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# **The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics**

by  
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## Introduction

Since the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* in 1960, philosophical hermeneutics has become one of the most influential currents of modern thought. Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics continues the traditional discipline of the interpretation of texts, but at the same time transforms the problems of the art of textual understanding into a universal, philosophical issue. Philosophical hermeneutics breaks with the development of hermeneutics as a general theory dealing merely with the methods of understanding and interpretation of texts and historical sciences as represented by the tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. As a philosophical theory of human experience in general, the task of hermeneutics has been extended to a reflection on the nature of "all that can be understood."<sup>2</sup> Gadamer declares his purpose to be the description of the conditions of understanding and states that this concerns the ontological structure of understanding. He takes his cue for the ontological aspect of hermeneutics from Heidegger's use of hermeneutics as the phenomenological method of ontology. However, Gadamer makes an attempt to re-apply the ontological significance of hermeneutics to the problem of understanding and interpretation in the human sciences. In this attempt, Gadamer's hermeneutics has opened up new horizons, but has also encountered specific difficulties and resistance from those loyal to the actual practices of regional hermeneutics, as well as to the social sciences.

Primarily as a result of the debates following the publication of *Truth and Method*, there has been a proliferation in the use of hermeneutics, ranging from the traditional art of interpretation to the so-called hermeneutics of suspicion. This state of affairs has also created a great deal of confusion and several misconceptions about Gadamer's thesis. Among the issues under discussion, the criticism that philosophical hermeneutics promotes a form of relativism seems to be the most controversial, given the general tenor of Gadamer's works. In the following study, we will examine the charges of relativism made against Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics and try to confront them by exploring the transcendental and the ontological basis of philosophical hermeneutics.

The problem of relativism emerges as central because of Gadamer's emphasis on the historicity of understanding. However, the question of relativism has another side in Gadamer's philosophy. Gadamer claims that his theory, precisely by relying on the historicity of human experience and life, can provide a solution to the problem of relativism as it arises when the human sciences deal with the problem of historicism. In critical debates, this aspect of Gadamer's thesis is often ignored.

This dissertation investigates whether Gadamer's hermeneutics is committed to a certain kind of relativism, given his account of how the historicity of understanding is part of the ontological structure of human existence. This dissertation argues that the historicity of understanding, as Gadamer construes it, is the non-relative transcendental foundation of his philosophical hermeneutics.

This argument is sustained by showing that, in the application of the hermeneutic theory of understanding, Gadamer demonstrates how historicity constitutes the mode of being which is common to the knowing subject and the object of knowledge in the humanities. This defining feature of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has often eluded interpreters of *Truth and Method*. Usually the application of hermeneutics to the interpretation of texts and to the study of history, as advanced in *Truth and Method*, is regarded as a theory of interpretation, or interpretive practice. In the following dissertation, it will be shown not only that philosophical hermeneutics

cannot be charged with relativism, but also that it has a transcendental-ontological aim. Hermeneutic principles are not simply applied to textual interpretation but rather are drawn from a wider sphere of experience, including art, history and moral practice.

Critics charge that Gadamer fails to identify a norm or a criterion by which it would be possible to determine the validity of an interpretation. They also argue that if understanding is always historical, a critical stance towards a current interpretation of the past or towards the self-understanding of a tradition is impossible. In accord with this view, critics fault Gadamer for appealing to tradition as a criterion for judgments concerning social practice.

In contrast to these interpretations, we argue that the hermeneutic theory and the concept of historicity must be related to the transcendental conditions of human knowledge. The historicity of understanding and the truth revealed through language belong to ontological conditions of human existence in the sense that both the finiteness of human understanding and the potentially infinite scope of language share the same fundamental grounding. Philosophical hermeneutics is a project that both appropriates the finite and historical nature of human experience of the world and develops a concept of the experience of truth capable of meeting the finite conditions of human experience. In the light of arguments presented by the critics cited above, this study uncovers the ontological foundations of a hermeneutic theory of understanding.

In the first chapter, the relativistic problem presented by the historicity of understanding is examined. We introduce a schematic account of how the problem of relativism and the historicity of understanding are conceived in philosophical hermeneutics. This is followed by an examination of the main elements of the historicity thesis as a hermeneutic principle in Gadamer's account of philosophical hermeneutics. In the second chapter, Gadamer's own attempt to overcome historicism and its relativism is set against the background of his critical appraisal of methodological hermeneutics. Gadamer introduces a critique of romantic hermeneutics and its application to historical studies. Gadamer's own thesis concerning the understanding and interpretation of texts and the meaning of the past is also presented.

The third chapter addresses the relation between ontology and the historicity of understanding, as articulated by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. We examine Gadamer's analysis of forms of experience other than that of the understanding of texts. This analysis deals with interpretation and understanding as experiences. The historicity of experience and understanding, considered in their ontological structure, demonstrates the limitations of the scientific concept of experience. Also, the experiences of art and of moral practice are examined as examples of the universality of hermeneutic experience. The historicity of understanding appears on three levels: the historicity of experience, the historicity of objects of the human sciences, and the historicity of the understanding subject him or herself. Of these, only the last has been taken into account in critical debates.

In the fourth chapter, scholarly responses to Gadamer's hermeneutic theory are examined in detail. As already mentioned, two opposing positions represented by the critics come into conflict with Gadamer's account: the one based on an epistemological ideal of objectivity, and the other based on a project of formally constructing normative, albeit historically conditioned, canons of discourse.

In chapter five of this dissertation, Gadamer's responses to these objections are evaluated. A general argument is made against the charges of relativism on the basis of Gadamer's understanding of the universality of language and the concept of historical continuity based on the temporality of life experience. Drawing on this extended issue, we argue that Gadamer maintains the universality of reason and language. The dialectical relation between the finitude and the

infinite range of human understanding and language is elaborated, in order to argue that the charge of relativism cannot be sustained.

By revealing the different concepts of language and history held by Gadamer and his critics, philosophical hermeneutics can be defended against the charges of relativism. Philosophical hermeneutics bases itself on the ontological structure of the relation between understanding, language and Being. Hermeneutic understanding is an experience of truth that is the truth of Being as presented in language as intelligible. The historicity of understanding refers to the finitude of human understanding, not to the Being of its object. Gadamer may not be drawing an idealist or absolute conclusion from his thesis, but this cannot be construed as leading to relativism. He avoids those conclusions, because of his conviction that the meaning of Being and the truth revealed through language are also concealed by language. Hence, this represents an historical limitation for any theory claiming absolute validity.

## Chapter I

# The Problem of Relativism and the Historicity of Understanding

There are two ways of interpreting the concept of historicity as a condition of understanding in the human sciences: the historicity of understanding signifies the conditions and the interests from which any historical research starts, or it signifies the conditions affecting the subject matter of the historical sciences. The first issue concerns the problem of method in the social sciences, while the second is related to the epistemological status of knowledge in the human sciences.

In fact, in modern epistemological theories, attempts to deal with the knowledge of history run into the problem of relativism in different forms. All the questions concerning relativism can be reduced ultimately to an epistemological doctrine concerning the validity of human knowledge. First, the question concerning the possibility of establishing the epistemological principles of human knowledge on an absolute ground is carried into the problem of historical knowledge. Second, to the general problem concerning the nature of historical knowledge, its extension and legitimacy, a solution is sought in terms of a principle of historical knowledge that must be something either within history or outside history. Historicism becomes viable when the validity of historical knowledge is measured against a principle within or without the historical process itself.

The question of relativism emerges as a central problem within philosophical hermeneutics, because of Gadamer's emphasis on the historicity of understanding. It is either an epistemological principle, as described above, or a principle concerning man's relation to his world that precedes the question of the ground of human knowledge. Gadamer claims that his theory, by relying on the historicity of human experience and life, can provide a solution to the problem of relativism as it arises when the human sciences deal with the problem of historicism. In critical debates, this aspect of Gadamer's thesis is often ignored. As a result, Gadamer's theory has been charged as being relativistic. Critics of philosophical hermeneutics attribute a form of relativism to Gadamer's theory based on the central role of the notion of historicity. It is argued that because the historicity of understanding constitutes an essential part of Gadamer's system, philosophical hermeneutics falls into a form of relativism. This chapter investigates the link between the hermeneutic notion of historicity and the problem of relativism.

We examine the problem of relativism as this twofold issue in the context of the thesis of the historicity of understanding. First, we examine Gadamer's theory as his attempt to offer a resolution to the "aporias of historicism."<sup>3</sup> Second, we analyze the theoretical issues underlying the charges of relativism against Gadamer's hermeneutics.

### **Historical Relativism and Hermeneutic Understanding**

Gadamer presents philosophical hermeneutics as an attempt to deal with the problem of understanding in the human sciences against the background of the development of the theory of the scientific method and the rise of historicism in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In order to determine the success of Gadamer's project of overcoming the "aporias of historicism" through a transition from methodological hermeneutics to "historical hermeneutics,"<sup>5</sup> we first introduce his arguments against historicism. Then we describe the fundamental concepts of philosophical hermeneutics developed for this purpose. This is followed by an examination of critical issues that Gadamer's

hermeneutics raises, and the objections against them. Gadamer's hermeneutic theory deals with the problem of relativism in the human sciences as it is treated as the problem of historicism.

Among the important philosophical movements that Gadamer mentions are the dissolution of the dialectical approach to history and its replacement by the historical method. The revival of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian dialectics and Nietzsche's critique of historicism are the two sources that shape Gadamer's arguments against historicism and relativism. Yet Gadamer adopts the concept of an ethical continuity of life from Kierkegaard, against the nihilistic conclusions that Nietzsche draws from the fact of historical change. Another difficulty concerns the conceptual framework of philosophical language within which neither relativism-historicism nor the truth of art could be explained. Gadamer specifically mentions the preoccupation, in the early part of this century, with the problem of historical relativism as discussed in the views of Dilthey and Troeltsch.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger's critique of subjectivism and objectivism has paved the way for dealing with the "aporias of historicism."<sup>7</sup> Gadamer's theory relies on this new conceptual framework of phenomenological description.

One of the silent but critical purposes of philosophical hermeneutics is to react against historical relativism and the nihilism of the sort that started with Nietzsche's critique of the value of historical knowledge for the creativity and the spontaneity of life. Gadamer considers relativism and nihilism to be inevitable and radical conclusions of any historical method that recognizes only the past as historical, while forgetting the historicity of the present. At the foundation of historical consciousness lies the forgetfulness of the historicity of the human being. If history is nothing but the interpretation of the past in its own context without any consideration of its meaning for the present, the radicalization of historical change leads to a historicism that annihilates itself through historical consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche draws historicism to its natural conclusion, that there are no historical facts but only interpretations we impose on history, that is, only self-interpretations based on history.<sup>9</sup>

In an early article<sup>10</sup> on the subject, Gadamer proposes an historical hermeneutics for combatting the notion that historical knowledge is, like scientific knowledge, free from the historian's own present concerns. Gadamer claims that the idealist concept of reflective detachment from the object of knowledge and the methodical use of reflection in historical study had divested the past of any meaning for the present.<sup>11</sup> Against this divesture of meaning, Gadamer searches for the source of historical continuity that cannot be based on individual consciousness. His critique of historicism concerns the formal historical objectivism that attempts to transcend historical change through the notion that historical research should abstract from present concerns and perspectives in order to attain an objective knowledge of the past. The horizon of the present should not be involved, because of its historicity, yet the methodological ideal of objectivity consists in the belief that the meaning of the past can be objectified in its own horizon for the purpose of historical study. Historicism can only recognize that the past age has its own horizon, and the interpreter supposedly can transpose himself into the past by methodologically suspending his prejudices that are rooted in the present.

Gadamer argues against the notion that one can reflectively suspend one's own opinions and can transform oneself into another. This would suggest that our relation to the past is arbitrary. What would justify the assertion that transposition into the horizon of the past is not arbitrarily chosen? To overcome this difficulty, historicism must have a universal historical world view. Historical consciousness, as awareness of one's own historicity as transitory and changing, undercuts the ability to understand another world view. Historical objectivism without a teleological view of historical development conceals its own relativism and nihilism.

Thus, Gadamer's critique is directed not only against historicism but also against the radicalization of historicism into an historical nihilism that opposes historical reflection antithetically against the spontaneity of the present. Gadamer's concept of understanding as consisting of a movement or happening (*Geschehen*)<sup>12</sup> between fore-understanding and the anticipation of completeness deals with the antithesis between the present and the past. At this point, we can introduce the concepts that Gadamer develops in order to explicate positively a form of historical hermeneutics that would avoid falling into historical relativism and nihilism.

Gadamer aims at articulating the distinctively historical character of hermeneutic understanding in order to overcome the impasse of historicism and the one-sided concept of scientific method. Historical hermeneutics, he argues, takes cognizance of the continuity of history through the linguistic mediation of tradition. Gadamer elevates the historicity of understanding to the "status of a hermeneutic principle."<sup>13</sup> The traditional concept of the hermeneutic circle no longer signifies only the formal relation of the whole and the parts of texts, or the relation of particular historical events to the larger historical context, but rather encompasses the human relation to the contents of tradition and language. The principle of the historicity of understanding explicates this reciprocal relation between understanding and tradition. Let us briefly describe hermeneutic concepts related to the principle of historicity.

### **The Historicity of Understanding**

These two complexes of concepts are central to philosophical hermeneutics. Understanding replaces the epistemological concept of pure perception and pure experience. The historicity of understanding signifies the knowledge of the known. The hermeneutic relevance of this concept lies in the fact that understanding more suitably accounts for the historical-hermeneutic attempt to close the distance between the object and the subject in the human sciences' research. Historicity signifies not only the finite and limited nature of human understanding, but also the dependence of its knowledge on conditions previously given. According to Gadamer, as Heidegger has also demonstrated, since the circularity of understanding is derived from the temporality of human existence, the hermeneutic circle does not represent merely an epistemological problem, but rather "possesses an ontologically positive significance."<sup>14</sup>

*Tradition and Prejudices.*—Probably the most controversial concepts of philosophical hermeneutics are "tradition," "prejudices" and the recognition of the "authority of tradition"<sup>15</sup> over individual's understanding of the past, all of which describe the conditions of hermeneutic understanding. Gadamer introduces these concepts under the heading of the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle. All these concepts are loaded with negative connotations within the discussions of the scientific method. Gadamer has also a polemical intention in his attempt to rehabilitate them from their negative connotation. Although he is not consistent about the distinction, prejudices may be said to consist of the fore-understanding concerning the subject matter of interpretation and the fore-conception and meaning derived from the language we use concerning the content of understanding.<sup>16</sup> Prejudices also refer to the purpose and the interest under whose influence the interpreter conducts his research in the human sciences.<sup>17</sup>

Gadamer's concept of tradition is another source of the confusion in hermeneutic debates. Tradition has a vagueness in that it signifies both the tradition of research in a particular field as well as the concrete contents of a historically transmitted living tradition.<sup>18</sup> Tradition represents both the lucid concretization and the fulfillment of historical process at a particular period.<sup>19</sup> In

the concept of tradition, Gadamer also incorporates the distinction between historical sources as the subject matter of historical study and remnants of the past as the materials of historical inquiry in the present.<sup>20</sup> Tradition in this sense encompasses the relation and the continuity of the past in the present. The human relation to tradition cannot be taken to be a form of blind obedience and, hence, always to be suspect; it might be based on the acceptance of an authority whose legitimacy depends on acknowledgement and knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

*Effective History and Fusion of Historical Horizons.*—Gadamer proposes the hermeneutic principle of the historically effected consciousness as a corrective to the form of historical consciousness that has led to historicism and positivism in historical studies. The concept of horizon fusion designates the awareness of the mutual relation between understanding texts, history and the conditionedness and limits of this understanding.<sup>22</sup> The fusion of horizons describes the constitution of historical continuity in the process of understanding texts from the past and the merging of the present and the past in a wider horizon encompassing both. Finitude and the historicity of understanding prevents us from transcending the whole that is formed in every renewed attempt to understand the contents of texts.<sup>23</sup> This concept also signifies the difference between romantic hermeneutics as a re-constructive method and philosophical hermeneutics dealing with the integration of the past and present in hermeneutic experience.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophical hermeneutics, as a theory of understanding, distances itself from the methodological concerns of textual interpretation, as well as from the research methods of particular human sciences. However, Gadamer often chooses his examples from interpretations of a text and raises a critique that the pre-occupation with the problem of method in the human sciences has created a situation that has constricted the human relevance of their results.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Gadamer does not hesitate to specify certain internal criteria of correctness for the interpretation of texts, such as the appropriateness of understanding to the subject matter.<sup>26</sup> He suggests that temporal, linguistic and structural distances must also be considered as the criterion of objectivity for the interpretation of a text or an artwork.<sup>27</sup> Thus, hermeneutic understanding is not to be conceived as construing a self-identical meaning of the text or artwork, but rather as a continuous dialogue. Dialogue as the model of hermeneutic understanding confirms the mediation of meaning. His concept of experience as an open process paves the way for the notion that a meaning cannot be determined by an approach from the perspective of propositional logic, but rather through the logic of question and answer. By finding out what is the question to which the text serves as an answer, we also question ourselves in face of the truth claim of the text. The testing of pre-understanding and pre-judgment that conditions understanding takes place in this confrontation.<sup>28</sup>

Gadamer's critical approach to hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation and method of historical science is intended to offer a solution to problems of historicism in the human sciences. The details of this subject are treated in the second chapter of the present work. Gadamer tries to support his arguments with a critique of epistemological assumptions concerning scientific experience and methodological control of the process of understanding in the humanities. His arguments against the univocal application of scientific method and the limitations of the concept of scientific experience address the central issues in the debates on philosophical hermeneutics. We present Gadamer's theory concerning the ontological grounds of hermeneutic experience in Chapter Three of this study. For now we return to Gadamer's critical approach to scientific method and experience.

Gadamer not only criticizes the application of the criteria of objectivity and certainty characteristic of the scientific method to interpretation, he also describes the experience of the human sciences as extrascientific. He is extremely ambivalent on the question of the objectivity of understanding in the human sciences. On the one hand, he insists that the method and the ideal of objectivity are only relevant for determining the formal structure and conditions of the texts and historical sources.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, he insists that the experience of truth in the human sciences transcends the methodological limits of sciences. Gadamer seeks the mediative nature of understanding in the basic structures of experience itself. Gadamer argues for the openness of experience. The nature of experience cannot be explained as a theoretical fixation upon its objects.

In the first two parts of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer presents the hermeneutic problem through a critique of aesthetic and historical consciousness. Theories about aesthetics and historical knowledge approach artworks and the meaning of history in terms of the doctrines of the historical alienation and the artistic genius of the individuals who have created the artwork and those who interpret it in the present. From a critique of the romantic and idealist conception of aesthetic and historical understanding, Gadamer draws the conclusion that the concept of language as the "universal medium" of historical mediation must replace idealist and empirical approaches.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, on the basis of a critical examination of the problem of historical understanding, Gadamer develops his thesis that the historicity and linguistic character of understanding are ontological structures of our experience of the world. Hermeneutic philosophy raises two objections concerning the relevance of the natural scientific ideal of objectivity and methodological criteria to the human sciences. Understanding in the human sciences is accomplished not from a free and distanced position, but rises from immediate life concerns, prejudices and tradition that shape both the interpreting subject and the object of the research.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, it is not only the case that interpretation is guided by fore-understanding. Also the objectivity of the result cannot be measured by the yardstick of method according to the model of the natural sciences.<sup>32</sup>

However, under the ideal of objectivity belonging to the scientific method, the interpreter is required to abandon all prejudices. Application of the ideal of objectivity to the human sciences, Gadamer argues, covers up the true nature of the subject matter of the human sciences which is the realm of human life.<sup>33</sup>

Gadamer recognizes that historical understanding takes place only from the present perspective, and he denies the possibility of access to history and historical texts through a complete suspension of the prejudices and the concerns in the present. Secondly, he denies that textual meaning is self-contained, whether in the sense of the meaning intended by the author, or in the sense that this meaning is a part of historical circumstances. He accepts that the question of the genesis of meaning is relevant when the understanding of a text fails, and only then do we appeal to the genetic circumstances to supplement our understanding.<sup>34</sup>

The interpreting subject belongs to the historical and cultural tradition he is dealing with, because every historical research originates out of questions and concerns of the present.<sup>35</sup> Interpretation does not require one to abandon one's own horizon, but involves an integration of the horizon of the past with one's present horizon, because the historical text is not received in isolation but within the continuity of the history of its application, i.e. the effective history of the text. Gadamer attacks various theories concerning the meaning of texts.<sup>36</sup> The first theory he attacks is the psychological method which is based on the assumption that the object of interpretation is the meaning intended by the author.<sup>37</sup> The second theory he attacks is that of

historical method based on the doctrine that the meaning of the text can be determined by reconstruction of the historical conditions in which the text originates.<sup>38</sup> Third, he attacks structuralism as the view that the meaning of a text is represented by the structural unity of the text. The former two methods require the interpreter to follow a reverse procedure of reconstructing an author's intentional or mental process--psychologism; or the reconstruction of the meaning as it could have arisen in the immediate historical circumstances in which the text came into existence as a response by its author to his own historical situation, while also requiring the reconstruction of the reception of text by its original reader--historicism. Hermeneutics, in the sense of understanding in the human sciences, is itself determined not only by the temporal historical distance of the objects of study but also by the historical situation of interpretation. In other words, the task of historical hermeneutics is twofold. The concern is to understand not only the meaning of an object from a historical distance, but also the historical transmission of this understanding, i.e., how it will be received in the future.<sup>39</sup>

Hermeneutics deals with the interpretation of texts as well as the inquiry into the interpretive nature of human self-understanding as a mode of being. The practice of textual interpretation furnishes an exemplary case for revealing the ontological structure of understanding. In this sense, inquiry into the historicity of understanding is distinguished from an historical study which attempts to understand the empirical course of history.

According to Gadamer, the human relation to history cannot be explicated on the basis of a subject-object distinction, because historicity as the ground of this distinction precedes our cognitive relation to history. Nor can this relation be established on the basis of temporal succession, or causal relation. Understanding is as much conditioned by history as the reality of history is conditioned by our understanding of it. History is an evolving process that is constituted by the human interpretations and understandings of it. The understanding of history is mediated by the inherited tradition in which the interpreter lives.

When Gadamer speaks of tradition, he does not appeal to the truism that every human being belongs to a tradition. Rather, he means that the contents of tradition are not something objectified within a single consciousness, but are constantly expanding through language and, therefore, involve a community. Historical continuity and the meaning that encompasses this continuity are not experienced by a single individual consciousness, but have a social significance. Philosophical hermeneutics seeks to discover how the meaning intended by an individual author or the meaning understood by an interpreter acquire historical significance.

According to Gadamer, the hermeneutic experience is universal, and it reflects the universality of the "activity of the thing itself; the coming into language of meaning points to a universal ontological structure, namely to the basic nature of everything towards which understanding can be directed."<sup>40</sup> However, this thesis of the universality of hermeneutics, based on the assertion that understanding depends on the universality of the relation between language and reality, is taken in the sense that philosophical hermeneutics should be applicable to all areas of knowledge. On the question of the application of the principles of Gadamer's theory, philosophical hermeneutics seems to face constraints mentioned by critics.

## **Constraints of Historical Hermeneutics**

Critics have demanded that if the universality of hermeneutics is accepted, it must be proven to be applicable to all fields of knowledge. This brings us to another major issue: does

philosophical hermeneutics concern the conditions of understanding limited to the humanities alone, or does it apply also to knowledge of the natural sciences? Even if it is granted that the modes of knowledge operative in the human sciences and the natural sciences are different, critics assert that the specific nature of knowledge and the experience of truth in the human sciences must be ascertained. Critics argue that if a different form of objectivity and a different concept of truth follow from the historicity principle, it still must be compatible with the notion of objectivity.

Gadamer accepts either a dualistic position, in which the hermeneutic problems remain different on the epistemological or methodological level from those on the ontological level which philosophical hermeneutics deals with, or a position according to which philosophical hermeneutics represents a later stage and, because it is at a higher level of reflection, it overcomes the earlier stage.<sup>41</sup> There is evidence in Gadamer's text supporting both views. He acknowledges the legitimacy of objectivity for scientific research, but he also criticizes methodologism in the human sciences. As Gadamer states: "I have endeavored to mediate between philosophy and the sciences. . . . That, of course, necessitated transcending the restricted horizon of scientific theory and its methodology. But can it be held against a philosophical approach that it does not consider scientific research as an end in itself but, rather, thematizes the conditions and limits of science within the whole of human life?"<sup>42</sup>

The main point of contention concerns the question whether, from the description of the ontological status of human knowledge, an epistemological rule can be drawn. Gadamer refuses to limit the scope of hermeneutics to an inquiry into the "methodology of the human sciences."<sup>43</sup> He considers hermeneutics to be a study of "the phenomenon of understanding and of correct interpretation of what has been understood."<sup>44</sup> Ambiguity in Gadamer's position on the relation between method and understanding in the humanities has led to critical debates on the principle of the historicity of understanding in the context of the hermeneutic theory expounded in *Truth and Method*.

Based on the assumption that Gadamer does not offer any criteria for objectivity and the validity of an interpretation, Gadamer's theory falls into a subjectivist and historicist relativism according to some critics. Gadamer's theory encounters the problem of relativism when seen as lacking norms for objectivity, as well as from the perspective of the historical conditioning of hermeneutic theory itself. The charges that philosophical hermeneutics falls into a subjectivist form of relativism originate from the fact that Gadamer expands the formal concept of the hermeneutic circle to include the human relation to the historical and natural world. In his critics' views, this is not justified. According to critics, the historicity thesis represents human conditionedness by tradition, culture, history, language, social institutions, the value system of a community and so forth. By bringing tradition and prejudice into his discussion, Gadamer supposedly gives priority to tradition and the past.

Gadamer's theory is criticized also from the point of view that history is the medium in which all cognitive and practical activity of mankind takes place, as well as the standard to evaluate and judge all knowledge claims. Such a view of history imputes a certain form of relativism to Gadamer's theory, if relativism itself is understood as the lack of an a-temporal criterion of validity and truth in the sense that all validity claims are conditioned in the historical process of life.

According to many critics, such as Betti, Hirsch, Habermas, Apel,<sup>45</sup> by emphasizing the principle of the historicity of understanding, Gadamer undermines the traditional concept of objectivity, that is, the possibility of establishing norms of valid textual interpretation. For some critics, the denial of the objectivity of textual interpretation amounts to the denial of objectivity as such. Those who read Gadamer's hermeneutics as a strong version of opposition to objectivity

accuse Gadamer of deriving from a viable thesis of historicity unacceptable relativist and historicist conclusions.<sup>46</sup> It is also argued that by extending his critique of the ideal of objectivity in the human sciences to a broader argument against objectivity in general, Gadamer falls into an historical relativism.<sup>47</sup>

These critics consider that these two claims concerning the historicity of understanding and the universality of the hermeneutic experience are incompatible and have argued that Gadamer's hermeneutic theory fails to offer a criterion for the objectivity and validity of interpretation in the human sciences. The debates between Gadamer and his critics, which are examined in Chapter Four of this study, are entangled in three stalemates that have defined the nature and the scope of contemporary hermeneutics. At the center of these debates is the thesis of the historicity of understanding. The first argument is that the historicity of understanding signifies that we cannot have an objective knowledge of history because we have no access to a given past in order to be able to judge it against the criteria available in the present. This argument is characteristic of the historicist thesis. Gadamer argues against this view by pointing out that the historicity of understanding is itself constitutive of the continuity and the relation between the present and the past. Many commentators attribute the same historicist thesis to Gadamer's hermeneutics, and argue that his view of the historicity of understanding would prevent us from gaining a genuine access to the past. According this view, we cannot have access to the past because understanding of the past arises out of the prejudices belonging to the present historical situation.

Historical relativism entails the notion that no historical study can enable us to grasp the meaning of the past. Our understanding of history is always relative to conditions under which past events took place, and the meaning of these events are understood only with reference to a certain historical process which is constantly changing. Although the fact that every historical work is limited by social and individual psychological conditions is uncontested, historical relativists claim that the meaning of a historical work, its validity, can only be understood by referring its content to historical conditions. Thus, the relativist maintains that in order to understand history we must understand a text by inquiring into what is said only in the light of why it is said in a certain manner. This problem is known as the question of the genesis and the value of historical meaning. By giving primacy to the genetic question historical relativism commits itself to what is called "the genetic fallacy"

The second argument concerns the issue of whether the principle of historicity refers to the status of the historians' and interpreters' own interest in the choice of the historical material. As Maurice Mandelbaum states: "the fountainhead of relativism is to be found in interpretations placed upon the indisputable fact that the historian selects and synthesizes his material."<sup>48</sup> If the current interest in the historical object is taken to be one of many perspectives on the same object then it would seem that the interpreter is led by this interest and the historical situation under which he conducts his study to understand the object according to one perspective rather than another. Differences and conflicting interpretations arise because of the differences in respective standpoints, and the possibility of arbitration between valid and invalid interpretations cannot be decided without a criterion of appropriateness.

The third issue in the critical debates concerns the determination of human subjects by the historical process itself. It is argued that the object of historical study is the interaction and the structures of a basic process of historical change. The historicism involved in hermeneutic theory, according to critics' arguments, is related to the principle of historicity signifying only separate elements of change within the structure of the total developmental process of history. Instead of accepting a changing element as a principle of understanding, they argue, Gadamer should

postulate an intersubjective, historical, yet normative ideal according to which historical knowledge can be judged. It is necessary, they insist, to make a distinction between historical, changing elements and the elements for which change must be directed.

The distinction made by Dilthey between cultural and social systems as being two forms of historical effects on the individual can also be found in Gadamer's account of the consciousness of historical effects. While participation in the cultural systems which consist of art, history, etc., is free, social systems demand and insert a necessary and forceful participation. In the first part of Gadamer's work, we find an analysis of forms of participation that are free in historical life.<sup>49</sup> Gadamer shows, in his analysis of the humanist concept of *Bildung* as the culturation of a person that enables him to rise from individuality to the universality of the objective spirit of cultural community, that *Bildung* reflects this free, yet self-regulative participation in the inter-subjective domain of social life.

This distinction between free and compulsory domains of cultural life seems to collapse because of the ambiguity of Gadamer's argument concerning prejudice and authority as the possible sources of understanding in the human sciences. If Gadamer maintains that participation in tradition in the form of art and history is free and considers that the authority of tradition over the individual results from freely accepted choice, there is no contradiction involved here. But Gadamer also speaks of tradition in the sense of institutions, social structures and customs<sup>50</sup> which are considered in romantic hermeneutics, especially in Dilthey's writings, as social, compulsory systems.

For those who hold that Gadamer confuses the distinction between free and compulsory participation in cultural life, Gadamer becomes susceptible to charges of subjectivism and traditionalism. Among these, many argue that philosophical hermeneutics reinforces the actual state of relativism relevant in social discourse by an appeal to an ideal ethical community.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, all critics impute a lack of norms for the validity and the critique of interpretations and the adjudication between conflicting interpretations. They challenge Gadamer on the issue of the roles of prejudices, tradition and authority in understanding. Also for some critics, hermeneutics' claim to universality cannot be sustained in the face of the distortion and domination inherent in historical practices as transmitted through language. In the absence of critical norms, Gadamer's hermeneutics submits to tradition and its authority for justification of the validity of understanding in the present.

According to Habermas, in order to escape historicism, Gadamer's theory must project one or the other, either a universal history or a an ideal language.<sup>52</sup> If he fails to do so, he falls into either an historical relativism or relativist idealism, respectively. Apel, on the other hand, argues that Gadamer's theory confounds the conditions of the possibility of hermeneutic understanding with the conditions of the validity of understanding. The pre-reflective or pre-scientific life-world can be described as the ground of intersubjective understanding, but normative conditions of validity should be posited as a rational ideal of the counter-factual existence of a free community of interpreters. For Apel, then, historical life cannot serve as the condition of the validity of understanding; therefore philosophical hermeneutics falls into an existential-historicist relativism.

The problem of relativism becomes central to these debates because of conflicting views on the meaning and the nature of historical process. Critics arguments remain within the epistemological context of the problem of historical knowledge which we have mentioned at the start of this chapter. Any epistemological account of historical knowledge that is based on a principle within history raises a problem concerning the objectivity of this knowledge. If Gadamer's principle of historicity itself belongs to an historical category, critics argue it abolishes

the objectivity of all knowledge. In this approach, critics adhere to an epistemological view of history. By setting the problem in epistemological terms, critics require that either reason or the methods of inquiry remain outside of history and preserve their impunity through the changing effects of history. In this view, then, the object is recognized as being in history, and the absolute inseparability of the object from its historical circumstances is also recognized, while the subject is required to acquire an objective attitude against it lest the object be severed from its historical surrounding. The issue of relativism associated with the historicism emerges from this position.

Gadamer does not take history and the historicity of human understanding as negative, but rather he recognizes history as a category of human knowledge. Also the historicity of understanding belongs to the ontological—or in epistemological terms to the *a priori*—structure of "understanding as." The human relation to history is not a formal relation. Human understanding is neither in history nor above and beyond history, but moves along with it. The concept of history must be understood here in its peculiar sense. History is not a domain independent of human involvement. In other words, to think of history and human beings separately is possible only on the level of abstraction and theoretical reflection. But, whether it is seen from an ontological or from an epistemological vantage point, history cannot be separated from the being of humanity. This must be elaborated further, because it is crucial to the issues that critics have raised against Gadamer.

The approach to history as only an epistemological category needs a vantage point from which the historical elements effecting the object of historical sciences can be distinguished from the historical elements effecting the interpreter such that the object can be represented independently of history.

The source of the disagreement among the participants of debates on hermeneutics must be sought somewhere else: in the differing concepts of what constitutes the proper object of historical studies. According to one account, the task of historical science is to discover the universal laws of the development of history. It is claimed that although they are different from natural laws, there are, nonetheless, historical laws that can be discovered in the chronological order of historical development, and these laws may be confirmed in their repetition by events reported in historical sources or by the present events that can corroborate them. The uniformities observed in social life can be explained by these laws.

Against this positive account of history as constituted by the observable sequence of events, the other approach to history takes the concept of the historical object as a particular and unique event. But, again, since no science can be built on the study of particulars, the universality of historical studies must be based on the those elements that make these events historical objects. According to this view of history, the object of historical studies is composed of the intention, the motivations and the will of the individuals who make history. Therefore, psychology becomes the most relevant part of the method of historical understanding. But if the concern of historical study is reduced only to those individuals, history would be limited only to stories and there could not be a science of history.

We can observe that the former view approximately describes the position of the critical theorists, while the latter describes the position of the proponents of methodological hermeneutics. Gadamer's critique of the middle position represented by Collingwood may apply to both views. Collingwood describes the objectivity of historical understanding in terms of a "re-enactment of the past thought in the historian's own mind."<sup>53</sup> The question that Collingwood's position raises is how the transition from the narrow psychology of individuals to the historical significance of these individuals can be made. Gadamer not only sees the problem that such a transition from

individual acts to their historical significance implies, but he sees also the problem of how our understanding of the individual's intentions and thought processes would enable us to have a hermeneutics of history.<sup>54</sup> Collingwood surpasses the weakness of historical positivism, but fails to account for the hermeneutic mediation of understanding the thought of the historical agent and its historical significance.

If the question of historical knowledge is formulated in terms of the subjectivity of the author or the agent in history and the subjectivity of the interpreter, a psychological and sociological reconstruction of the original conditions of the text and its reception by different interpreters is presupposed. Critics impute to philosophical hermeneutics an epistemological concept of history and argue that objectivity, for Gadamer, depends on the ability to understand not only what the effective history consists of, but also the historical condition of opposite interpretations and the ability to compare these interpretations with one's own. This objection is raised from the point of view that each individual has his or her perspectives on a particular subject matter.

If each perspective truly binds individuals, it seems impossible that one can understand and compare the perspective of someone else. In other words, Gadamer's view of objectivity is built on the basis of a phenomenological concept of perspective according to which objects present themselves according to one's own perspective. Contrary to the phenomenological concept of perspective, the historical perspective is a formal concept signifying either a subjective perspective or an historical world view.

Gadamer's view of the objectivity of historical understanding is built on the notion that historical objects present themselves according to their own perspective. Our subjective perspective should be replaced with the perspective in which the object presents itself.<sup>55</sup> The objectivity of historical understanding can be determined by establishing the relations of historical judgements to their valuational basis that will include a general perspective conforming to the subject matter. But the totality of perspectives of the subject matter is not given to an individual consciousness. This view might be supported by Gadamer's conception of the "fusion of horizons."<sup>56</sup> At first sight, the concept of the fusion of horizons signifies something similar to the concept of synthetic judgement that follows the rule that the last view of an object will always be the best. However, this cannot approach a closure of further possibilities. Gadamer refuses to admit that historical knowledge requires a notion of a world history or that a teleological account of history is necessary to understand the meaning and the truth of historical phenomena. Even if we presuppose such an end to history, it is impossible to know it because of the finitude and historicity of our knowledge, for before we may predict the end of an historical process, we must know its goal and such knowledge of the whole in its true nature is impossible for finite beings.

Although Gadamer accepts the view that the horizons of the past and the present constitute a continuous whole, we cannot say they are co-extensive and co-determinate. The evidence for this lies in his argument that historically effected consciousness can reflectively rise above the effects of history, but not above the object in its otherness.<sup>57</sup> The objections against the relativism implied in hermeneutic theory depends on an assumption that consists in identifying the knowledge concerning an historical object with all the characteristics of that object. In fact, Hirsch raises this objection against Gadamer.<sup>58</sup> But the identification of the knowledge of the object with all that can be known of the object is fundamentally out of line with the general nature of experience described by Gadamer as essentially negative. If one claims to know an object, this does not necessarily mean that one comprehends the nature of that object in its totality. In our cognitive relations with an object, there is an awareness that the object transcends that which we know concerning it. Gadamer calls this transcendence the otherness of the subject matter.<sup>59</sup> Even if we

apprehend successively various characteristics of the object, we are always aware that they do not exhaust all that can be said about the object, yet we still believe that we have obtained some knowledge of the object. The fact that the object might have many other characteristics we may not now or ever know, does not change the satisfaction of having some insight into the object through the knowledge already gained from it.<sup>60</sup>

Gadamer adapts the historical method to his conception of the textual content to be determined according to a logic of question and answer. But he denies that in order to determine the meaning, we would have to reconstruct the text's historical circumstances which are already given in the continuity of history. What is given in this continuity also includes the history of the reception of the text, which is also changing. Gadamer considers the textual meaning to be preserved in the continual self-presentation of its subject matter, the *Sache* of the text.<sup>61</sup> Gadamer does not deny the internal criteria of interpretation in terms of the correctness of an interpretation and its appropriateness to the subject matter of a text. However, he wants to allow that any text must remain open to different appropriations. It is for this reason, according to many critics, that Gadamer's hermeneutics falls short of providing a definite criterion for the validity and correctness of interpretation.

Gadamer contrasts "historical consciousness" with his own concept of a "historically effected consciousness."<sup>62</sup> For Gadamer, historicism and relativism are a consequence of the exaggeration of change at the expense of the stability in life. The historical consciousness and historical world view (*historischen Weltansicht*)<sup>63</sup> signify this attitude.

These two approaches to history are contrasted with the hermeneutic conception of history. Gadamer recognizes that historical consciousness belongs to the rationalistic view of history. According to a rationalist approach to history, the understanding of historical phenomena and their value are to be obtained by an analysis of the contribution they made within the process of development. We call this view the developmental notion of history. In order to assess the radical aspects of such a thesis, one must compare this to what is called the historical world view, or the historical sense which involves being on guard against the prejudices and conditions of historical research in the present while one is investigating the past. In other words, we must be careful not to assume that the conditions under which the historical phenomenon occurred are the same conditions which obtain in the present. To make a value judgement concerning any historical phenomenon, one should take its own historical context into account. In addition, it implies that one should avoid applying to past phenomena standards and values characteristic of the present.

Although these two positions are not identical, they share the same fundamental thesis that any historical phenomenon should be viewed in a particular context, whether the context characterizes a certain phase of the development of an idea, a culture or an historical period. But these positions differ on a fundamental point concerning the meaning and value of an individual, particular historical event. Historical consciousness suggests that the meaning of a particular event can be understood only on the basis of the contribution it has made to the progress of historical development, whereas the historical world view seeks to preserve the uniqueness of an individual and particular historical phenomenon.

Historicism is said to be the thesis that rejects the view that historical events have a unique and particular character apart from the role they play within a certain pattern of development. From this, what is essential to historicism is the notion that every understanding of historical events involves grasping them as part of an historical progress.

In this sense, we can speak of historicism in the broader sense of its own historical world view. The most characteristic notion of historicism is the idea of progress or evolution. Whatever is

intended by progress, development or evolution in historicism, a certain sense of an historical change in the spiritual or intellectual outlook of social life is involved in understanding the nature of historical phenomena.

Thus, in the broader sense of the term, an historical sense or historical consciousness denotes the recognition of change as the fundamental aspect of historical phenomena. However, what distinguishes historicism is, as Karl Mannheim puts it, the attempt to derive an "ordering principle" from this change itself, to capture a structural unity within the pervasive phenomena of change.<sup>64</sup> The Enlightenment view of history, or any other rationalist approach, pursues such a principle in terms of an analysis of the leading motif of a cultural, intellectual life which is traced back to its earlier forms in the past. This approach includes, for instance, even Romanticism's model of historical investigation as an attempt to provide the forms and models of ideas in the past as they illuminate the present.<sup>65</sup>

One of the natural outcomes of naive historicism is the specter of relativism that it entails. The doctrine of historicism suggests that every knowledge claim is historical. Gadamer offers a peculiar interpretation of historicism to the effect that historicism depends on the notion that events in the past and the value judgements concerning them are determined by history. The only exception to this determination is the understanding subject. In this diagnosis of the problem of the historicism, Gadamer shares something with Leo Strauss,<sup>66</sup> namely, the belief that radical historicism falls into the logical fallacy of claiming that every knowledge claim, except for that of historicism itself, is historically determined. Because of this, historicism itself reflects the paradox of relativism. Gadamer recognizes this paradox in historicism, but argues that by including the historicity of understanding and the subject within the process of history, hermeneutic theory can escape the relativism and the paradoxical claim that it entails.

Gadamer in a way combines the historical and hermeneutic questions into an account of historical continuity and the experience of this continuity. Historical distance helps to account for the critical assessment concerning the text's claim to truth, while the continuity of meaning is mediated through language. He denies, however, that the actuality of any historical phenomenon can be known as an "object in itself"<sup>67</sup> because of the finitude and limitedness of human knowledge. In the absence of an absolute knowledge and a conception of universal history, Gadamer tries to avoid the predicament of such a situation with the help of the concept of the "consciousness of the historical effects."<sup>68</sup> He holds the notion that the effects of history and the consciousness of effective history constitute a unity in which the appropriateness of knowledge and its object can be judged. The consciousness of historical effects includes not only our foreconceptions, prejudices and present interests, but also the historical phenomena as mediated through language. Gadamer's position implies a perspectivist view of historical knowledge based on the notion that language presents historical objects from different perspectives that belong to the being of objects themselves. If, for instance, the sun is only a planet for the astronomical sciences, it is also a source of inspiration in poetry.

The implications of relativism in hermeneutic theory have been discussed either in the context of epistemological conditions of historical knowledge, or in the context of a rationalistic, pragmatist concept of history. These arguments belong to a concept of history and language different from those held by Gadamer. As becomes clear from the foregoing analysis, the issues surrounding the problem of relativism and the approaches to deal with it vary according to the views held concerning the concept of truth and criteria. On one side of the debate, it is argued that our knowledge and understanding are contingent upon historical and cultural conditions. If this is the case, we cannot uphold the conception of an absolute truth that is prevalent in traditional

philosophy. According to this view, it is impossible to know universal principles a-historically. They offer a concept of truth established upon the consensus of interpreters. They argue that the historicity of understanding requires that the concept of an absolute truth must be abandoned in the light of the need for a critical epistemology.

The problem of relativism in the context of the method of interpretation is defined in many different ways. Among these is the view that the hermeneutic theory relinquishes the idea of objectivity because hermeneutics relies on the thesis that understanding is historical. The second argument is an extension of the first, in the sense that its reason for the denial of objectivity depends on its giving up the concept of truth as a-historical, a-temporal property of judgment. But the question of the hermeneutic concept of truth presents a two-sided interpretation: either Gadamer adheres to a conception of truth as historical or he adheres to the concept of the historicity of the experience of truth. These are two separate issues.

In these discussions three forms of relativism are to be distinguished. The first is the self-refuting claim that all knowledge is relative. The second is subjectivistic relativism implying that the relativity of knowledge claims remain on the level of the person making that claim. The third form of relativism combines certain aspects of the first two. This doctrine aims at denying the existence of a standard view of truth other than those based on the social practices and conventions. According to the latter two doctrines of relativism, any agreement or adjudication between contending knowledge claims through rational discourse becomes almost impossible. These forms of relativism cannot be imputed to hermeneutic theory. For Gadamer, all arguments for or against relativism are formal, they do not have a content.<sup>69</sup> As Gadamer points out several times, once we convert those statements concerning the relativity of knowledge to the content of a specific knowledge, the formality of the arguments becomes evident. In other words, Gadamer repeats, in modern language, Plato and Aristotle's arguments against skepticism.<sup>70</sup>

We need also mention those who defend Gadamer's alleged relativism from a position questioning the possibility of relativism itself. In our view, they still rely on the forms of relativism we have mentioned. Generally, cultural or historical relativism defends a doctrine that the claims to knowledge and truth are incommensurable. Thus, the relativist argues that the multiplicity and the variety of perspectives and frameworks need not be evaluated according to a single standard of truth.

According to this view, for any search for truth there is no single criterion for judging the claims to truth, value and meaning. Some commentators who call such a view perspectivism, claim that, according to Gadamer's hermeneutics, it is possible to develop different positions on the same subject matter without steering into irrational positions. According to this sort of perspectivism, understandings and interpretations of a text can be dependent upon, and relative to, the historical conditions in which they take place. The inherited interpretive practices, conceptual frameworks and methods would constitute the particular context within which interpretation is made.

Some commentators attribute this contextualist relativism to Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. According to this form of relativism, it is not the individual's preference or reflections that determine the rationality of discourse, but on the contrary, the specific context of the arguments brought in favor of the choices one makes determine the plausibility and rationality of the interpretation.<sup>71</sup> Although no conclusive argument can be given for justifying the correctness of one interpretation over another, evidence and support can be provided for justifying the appropriateness of the choice of one context against another. According to this view, because no context of interpretation occupies an absolute position, different interpretations can remain justifiable. This position is distinguished from a radical relativism only from the consideration that

not all contexts are equally appropriate or justifiable.<sup>72</sup> As Hoy points out, contextualism escapes the charges of relativism in the strict sense because "contextualism denies that there is an objectively neutral first step providing an unquestionable methodology. This general position is not properly called relativism because it is held by both relativists and non-relativists."<sup>73</sup>

Hoy's argument that contextualism is not a relativism in the strict sense is further advanced by others. For instance, according to Grondin, rather than defending an absolute point of view to argue against the possible imputation of relativism to historical hermeneutics, we should focus on the possibility of relativism itself.<sup>74</sup> Some of Gadamer's remarks seem to suggest that such a defense against the charges of relativism is possible. But the question is whether this entails a weakening of the requirement of objectivity. If Gadamer's position is interpreted as advancing a form of contextualism, and contextualism, too, requires justification and reasons for any particular interpretation, does this lead us to abandoning anything other than *ad hoc* criteria? Habermas', and Apel's readings of the historicity thesis take their starting point from such a contextualist position attributed to hermeneutics. These distinctions are relevant for our inquiry for two reasons. First, Gadamer answers in the affirmative the question whether his thesis concerning the historicity of understanding is not itself an historically conditioned view, such that it may prove wrong in another historical period. But his argument that it might be the case has a different implication than the suggestion that this probable change of the opinion about the historicity of understanding would be the result of a mere passage of time or the availability of new information. Rather, he holds open the possibility that the historicity thesis might reveal a different aspect over time. But Gadamer also distinguishes the historicity of understanding from the statements or beliefs concerning its validity.

This approach corresponds to the problem known in the analytic tradition, that the statements about a fact and the statements about the language stating a fact must be distinguished. The evidence provided by Gadamer's rejoinder to the critics' arguments concerning the relativistic implications of his historicity thesis suggests that Gadamer acknowledges that his hermeneutics entails a certain form of historicism, but in no way implies a relativistic historicism.<sup>75</sup>

The other challenge he faces is based on the assertion that only by appealing to nature as the realm in which historical life takes place can we avoid historicizing everything. Given the fact that Gadamer argues that our relation to nature is not immediate but mediated by language, his only solution lies in the speculative nature of language in mediating the infinite and the finite.<sup>76</sup>

Making language the substrate and the medium of historical continuity raises the question of linguistic relativism. His argument that language is the universal medium of understanding and the mediation of man's experience of the world must face the challenge of the multiplicity of languages. But as we will demonstrate, language is not the only the universal condition of hermeneutic understanding. As Gadamer states: "The speculative character of being that is the ground of hermeneutics has the same universality as do reason and language."<sup>77</sup>

The speculative structure of language and its relation to the speculative character of being make it possible for human reason to have access to a universal understanding despite the historicity and finitude of its existence. Thus, the historicity of understanding means not only that understanding comes out of a concrete situation which is both the condition of understanding as well as its limitation, but also that historicity orients us towards the universal self-presentation of the objects of our understanding, such as art and history.

In the light of this analysis, we aim to demonstrate that philosophical hermeneutics is not interested in developing a method of interpretation in the social sciences. By giving a phenomenological description of the ontological structure of the experience of understanding and

interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics does not defend the thesis that knowledge is relative to the historical conditions within which these experiences take place.

Gadamer recognizes the difficulty and the danger of falling into an historical relativism. He is aware that if we put the issue in rigid epistemological terms, relativism can only be resolved by an appeal to an absolute idealism or to a metaphysical idea of an infinite intellect.<sup>78</sup> As a post-Kantian and post-Heideggerian philosopher, Gadamer can appeal to neither of these positions. Although Gadamer bases his theory on a metaphysical view of the relation between language and reality, he does not postulate it as a foundation of his philosophy. However, there is a clear difference between the denial of an absolute position, knowledge, truth, etc., and not positing that there is an absolute standpoint from which human knowledge is judged.

In this research, the historicity of understanding is treated as a quasi-transcendental foundation in the hermeneutic theory. For our purpose, the relation between the historicity thesis and the problem of transcendence presents the following choices: The principle of historicity is transcendental, either in the sense that it is beyond our knowledge or in the sense that historicity precedes our knowledge as something belonging to the mode of the Being of humanity. In other words, the question of transcendence represents a two-pronged question that is not peculiar to hermeneutic philosophy. Even in the context of traditional philosophy, reality in its totality transcends our capacity to know it, despite the fact that certain immanent principles are given to human understanding. The notion of self-evident principles of knowledge is an indication of this. Modern philosophy in its Cartesian beginning replaced the notion of the givenness of these self-evident principles with the subjective certainty of consciousness's own being. Heidegger subjected both the notions of objective and subjective givenness to a strong criticism.

Besides Gadamer's critique of historical objectivism and positivism in order to refute historicism, we will present a critical appraisal of the attempts to develop a hermeneutic theory based on subjectivism and objectivism. Historicism and relativism arise as a consequence of inconsistencies in construing the method of the natural sciences as the measure of all worthy of knowledge. As we show in the next chapter, Gadamer's refusal of objectivity must not be understood in an unqualified sense, but as a critique of the ideal of objectivity upheld in historical studies.

## **Chapter II** **Hermeneutics and Historical Understanding**

Hermeneutics as the art of interpretation plays a prominent role in the humanities. Gadamer has raised this role into a philosophical problem by taking up the question whether hermeneutic disciplines, such as art, history, jurisprudence and literary criticism, in their research practices differ from the natural sciences. Autonomy and independence of the humanities as sciences have long been considered to be based on understanding as their specific method. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer has revived the question of the autonomy of hermeneutic sciences in terms of the sort of knowledge attainable in the human sciences. The specific nature of the experience of truth and understanding is not a problem of method, but concerns the historical and linguistic character of the distinctive objects of the human sciences.

The experience of the human sciences involves the understanding of meaning, not empirically given objects. The ideal of objectivity is based on the concept of the validity of scientific method, independent of the content of knowledge. Natural sciences inquire into their objects on the basis of mathematical, hypothetical construction and its verification by means of experiment and

measurements. The scientific method provides the rule for the certainty of their results. As long as the content-independent methods are employed, the validity and the certainty of its results can be proven. According to Gadamer, philosophical efforts to justify the natural sciences' mode of knowledge as a general epistemology is responsible for the conception of the universal validity of scientific method. Modern science did not start out as search for a comprehensive knowledge, but on the contrary proceeded by abandoning comprehensive knowledge in favor of the certitude and controllability of its knowledge.<sup>79</sup>

Philosophical hermeneutics deals with understanding as the basic experience of the world in which knowledge is not limited to criteria of control and certitude but oriented to the whole of human life. The interpretive understanding in the human sciences, whose subject matter is human life in general, is much closer to basic human experience. The object of understanding cannot be isolated from the totality of its relation; the knowledge of its object always involves an orientation towards the whole. For this reason, understanding in the human sciences is not primarily a question of methodological control and certitude, but is conditioned by the certitude of the experience of life. As Gadamer states: "The certainty of science is very different from the certainty acquired in life."<sup>80</sup>

For Gadamer, it is a philosophical task to describe the conditions of knowledge in the human sciences, which he understands as the heir to the tradition of metaphysics, concerned with "man's knowledge about himself and the world of his creations in which he has deposited this knowledge." From the methodological point of view, this kind of knowledge is only a mixture of feelings and imagination, failing to display the requisite scientific vigor.<sup>81</sup>

Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is not an apologetic work for the defense of the human sciences against the ideal of objectivity of the scientific method. Rather it is an attempt to show the limits of knowledge in the sciences and, hence, the modes of experience of knowledge that cannot be explained within those confines. The experience of knowledge and truth that lies beyond the conceptual and methodological limits of the natural sciences is described in the domain of the historical sciences such as art, history, and legal and moral sciences. Although the limitations of his inquiry are set by the fields Gadamer chooses to discuss, its outcome is expressed in the claim that hermeneutic understanding is universal.

The claim to universality by philosophical hermeneutics has been challenged from the point of view of the method of textual interpretation and from the point of view of the critical function of the social sciences. Gadamer argues that the ideal of the objectivity of method cannot be univocally applied to the research practices of the human sciences. The specific character of the object of the human sciences must be taken into consideration. Since Gadamer denies the possibility of an absolute and "objective" knowledge in the human sciences, philosophical hermeneutics becomes susceptible to the criticism that it is an historicistic-relativistic theory.

Even in the traditional sense, hermeneutics as the theory of textual interpretation involves the problems of historical understanding. Gadamer employs the concept of the historicity of understanding to describe the incompleteness of the interpretation and understanding in the humanities. The methods of interpretation that are supposed to aid understanding historical texts, works of art, events and so forth cannot provide criteria for determining the decidability of interpretation in other and notably, in future instances and, therefore, all interpretation inevitably involves the problem of historical understanding. In the face of this problem of historicism, Gadamer develops two strategies to defend hermeneutic understanding from the objectivism of the sciences and the relativism of historical positivism.

In this chapter our inquiry has the following objectives: First, we construe Gadamer's own thesis that philosophical hermeneutics is developed against the ontological prejudices of methodological hermeneutics that led to the doctrine of historicism—this is Gadamer's own claim. Second, we examine Gadamer's theory concerning the relation of history and hermeneutics and his application of the principle of historicity to textual interpretation. Gadamer's critique of Romantic hermeneutics and the objective method of historical studies has its implications for his arguments against relativism and historicism in humanities.

## Hermeneutics and the Method of the Historical Sciences

The relation between hermeneutics and history is very complicated and always threatened by the challenge of relativism. Hermeneutics as a theory of understanding and method in the humanities has dealt with this challenge in the form of historicism. In the first section of Part II of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer develops a critique of historicism and relativism as part of an analysis of Romantic hermeneutics and its application to historical studies. In the second section of Part II, Gadamer expounds the historicity thesis in conjunction with a critical outline of the history of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher through Dilthey to Heidegger. Since Gadamer deals with the relation between history and hermeneutics at length, we introduce it in preparation for the development of his thesis concerning the rehabilitation of tradition, authority and prejudices, the "historicity of understanding," and "consciousness of the history of effects"—all of which are central to debates on Gadamer's hermeneutics.<sup>82</sup>

### *Critique of Hermeneutics as a Universal Method*

Traditional hermeneutics dealt with the rules to be followed in the interpretation of texts. Philosophical hermeneutics refers to a wider scope as an inquiry into the conditions of understanding in history, art, texts, moral practice and philosophy. Therefore, hermeneutics embraces both the method to be applied in textual interpretation, as well as the epistemological presuppositions of understanding in the human sciences. In the second sense, Dilthey has called it a "critique of historical reason."<sup>83</sup> The expansion of hermeneutics from an art of the analysis of texts to an art of understanding all meaning expressed in language was initiated by Schleiermacher.

Beginning with Schleiermacher, hermeneutics becomes a theory of interpretation dealing with the conditions that make the understanding of texts and speech possible.<sup>84</sup> Gadamer sets the development of Schleiermacher's theory of understanding against the background of the older theory of interpretation as an art, occasionally applied when the immediacy of understanding the subject matter of text is breached due to historical and linguistic differences.<sup>85</sup>

Schleiermacher distances himself from the early Romantics' distinction between understanding as immediate grasp of the subject matter and interpretation as an art to supplement understanding, that is required for external purposes. The early Romantics followed the Enlightenment concept of interpretation, according to which understanding is concerned with rational discourse. Differences in understanding are due not to the rationality of speech but to differences in "point of view."<sup>86</sup> Something is seen in one way and not in another because of the differences of the point of views.<sup>87</sup> Gadamer notes that two rules require specific attention: the first rule has to do with the familiarity with the subject matter of the text, and the second rule has to do with adopting the right ideas concerning the subject matter in order to remove the obstacles for understanding the text.<sup>88</sup>

Prior to the Romantics, hermeneutics was based on the familiarity or the immediacy of the relation between the meaning of the text and the interpreter. The Enlightenment's idea of a universal reason which could understand truth and values in a timeless way had reduced the immediacy of meaning to the immediacy of rational ideas. Whatever could not be understood by reason must be understood historically, in terms of the historical genesis of texts. For instance, according to Spinoza, when a text seems unintelligible, understanding it "motivates the detour via the historical" and according to Chladenius, understanding "involves the art of interpretation."<sup>89</sup> Historical method, as a supplement to hermeneutic understanding formulated here, prepares the ground for a later theory of interpretation as a reconstruction of the historical conditions of a text's composition. The concept of hermeneutic understanding as the art of interpretation has a different meaning for Schleiermacher; he defines its as "the art of avoiding misunderstanding."<sup>90</sup>

Gadamer argues that, prior to the rise of historical consciousness, understanding was always considered as natural and immediate, and interpretation as explication of this understanding was directed to the subject matter. The unity of the hermeneutic process, consisting of "understanding," "explication" and "application", is based on their reference to the subject matter.<sup>91</sup> Relying on Chladenius, Gadamer describes the basic principles of pre-Romantic hermeneutics as follows: 1) the author's meaning is not the norm for understanding a text,<sup>92</sup> 2) the object of hermeneutics is to "understand the true meaning" of the texts, i.e., their "content," and 3) not everything that can be thought of a text or not "every 'application'" but only what corresponds to the "subject matter" can be considered as part of the meaning of a text.<sup>93</sup>

These principles of hermeneutics as a discipline of art guide Gadamer's analysis of the history of hermeneutics. Gadamer intends to show that linguistic and historical alienation had become the starting point of Romantic hermeneutics. Also history and language are not even regarded as the source of the continuity and familiarity of objects of hermeneutics, as the foundations of understanding. In order to prove this, Gadamer tries to show that the Romantic notion of the method of interpretation as psychological re-construction of the meaning of the text as intended by the author and the historical method as the reconstruction of empirical contents of history by means of texts and remnants from the past are similar attempts to overcome the historical and linguistic distance. For Gadamer, the idealist concept of the individual subject and scientific epistemology are responsible for the theories of interpretation as a "restoration" process.

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, Romantic hermeneutics makes an attempt to radicalize the historical method as an aid to interpretation and turn it into a universal aspect of hermeneutic problems. The early Romantic concept of the point of view as an explanation of the subjective aspect of rational discourse is the precursor to Schleiermacher's concept of meaning as the intention of the author.<sup>94</sup> Romantic hermeneutics has made misunderstanding or unintelligibility the rule; understanding the exception. The hermeneutic task was conceived as restoring understanding by means of psychological and historical methods. The historical detour which was only a limiting case of intelligibility became for Schleiermacher the "norm and presupposition from which he develops his theory of understanding." Schleiermacher isolates the procedure of understanding from its content and makes hermeneutics into an independent method.<sup>95</sup>

However, the universal rules of interpretation based on the shared procedures of understanding, rather than on the content, allow Schleiermacher to see the historical distance as an instance of a more general form of alienation between the I and the Thou.<sup>96</sup> The distance and alienation from the past that prevent the understanding of the text are also actual for understanding speech as well.<sup>97</sup>

The solution for overcoming the gap between the text and interpreter is to supplement the grammatical and historical analysis with a psychological re-creation of the author's creative act. In this view, the object of interpretation shifts from the content of the text to the creative process of another mind.<sup>98</sup> Hermeneutics ceases to serve interpretation and becomes a general method guiding all understanding.

However, Schleiermacher's hermeneutics concerns the interpretation of particular texts and appeals to the larger historical context for the purpose of determining the peculiarities of the author's use of language and his life context. As Schleiermacher stated, historical interpretation cannot be limited to the collection of data, it concerns "re-creating the relation between the speaker and the original audience," without which interpretation cannot even begin. Understanding historical facts requires a minimal psychological interpretation, but the "overall viewpoint" requires it because of the subjectivity of the author.<sup>99</sup> Still, appeal to history is for him only a philological requirement to determine the author's relation to language by establishing the "objective-historical" conditions, and to determine the effects of thoughts and use of language on the author by establishing the "subjective-historical" conditions for the purpose of re-constructing the meaning.<sup>100</sup>

These rules of interpretation apply regardless of the truth value of the content. For Schleiermacher, understanding the content is the subject of dialectics.<sup>101</sup> Gadamer admits that the subject matter, as the object of understanding, could be regarded as a self-evident principle for Schleiermacher. However, hermeneutics does not concern the meaning of content, but only of expression, which is an artistic expression.<sup>102</sup> The hermeneutic task is the "re-construction of construction"<sup>103</sup> and the aim of interpretation is always understanding an author better than he understood himself.<sup>104</sup> Expressions are the products of an artistic genius and, hence, they are unconscious products; a re-production is always a better understanding, because it is conscious.<sup>105</sup> Gadamer derives from this only a positive conclusion that the author has no privilege over his text as an interpreter.<sup>106</sup> The interpreter's understanding is not superior with regard to the content, but it could be so only in terms of what the author was not able to see in what the text says. For instance, the existence of classical texts proves that their enduring presence is related to the truth of their content.<sup>107</sup>

The problem of relativism becomes a challenge for Schleiermacher as a result of his concept of individuality. He sees the task of understanding a text not in terms of its subject matter, but as an aesthetic construct.<sup>108</sup> The text as a work of art is a "free construct and the free expression of an individual being."<sup>109</sup> Hence, the hermeneutic circle, as it applied to psychological understanding, implies "understanding every structure of thought as an element in the total context of a man's life."<sup>110</sup> The circle constantly expands and, because this understanding always remains relative, a larger context is constituted by integration of the parts. Although the unity of the author's life context through individual thoughts is completed only as a divinatory act, it cannot be decided whether it is ever completed. It may describe only a "relative completeness of understanding."<sup>111</sup>

In order to resolve the hermeneutic tension between the relative difference of all individuality and the universality of method, Schleiermacher appeals to artistic feeling, to "con-genial understanding. Hermeneutics is an *art* and not a mechanical process. Thus, it brings its work, understanding, to completion, like a work of art."<sup>112</sup> Thus, the incompleteness of understanding is always a problem of the artistic re-creativity of the interpreter; it is never a problem of "historical obscurity, but the obscurity of the Thou."<sup>113</sup>

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics concerns particular texts with an undisputed authorship and appeals to history only to determine subjective and objective conditions of its composition.<sup>114</sup> For

instance, myths do not enter into the hermeneutic study.<sup>115</sup> Hermeneutics, on the other hand, as a universal method in the service of the historical study, has as its subject not "the individual text but *universal history*."<sup>116</sup> Hermeneutics is also applied to the study of history.

### *Hermeneutics as Historical Method*

Application of Romantic hermeneutics to the study of history has led the *Geisteswissenschaften* to become entangled in the problems of historicism. Understanding a text in terms of the dogmatic unity of its content as a condition of interpretation is denied. Since the unity of a text cannot be established in terms of its content as a self-contained whole, every text must be read within the larger context of its composition. The historical method reverses the situation. The historian needs to understand a particular text as a means to understanding history as a whole. The historical school has based its understanding of universal history on the "Romantic theory of individuality."<sup>117</sup> Not only texts but every particular event is to be understood in the "universality of the historical context."<sup>118</sup> The particular text can be used to construct the whole of history.

Dilthey recognized that the application of hermeneutics to the study of history could make it possible to comprehend the idea of a universal history. This is because, according to Dilthey, not just "sources are texts, but historical reality itself is a text that has to be understood."<sup>119</sup> By textualizing history, the historical school was resisting Hegel's concept of history as a teleological process. Contrary to an *a priori* construction of history, it can only be understood empirically. There is no standpoint outside history from which to understand history.<sup>120</sup> The continuity of history can only be understood from the historical tradition. Hence, hermeneutics now has become the foundation for the study of history.

In its opposition to an *a priori* construction of history, the historical school was also resisting Hegel's notion of a world history. In order to develop a critique of the concept of history based on an *a priori* construction of the unity of history according a teleological, rational or eschatological end state, the historical school was drawn to methods of the natural sciences. History must be based on research and progressive experience. In this effort, Schleiermacher was a better guide than Hegel, who recognized the "importance of history for the being of spirit and the knowledge of truth" more than did the great historians.<sup>121</sup>

The historical school's method requires an empirical construction of world historical phenomena. Particular events cannot be understood except in the larger context of a universal history. However, universal history cannot be construed *a priori*, but only through historical research. There are other ways of conceiving history in terms of a criterion that lies beyond it. History can also be understood as the cyclical rise and decline of a golden period, as the movement towards a future perfection, or as a reestablishment of a lost perfection of some primal time, or, as Hegel saw it, the perfection of history lies in its fulfillment in the "universal self-consciousness of freedom."<sup>122</sup>

Against Hegel's philosophy of history that there is a "reason in history,"<sup>123</sup> the historical school accepted the notion that ideas, essence or freedom did not find "sufficient expression in historical reality."<sup>124</sup> Instead, historical research discovers the empirical variety and multiplicity of the manifestations of historical life. Therefore, the unity of the historical process is constituted by the variety of historical phenomena. However, if this unity is attained by empirical research, historical research might be considered to replace philosophy to "inform man about himself and his place in this world."<sup>125</sup>

Gadamer finds both choices unacceptable. History is neither the pre-determined self-unfolding of reason nor the natural process in rigid, necessary law-like regularity that emerges into the world. Both of these conceptions of history cannot do "justice to the metaphysical value of history and the status of the historical science as knowledge. The unfolding of human life in time has its own productivity."<sup>126</sup>

The historical school attributed a formal unity to the variety of historical life, a formal principle not derived from the empirical content. Between the variety of historical phenomena and the value of these in human life there is no necessary relation. This belongs to the contingency of the historical world. The formal ideal of variety is empty, "for it cannot be shaken by any historical experience, any disturbing evidence of the transience of human things. History has meaning in itself."<sup>127</sup>

The formal unity of historical process requires that every period with a distinct value be included in the universal history, while the variety of historical phenomena renders the unity of history problematic.<sup>128</sup> History must be empirically studied in order to establish the unique value of particular historical phenomena. Yet the very phenomenon is historically meaningful only as part of the unity of the historical process. Constructing the unity of a historical process at the same time divests the particular phenomenon of its unique value. Therefore, the idea of an empirical construction of universal history is as problematic as its opposite, idealist construction.

The change and the impermanence in historical life seem to speak against the universal value of historical phenomena; transitoriness is also the basis of history. "In the impermanence itself lies the mystery of an inexhaustible productivity of historical life."<sup>129</sup> Therefore, the unity of history is not so much a formal concept, independent from the "understanding of the contents of history."<sup>130</sup> However, such a unity cannot be conceived of as a matter of knowledge or experience, but rather as an *a priori* of historical research. As Droysen recognized it, the idea of the unity of history is a "regulative idea."<sup>131</sup> It is the *a priori* principle of the empirical orientation of the historical sciences. This unity cannot be regarded as an object of knowledge because the essence of history is its continuity. Unlike nature, history includes the element of time, and unlike the repetitiveness of nature, history expands. The increase of history always includes the element of self-knowledge which not only involves the act of preservation, but also surpasses "what is preserved."<sup>132</sup> History belongs to the consciousness of this continuity.

The unity and continuity of an historical process cannot be regarded as only an "idealist prejudice." Rather, for Gadamer, "This *a priori* of historical thought itself is a historical reality."<sup>133</sup> Since Gadamer follows Hegel's answer for historical understanding as "*integration*" rather than Schleiermacher's description of historical understanding as "*reconstruction*," it follows that hermeneutics for Gadamer cannot avoid the question of a universal history.<sup>134</sup>

According to Gadamer, Dilthey is the first one who applied the hermeneutic principle of the circularity of understanding to history: "To understand parts in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of the parts. Conceived in terms of hermeneutic understanding, historical reality is conceived as a text."<sup>135</sup> But because the universal history lacks the self-containedness of a text, the historical school has raised the particular events in the past, historical periods and even the history of peoples no longer on the stage of world history into a "complete unit of meaning."<sup>136</sup> For Dilthey, the problem of the constitution of the unity of the meaning of history appears to involve either an empirical construction of historical processes or an aesthetic construction of the unity of history.

Dilthey has recognized this tension between aesthetic reconstruction and the philosophy of history. It appears to him as a tension between empirical knowledge of history and a

*a priori* construction of history. His critique of historical reason is directed against Hegel's notion that there is a reason in history. Dilthey intends to show the limits of a rational *a priori* construction of history and to legitimate the claim of the historical sciences to be rightfully called science. Against the purely rational construction of history, Dilthey asserts the relevance of historical experience to render history intelligible. He takes up the question of how the experience of history is legitimized as a science.

Dilthey approaches the problem of the unity of the historical process from the issue of the coherence between the subject and the object of history. The structure of the continuity of history has its coherence in the unity of the categories of life. Historical experience has its own unity and intrinsic continuity within the unity of experience. Dilthey takes the life experience of the individual as the basic object of historical understanding. By showing that life experience has its own immanent coherence and structural unity, he tries to lay the foundations of historical understanding. It can be proven that historical experience is not constituted by atomic elements in the experience of facts, but rather is already an understanding of meaning and connections immanent in life.

Dilthey wanted to make the transition from the structure of the coherence of an individual's life experience to "*historical coherence*, which is *not experienced by any individual at all*."<sup>137</sup> The question Gadamer constantly asks is: how do individual experiences acquire an historical significance? how do they become an historical experience? The continuity of historical life and the knowledge of it cannot be explained on the basis of the way an individual's life acquires continuity.<sup>138</sup> The reason for this claim is the fact that there is no universal subject, only historical individuals. The ideality of meaning in history emerges from the historical reality of life, not from a transcendental subject.<sup>139</sup>

Dilthey has further developed the psychological interpretation by suggesting the re-experiencing (*Erleben*) of the meaning as the expression of the author's life.<sup>140</sup> At the same time, he broadens the scope of hermeneutics to take into account meaning not as a product of individual consciousness, but as an expression of the larger category of life; historical phenomena came under a new light. Historical understanding is possible because the interpreter or historian also participates in historical life.

However, Dilthey understands the continuity and unity of history in terms of the unity of structures. The relationships between the historical events are different from the causal relationships of the natural world. The structural quality of the continuity of the life experience is different from "causal continuity."<sup>141</sup> Dilthey, under the influence of Husserl, called this structural continuity "significance."<sup>142</sup>

Dilthey did not regard it as any fundamental problem for the possibility of knowledge in the human sciences that finite, historical man lives in a particular time and place. Historical consciousness can reflectively rise above its own relativity in a way that makes the objectivity of knowledge in the human sciences possible.

This objectivity can be justified without a concept of absolute, philosophical knowledge beyond all historical consciousness.<sup>143</sup> Dilthey has identified the "striving towards stability" as a tendency to transcend the particularity with objectivity.<sup>144</sup> The objectivity of historical knowledge would be established, based on life's orientation towards stability, towards the whole.

Dilthey was thinking in terms of these relative wholes. The phenomenon of life would provide only ground for understanding "an alien individuality that must be judged according to its own concepts and criteria of value, but can nevertheless be understood because I and Thou are of the same life."<sup>145</sup> Dilthey's position has this advantage over "idealistic reflective philosophy" when

he correctly observed that "life's natural view of itself is developed prior to any scientific objectification."<sup>146</sup>

In Gadamer's view, Dilthey did not realize the significance of his position and its capacity to refute the charges of relativism against his philosophy, charges that came from the idealist point of view of the relation of the finite to the absolute.<sup>147</sup> Dilthey did not question these charges, because he knew that "in the evolution of historical self-reflection leading him from relativity to relativity, he was on the way toward the absolute."<sup>148</sup>

Dilthey, according to Gadamer, was always reflecting on these charges without following the consequences of the philosophy of life he had developed against the reflective philosophy of idealism. "Otherwise, he could not have avoided viewing the charge of relativism as an instance of the 'intellectualism' that he had sought to undermine by beginning from the immanence of knowledge in life."<sup>149</sup> Dilthey had a good start, but his reflections on the epistemological problems are not compatible with his starting point.<sup>150</sup> Reflection immanent in life cannot transcend life itself. He did not raise "the priority of history to life" to methodological reflection.<sup>151</sup>

In defending Dilthey's starting point from life against the charges of relativism, Gadamer also demonstrates that it is only from a reflective idealist position that the relativity of historical understanding can be raised. Against the subjective certainty of reflective consciousness, Dilthey appealed to the certainty attained by means of empirical verification. Thus, according to Gadamer, by appealing to the certainty of scientific method, Dilthey contradicts his own insight that historical understanding must be based on the "immediate living certainty."<sup>152</sup> This does not mean there is no "uncertainty of life" but it must be "overcome by the stability that experience of life provides."<sup>153</sup> Dilthey appealed, instead, to scientific certainty.<sup>154</sup> Scientific certainty is always the result of a critical method. Certainty as a goal of knowledge always precedes doubt in order to guarantee the certainty of its result.<sup>155</sup> But social life cannot be understood on this methodological basis.

In Gadamer's view, Dilthey's philosophy remains entangled in the *aporias* of historicism. It is an attempt to preserve the empirical course of history, while taking account of the ideality of meaning structures immanent in life. It does not question the empirical givenness of the historical objects. Speculative idealism offers at least a better solution concerning the historical knowledge, for it has subjected the positivity, pure givenness of the object to a fundamental critique.<sup>156</sup> However, Heidegger's critique of the notion of the pure givenness of the object and the subject provides a better foundation for historical understanding.

Heidegger's critique of the concept of substance has also shown the inadequacy of subjective consciousness for historical being and knowledge.<sup>157</sup> Earlier, Husserl's research on intentionality had opened a radical critique of "objectivism." His understanding of transcendental subjectivity as the only absolute, i.e non-relative thing, is here distinguished from the relativity of everything that appears before it. Heidegger raised a critique of the pure givenness of subjectivity to consciousness. Gadamer's hermeneutic theory is based on concepts that are found in Heidegger's analysis. We present a brief description of important aspects of Heidegger's philosophy for hermeneutic theory.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger appropriates the concept of historicity from Dilthey and applies it to the ontological question of the human understanding of Being. Although Heidegger acknowledges the importance of Dilthey's philosophy of life, he criticizes it, because the ontological structure of life was left unquestioned by Dilthey.<sup>158</sup> It later becomes clear that the ontological issue concerns the unity of life experience. Heidegger relies on the hermeneutic circle

to point out the circularity of *Dasein*'s understanding of Being and to illuminate his own ontological inquiry into the understanding of the meaning of Being itself.

In his project to develop a fundamental ontology, Heidegger unfolds the concept of time as the horizon of understanding. His investigation into the ontological question of Being turns first to the modes of the human understanding of Being. How is Being disclosed in human understanding? Heidegger states that "we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being. Out of this understanding arise both the explicit question of the meaning of Being and the tendency that leads us towards its conception."<sup>159</sup> Human practice and knowledge already move within a fore-understanding of Being. How is it possible for ontological investigation to take its starting point from the finite and temporal structure of human life and experience?

In order to address this question, Heidegger links the human understanding of Being with time.<sup>160</sup> The correlation of the human understanding of Being and the meaning of Being takes the form of an "existential analytic" as the initial articulation of ontological inquiry. Understanding is one of the existential characteristics of *Dasein*'s "being-in-the-world."<sup>161</sup> For Heidegger, understanding has the structure of a projection, a projection of *Dasein*'s own possibilities to be. Interpretation is the explication of this understanding, the articulation and working out of the possibilities projected in understanding.<sup>162</sup> However, interpretation is not something that follows after understanding. Rather, understanding and interpretation are coexistent.

Understanding is the form of apprehending something "as something," prior to the predicative determination of things "as that which is." Heidegger calls this first "as" the "existential-hermeneutic 'as.'"<sup>163</sup> There are three structural forms of fore-understanding:<sup>164</sup> fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. These constitute the fore-structure of understanding corresponding to the as-structure of interpretation.<sup>165</sup>

Fore-understanding governs all cases of the experience of objects. Fore-understanding itself refers to the ontological structure of human existence.<sup>166</sup> The circle of understanding is ontological, because it originates from the ontological structure of understanding. The meaning of the hermeneutic circle takes a positive turn in Heidegger: This 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* itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, foresight and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.<sup>167</sup> Thus, the object, just as much as the subject, constitutes an integral part of the process of understanding. The notion that the hermeneutic circle is completed not according to the position of the subject, but rather according to the object, forms, also, a crucial part of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of understanding.

In Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, the participation of the Being of the object in the hermeneutic circle constitutes the ultimate resistance of the object against being reduced to a representation. The object of experience always asserts its otherness over against the experiencing consciousness, so the process of understanding and experience is a never-ending task.

This is even more so in the human sciences. Heidegger emphasizes that the historical sciences are based on the ontological structure of human understanding. Heidegger writes: Because understanding, in accordance with its existential meaning, is *Dasein*'s own potentiality-for-Being, the ontological presuppositions of historiographical knowledge transcend in principle the idea of

rigor held in the most exact sciences.<sup>168</sup> The human sciences differ from the natural sciences precisely because they are related to man's own self-understanding. But the question of how human self-understanding and understanding in history are actualized brings us to the problem of historicity.

Heidegger gives an interpretation of historicity in section 74 of *Being and Time*.<sup>169</sup> In order to clarify the concept of historicity, Heidegger relates it to the continuity of life experience, or as he calls it, the "connectedness of life." The continuity or the "connectedness of life" consists in a "sequence of experiences" in time as *Dasein*'s happening (*Geschehen*).<sup>170</sup> Heidegger suggests that through an exposition of the structure of life's "happening," one will achieve "an ontological understanding of historicity."<sup>171</sup> Gadamer pursues such an ontological analysis in *Truth and Method*.

The ontological significance of the historicity of human existence cannot be explicated in the context of the ordinary conception of history as the continuous movement of time in which man lives his life.

The continuity of history, as it is experienced, is not constituted in accordance with the experience of time as a one-dimensional movement of 'nows.' The continuity of history is experienced within the context of discrete moments of life experience that achieves their unity of experience of past, present and the projection into the future in the ecstatic unity of temporality.<sup>172</sup> The original sense of temporality is historicity.<sup>173</sup> The concept of historicity, then, does not primarily signify human existence *in history*.

Heidegger emphasizes that only in the secondary sense of "historical," can man be said to be in history or a "being in time." In this sense, history, as it is ordinarily understood, is the time of man's "within-timeness." Heidegger adds that in the sense that both history and historicity are derived from temporality, "historicity and within-timeness [history] turn out to be equiprimordial."<sup>174</sup>

Heidegger believes that this has to do with the "hermeneutic situation." In this context, the hermeneutic situation means the openness of *Dasein* in the present, once it makes its resolution, to the repetitive disclosure of the past. The truth of historical understanding lies here: "The possibility and the structure of *historiographical truth* are to be expounded in terms of the *authentic disclosedness ('truth')* of *historical existence*. But since the basic concepts of the historiographical sciences . . . are concepts of existence, the theory of the humane science presupposes an existential Interpretation which has as its theme the *historicity of Dasein*."<sup>175</sup>

Heidegger raises the question of historicity and hermeneutics in the human sciences as the problem of the self-interpretation of life. Historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), in the sense of the experience of the continuity of life, is closely related to the notion of understanding as a process, or happening (*Geschehen*). For this reason historicity must be distinguished from history (*Geschichte*) and historiography (*Historia*). Such a distinction is necessary because historicity is for Heidegger and Gadamer an ontological category, whereas the term "history" has the usual sense of the past, and historiography as a science refers to the study of the past.

For Heidegger, historicity refers to the possibility of history. Therefore, history as a science depends upon the ontological constitution of man in his historical existence, and this constitution makes it possible for man to appropriate tradition.<sup>176</sup> Gadamer applies the concepts derived from Heidegger's *Being and Time* to the problems of the human sciences. Particularly important for Gadamer's starting point in philosophical hermeneutics are the notions that: understanding belongs to the ontological structure of human existence, that interpretation is the linguistic articulation of

human understanding, and that the disclosure of the experience of Being occurs within the horizon of the experience of time.

Against the background of Heidegger's notion of fore-structures of understanding, Gadamer formulates his thesis that understanding is made possible by the fore-understanding constituted by the prejudices of the interpreter's own historical tradition. He moves from the notion that all understanding originates from the pre-judgments (prejudices) of the reader. Thus, he no longer considers the circle of understanding as a formal element of hermeneutic method, but rather as the ontological and fundamental aspect of human existence. The hermeneutic circle includes the human relation to the world and, thus, encompasses the fact that human beings belong to language and tradition.

Gadamer makes it a central thesis that the epistemological ideal of the givenness of an object to a subject whose own consciousness is reflexively given to itself as an object has been proved to be a misconception. Husserl's research in phenomenology has shown that the idea of the pure givenness of an object is not a correct description of experience as the correlation between subject and object. It was Heidegger's ontological research that has shown the errors of 'objective subjectivism,' that is, the givenness of the subject to itself in self-consciousness. Husserl's concept of life-world and Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world" as the ground of experience concern the priority of historical life over subjective consciousness.

By adopting Heidegger's concept of understanding and historicity to his hermeneutic theory, Gadamer intends to overcome the problems of historicism and relativism. Gadamer tells us that he came to the hermeneutic situation from the standpoint of Romantic-idealism restoration research.<sup>177</sup> In contrast to an *a priori* construction of the historical past in the Hegelian manner, or the relativistic neutrality of historicism,<sup>178</sup> Gadamer explains that historical understanding is grounded in the historicity of human existence.

In Gadamer's view, historicism seems to be associated with objectifying thought and its metaphysical assumptions. Historicism is an approach to history that is concerned with not measuring the "past by the standards of the present, as if they were an absolute, but ascribing to past ages their own values and even acknowledging their superiority in one respect or another."<sup>179</sup> Therefore, historicism transforms the Romantics' notion of the intuitive retrieval of the past into a detached historical knowledge. Reversing the Enlightenment tendency towards the development of the rational course of history, Romanticism has resorted to "restoration."<sup>180</sup> The historical school has taken "objective knowledge of the historical world" to be parallel to the knowledge of nature "achieved by modern science."<sup>181</sup> The break with the continuity of meaning in tradition underlies both the Enlightenment and Romantic approaches to history. Historicism radicalizes psychological method as historical method; even one's contemporaries are "understood only 'historically.'"<sup>182</sup>

The question Gadamer asks is this: What is the substance of historical mediation between the past and the present? Is it some homogeneous human nature, natural laws of historical phenomena, or a teleological goal? Romantic hermeneutic theory depends on the concept of a homogeneous human nature as the "unhistorical substratum" of understanding. Its application to history has freed the empathetic interpreter from all effects of history. However, "the self-criticism of historical consciousness leads finally to recognizing historical movement not only in events but also in understanding itself."<sup>183</sup>

As we have seen, Gadamer carries out his critique of Romantic hermeneutics and historical methods and draws the following conclusion that scientific objectivism and its application in the

human sciences resulted in historicism. Historical understanding was considered only in terms of alternatives of empirical and idealist constructions of the unity of historical process.

Gadamer characterizes the 19th century dispute on interpretation as revolving around the question of the criterion of meaning for texts, works of art and historical events. As an alternative solution to the impasse of Romantic and historical hermeneutics--i.e., the intention of the author or the historical conditions of a text as the criterion of objectivity of interpretation—Gadamer suggests that the meaning of a text lies in its continuing effect, and this is given in a tradition.

What constitutes the object of hermeneutics is no longer the meaning as determined by the subjective intentions of an author or an historical agent, but rather the meaning as determined by the relation of the text to its content, as this is preserved in the continuity of tradition. Gadamer offers his views about what is involved in textual interpretation, based upon the consequences he draws from the critique of Romanticism and historical method.

### **The Historicity of Understanding as a Hermeneutic Principle**

Based on his thesis concerning the historicity of understanding and upon the implications of this thesis for textual understanding, Gadamer offers a non-objectivistic view of interpretation. Gadamer's version of hermeneutics represents a substantial departure from traditional, methodological hermeneutics. Gadamer acknowledges that he was driven to this version by Heidegger. We now turn to an analysis of how Gadamer describes the interpretation of texts, and the meaning of history.

#### *Interpretation of Texts*

Many disputes about the method of the correct interpretation of texts continue to play significant roles in philosophical hermeneutics. Contrary to the Romantics' hermeneutics of the reconstruction of the past, Gadamer describes hermeneutic understanding as an integration and mediation of the distance between the interpreter and the objects from the past.<sup>184</sup> Gadamer argues against the thesis that interpretation can be decided on the basis of the historical context of the text or on the basis of the intention of the author. The hermeneutic principle that the interpretation of a text cannot be complete and decided led to the development of hermeneutics as the universal method of objective, scientific research in the human sciences. The criterion of the correct understanding of a text is thought to be the original meaning-intention of the author. Gadamer proposes the thesis that the original meaning of a text is not something to be re-produced by reconstruing the psychological acts of its author in the past, but is already embodied in the content of the text. The object of understanding is the meaning contained in the text, not as psychologically intended by the author, but as the perspective from which the subject matter of the text is described. Gadamer states that we do not "transpose ourselves into the author's mind, but if one wants to use this terminology, we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views."<sup>185</sup>

Thus, instead of considering an historical text as a self-contained, self-identical phenomenon, Gadamer regards the relation between a text and the interpreting subject as the focus of hermeneutics. There are two components of this relation between an individual subject and the tradition: every subject has an interest in the subject matter and the medium in which the subject matter is presented, that is language. For this reason, Gadamer describes the hermeneutic circle as consisting of the "interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of interpreter."<sup>186</sup>

The philological concept of the hermeneutic circle, the idea that the understanding of any part of a text from the whole and the whole from the parts is transformed into a formal concept as an aid in the search for the meaning of a text as self-contained or as the author's intention. Gadamer's thesis is that the task of hermeneutics cannot be conceived as only "*formally* universal."<sup>187</sup> As a result of efforts to harmonize hermeneutics with the scientific ideal of objectivity, the "concretion of historical consciousness in hermeneutic theory" has been overlooked.<sup>188</sup> Gadamer's notion of the openness of the meaning of a text, undecidability of interpretation, is based on the idea of the historicity of understanding.

Human understanding is finite and limited. In addition, Gadamer attributes a transcendence to the being of the object or objects of understanding. The being of the works of art (and every text is a work of art in one sense) is not experienced as Being present. A text cannot be experienced in its self-identity, but rather the unity of the being of the text is always experienced in terms the dialectics of the self-identity and self-differentiation of its Being.<sup>189</sup> Therefore, Gadamer does not commit himself to the view that the meaning of texts is indeterminate. He seems to defend the view that understanding the textual meaning is indefinite.

However, Gadamer's attitude towards interpretation and meaning is ambivalent. On the one hand, he considers the notion that every text has its own determinate meaning to be a misleading approach to hermeneutics; on the other hand, he claims that understanding belongs to the text itself, i.e., a real interpretation always becomes self-transparent in revealing the meaning of a text.<sup>190</sup> This means that a text is understood only in its application to the situation of the reader. It means also that every understanding, as application, brings out of the text a new and valid meaning without invalidating a former interpretation. Gadamer summarizes his view of the openness of the meaning of the text and its interpretation in the following way: "It is enough to say that we understand in a *different way if we understand at all.*"<sup>191</sup>

Gadamer opposes the idea that the object of understanding is to ascertain meaning as the author's intention. The concept of the self-sufficiency of a text, i.e., the idea that the meaning of the text lies in the structural unity of the text itself, available through use of interpretative methods, is not proper either. Gadamer shows that the interpretation of texts, specifically the eminent text, is a never ending task. Gadamer's account of the indeterminacy of interpretation calls for a different concept of textual meaning.

Until Heidegger, in Gadamer's view, the hermeneutic tradition's ontological status was dominated by "objectivism" about textual meaning; texts and works of art have their unique and definite meaning, determinable in principle by the interpreter. Posing the hermeneutic question in terms of the objectivity of meaning—either as the intention of the author, or the text in its structural unity—supposedly restrains the interpreter from making judgments concerning the presentation of the subject matter of the text as valid or invalid. However, disagreement over the question of what the meaning consists of and how the interpreter would have access to it through time led to concepts of historical and psychological methods to supplement interpretation.

Philosophical hermeneutics follows the modern philosophical move away from the ideal of the pure givenness of the object and pure givenness of the subject. An epistemological scheme of subject-object can no longer be applied to the hermeneutic disciplines.

The ideal of a given object—text, work of art, historical event, etc.—is said to neglect the ontological feature of the human scientific knowledge. What constitutes the conditions of knowledge in the human sciences is discarded as prejudices and subjective hindrances to understanding. The epistemological ideal of a methodological control of prejudice as a hindrance to objective knowledge overlooks the enabling prejudices which make understanding possible in

the humanities. It also overlooks the fact that these prejudices might have a basis in the object. The object of the human sciences is not a self-contained entity that is in nature, but is related to human beings as part of a concrete tradition, as memories, as works of art, institutions etc.. Knowledge in the humanities is always increasing and expansive and changing along with the change in these relations and change of generations. Where exactly are the determinate objects of the hermeneutic sciences located? In the self-contained structure of texts or works of art; in the original intention of author or artist, in the plans and purposes of historical agents? For Gadamer, the meanings of texts are preserved and expanded through the continuity of tradition and history which is mediated by the continuity of language.

Because of the continuity of tradition, the circularity of understanding is no longer conceived as a formal principle of hermeneutics, but extends to the contents of tradition. Prejudices as fore-understandings belong to the ontological structure of understanding. Hermeneutic understanding must be thought as a movement from fore-understanding to understanding the subject matter in its self-presentation. Thus it becomes possible to explain the nature of knowledge in the humanities as a continuous movement of the confrontation and testing of prejudices against the otherness of text. In this process, not all prejudices are eliminated, some are confirmed, some are proved fruitless. However, even the fruitless prejudices remain dialectically effective as negative points of reference for determining the meaning of a text as "not that" and separating its truth claim from the false appearances. Therefore, as a whole, interpretation belongs to the history of the effects of the text. The correct interpretations emerge from the consciousness of this history of effects.<sup>192</sup> Thus, it is not only the case that the interpreter has a horizon constituted by his prejudgments, but also the text has a horizon of its own.

Interpretation is a conscious confrontation with the horizon of a text, a horizon that is not limited to historical conditions in which it came into existence, but is constituted by the possibilities of its meaning. In confronting the horizon of the text, we put those prejudices to test where they thereby either prove to be hindrances for genuine understanding or prove to be productive with a basis in the text. The naïveté of objectivism and positivism lies in the attitude that considers all prejudices as false and ignores the fact that prejudices might have their foundations in the subject matter. How these prejudices are tested is a demanding question for philosophical hermeneutics.

The thesis concerning the prejudice-structure of understanding, articulated by Gadamer in the second section of Part II of *Truth and Method*, seems paradoxical. It appears that prejudices are both indispensable and also unproductive for revealing the meaning of the text, if we seek to discover the truth claim of the text. Gadamer suggests that prejudices must be tested against the subject matter of the text, the *Sache*. It is not at all clear whether by the subject matter, *Sache*, of the text Gadamer alludes to the theme that the text is about or the perspective in which the subject matter of the text is presented. Of course, not all texts may have a particular, tangible object of reference. Cases in point are literary texts which can hardly be judged by appealing to some "thing" or subject matter. Another difficulty is that Gadamer does not specify whether the hermeneutic task includes a critical examination of the way the text presents its subject matter or whether it always proceeds as a self-critique by testing an interpreter's own prejudices concerning the subject matter in the light of a text's presentation of it. Gadamer wants to keep this ambiguity and tension in play for the sake of elucidating a different notion of the textual meaning and a different truth criterion of interpretation.

This tension lies at the basis of historicism. The question that immediately arises is: whose perspective would play the prominent role in the critical task of interpretation? The maxim for

hermeneutics rooted in historical consciousness is "we know better."<sup>193</sup> From Gadamer's point of view, the question one has to answer is this: what can one learn in the age of science from a text coming from the past? Should one dismiss it as no longer relevant or treat it only as a matter of historical interest for the present? Or should it be understood as part of a "meaningful relationship that exists between the statements of a text and our understanding of the reality under discussion"?<sup>194</sup> Gadamer's point is that even if such a text contains information that is scientifically irrelevant today, it is still meaningful as a point of reference concerning the 'correctness' of the current scientific view on the subject matter. Therefore, it is not only the case that the meaning of a text emerges in a reciprocal horizon fusion, but also correct and incorrect views about a subject matter come to light in this way. This is the way in which texts from the past address us and make a truth claim on us. This truth is not to be ascertained by subjecting its statements to a test of logical coherence or verifying its propositions through experiments, but it asserts itself as a matter of meaningfulness in the totality that encompasses the human world.

In other words, prejudices cannot be bracketed since the whole of an interpreter's own opinions are involved.<sup>195</sup> However, what Gadamer also fails to make clear is what the conditions are in which disabling or negative prejudices are separated out. He acknowledges that understanding cannot begin until the kind of text and its the subject matter are determined. These prejudices concerning the formal conditions of text, that is "the rules of grammar, the stylistic devices and the art of composition upon which the text is based,"<sup>196</sup> enable us to understand. But to claim that prejudices about the subject matter bring into the text our own views, our conceptions, is to ignore the commonality that binds the subject and the object. Rather, to consider the subject matter of the text as something totally alien or simply familiar is itself a mistaken prejudice. The hermeneutic task is to work out this tension without covering up the alienness—the otherness of the being of the text—and the familiarity—the common ground in which the interpreter and the text stand.

Gadamer describes the condition in which the productive prejudices are separated from the unproductive ones as a moment of the breakdown of the natural agreement between the text and the interpreter about the subject matter. Appropriateness of understanding to the subject matter of the text is one of the internal criteria for the correctness of interpretation.<sup>197</sup> Temporal distance and the distance created by writing preform the functions as external criteria of a proper understanding.<sup>198</sup> However, Gadamer deliberately chooses an extremely ambiguous formula to express the unity of these criteria of understanding: "Understanding primarily means to understand [oneself in] the subject matter (*Verstehen heißt primär: sich in der Sache verstehen*)."<sup>199</sup>

Hermeneutic understanding as an understanding of the subject matter and consequently as a self-understanding implies that the two basic hermeneutic requirements to be met are: first, the interpreter must know the subject matter, must be able to find his way around it; second, the interpreter must be open to or agree to that about which the text speaks as true. To remain open to the truth-claim of the text is also the condition for remaining open to question one's own pre-conceptions concerning the subject matter. Only when the interpreter lets his prejudgments be challenged by the text's views on the subject matter, can he thereby achieve a self-understanding.<sup>200</sup> All these meanings are packed in his formula. Gadamer often uses the most familiar experience as an example representing hermeneutic understanding: reading a letter from a friend.<sup>201</sup> The factual agreement with the other is a necessary condition of understanding.

He calls the expectation that we share this common ground as a "fore-conception of completeness."<sup>202</sup> Anticipation of what we read must have a unity, coherence and be true. The experience of understanding what a text speaks about, as long as it is comprehended, would elicit

plausibility and familiarly in us and force invoke the feeling that it "belongs to us and we belong to it."<sup>203</sup>

When the fore-conception of completeness is disturbed, the interpreter becomes aware of prejudices that are unproductive. It becomes difficult to understand or agree with the text. Such an encounter puts the interpreter's own opinions into question. Thus, hermeneutic understanding requires, too, the suspension of the prejudices that come to light through a text's claim to truth. But this suspension does not imply that those prejudices are completely annulled and done with. They still continue to perform their effect in terms of a negative determination of the meaning of the text, as this, not that. Gadamer writes: "All suspension of judgments—consequently and above all the suspension of prejudices—has in logical terms the structure of a question. The essence of a question is to open up possibilities and keep them open."<sup>204</sup>

The essence of prejudices then is that they might be based on the subject matter itself and the perspective of an historical past might still be effective as prejudices concerning them. Prejudices belong to the "essential reality of history in understanding itself."<sup>205</sup> Hermeneutic consciousness of the situation emerges as the consciousness of our own historicity when we encounter a text from the past and thereby confront ourselves in understanding the meaning of it. Gadamer calls this awareness "consciousness of the history of effects." Historical objectivism is characterized by the lack of consciousness of the historicity of the interpreting subject. Historical objectivism considers the study of history as a search for "an historical object" or as a matter of the advancement of research.<sup>206</sup> Historical objectivism ignores the fact that historical research originates from interests and the questions of the present. Gadamer argues that hermeneutic understanding not only involves a mediation of past and the present, but also the application of what is understood to a particular situation at hand, which is always an integral part of interpretation.

### *Historical Mediation as Application to the Present*

Gadamer contrasts the "consciousness of the historical effects" with the objectivism and positivism of historical method and introduces the concept of the horizon of understanding.<sup>207</sup> Romantic hermeneutics defended the idea that the interpreter should not mingle his own horizon with that of the text. This idea has been drawn to its radical conclusion in the doctrine of historicism as a call for understanding historical objects, including one's own contemporaries, in their own context, in the context of their own historical epoch.<sup>208</sup> Historical and psychological method as an aid to hermeneutic understanding overlooks the reality of historical continuity. It brings the temptation to assume that there is no relation between the past and the horizon of the present. Gadamer argues against objectivist historicism's assumption that the horizon of the past is self-enclosed, and the present horizon can be separated from it so that the past can be studied with methodological detachment. Ranke has formulated this idea as the "self-extinction" of the subject.<sup>209</sup> But where can we draw the dividing line between the past and the present? There is no self-enclosed horizon of the past and the present.

The consciousness of the continuity of history raises the awareness that the interpretation of a text is conditioned by our own historicity. Therefore, hermeneutic "*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*"<sup>210</sup> But if there are no allegedly independent horizons, why should hermeneutic understanding be considered as a fusion of horizons? It concerns the preservation of the otherness and the autonomy of the meaning of the text. Although we cannot speak of an independent horizon of past and present in view of the continuity of history, it is necessary to be conscious of the hermeneutic situation and our own

historical situatedness in order to maintain the tension between the text and the present. "The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out."<sup>211</sup>

Gadamer wraps up his understanding of the nature and the conditions of the humanities in the hermeneutic concept of the consciousness of the historical effect. With this notion, he intends to point neither to the effects of history nor to the effectiveness of consciousness in history. Gadamer takes great pains to explain that this notion means at once the awareness of the reality of a text, i.e., the text's own history of interpretation as it belongs to its meaning, and the awareness of the interpreter's own prejudices. However, a text and its effects are not causally related according to the contingencies of history; the effects of a text refer to the fact that the reality of a text consists in its being understood and understandable. The hermeneutic consciousness of this consists in being aware that a text is understood and applied by variable subjects and generations. Gadamer conveys this idea when he states: "Understanding is never a subjective relation to a given 'object' but to the history of effect . . . to the being of what is understood."<sup>212</sup>

The naiveté of objectivism lies in that it assumes understanding as a theoretical attitude in which the subject matter of the text is examined as a passive object of investigation. This leaves unanswered the question as to why the subject matter became an object of scrutiny in the first place. Here Gadamer draws attention to the role of application<sup>213</sup> and illustrates the hermeneutic value of the principle of application and its significance in interpretation by examples from the field of legal hermeneutics.<sup>214</sup> What is involved in the experience of the past is represented paradigmatically by the case of understanding a law, which is not an exceptional case but rather constitutes the essence of hermeneutic experience as comprising understanding, explication and application.<sup>215</sup> To understand the meaning of a law, whether one is a jurist or a legal historian one always is guided by the interest in its application to a present case. Although normative and historical approaches to the meaning of a law could have different interests in it, Gadamer argues that the principle of application is universally valid in both cases. He insists that the situation of a legal historian is no different from that of the jurist.<sup>216</sup> For, understanding a law entails recognizing how it applies "at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application."<sup>217</sup>

The object of the hermeneutic sciences is always understanding the meaning of texts and works of arts handed down from the past. The meaning of past events or texts is given neither immediately nor in a total alienation.<sup>218</sup> Hermeneutic understanding always moves in this tension,<sup>219</sup> where this tension does not exist, understanding is already immediate. But hermeneutic understanding as contemporaneous dialogue is not an experience of meaning in an intuitive immediacy, but rather meaning as mediated through language. Therefore, historical continuity is a linguistic phenomenon.

The understanding of written texts always takes place as a process of translating this language to the language of the interpreter. This is not only necessary for translations from one language into another. Rather, what Gadamer suggests is that the understanding of a speech or a written text is a dialectical process of removing the tension between individual linguistic perception and the common language use.

From all this, we can summarize Gadamer's position on the relation between history and interpretation as follows: 1) the interpretation of a text is always mediated by the effective history of the meanings of the text understood; 2) an interpreter's relation to objects of the human sciences is a condition for the possibility of understanding; 3) the historical distance between the object and

the interpreter is mediated in language; 4) the historicity of understanding and the linguistic nature of understanding cannot be eliminated by scientific methods or interpretive rules.

In many respects, Gadamer's theory is in conflict with the methodological concerns of traditional hermeneutics. This conflict has to do with different epistemological presuppositions. We examine Gadamer's approach to experience and understanding in the next chapter. It must be noted here, however, that Gadamer's critique of previous hermeneutics is an important part of his effort to deal with historicism and its relativistic conclusions. The consequences Gadamer draws from his critique and the implications of philosophical hermeneutics in terms of the textual interpretation must also be noted. We emphasize that Gadamer's approach to interpretation raises certain questions concerning the determination of the textual meaning and the interpreter's role in the process of understanding.

However, the interpretation of texts is merely one of the issues Gadamer describes as an example to prove the ontological structure of hermeneutic understanding. The other issues concern Gadamer's arguments for the experience of hermeneutic understanding and its universality as belonging to the ontological structure of human existence. Gadamer describes the experience of art and the experience of practical life as other cases that reveal the ontological structure of understanding. In the following chapter we explore these forms of experience which will disclose the forms of the experience of truth and knowledge other than scientific experience and method.

## Chapter III

# Transcendental Elements of Hermeneutic Experience

As we have seen in the first chapter, the discussion of the problem of the historicity of knowledge is still dominated by the opposition between empirical and idealist approaches to the experience of the human sciences. In Part I of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer deals with this problem through an analysis of the concepts dealing with the moral, aesthetic and historical experience that cannot be ascertained by means of the inductive and deductive logic of the sciences. In this chapter, we will examine those forms of the experiences of life which are subject neither to empirical certainty, nor to the certainty of the abstractly constructed deductive method. Gadamer argues that the experience of certainty in life cannot be measured by the criteria of the objectivity of scientific methods.

The hermeneutic analysis of understanding as the basic mode of human experience is the subject of our inquiry. Most commentators focus on particular aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics in the context of discussions concerning the practice of textual interpretation. By contrast, our focus is historical life or hermeneutic experience as it is treated by Gadamer in art, moral life and the temporality of experience itself.

Gadamer's analysis of these forms of experience aims at clarifying the nature of understanding in the hermeneutic disciplines. It must be borne in mind that Gadamer is a post-Heideggerian philosopher who writes within the space emptied by the critique of the concept of substance. Hermeneutic analysis has to walk the thin line between historicism and historical nihilism. It must also avoid falling into an idealism by replacing the particular historical individual with an historical transcendental substance, or into historical positivism by collapsing the human experience into concrete stages of historical process. Gadamer makes a subtle move away from Hegel's substance as subject endowed with self-consciousness to the substance of historical life that supports the individual subject. He has to demonstrate that the unity of substance and subject is based on the commonality of human life without thereby falling into historical determinism. In order to accomplish this, Gadamer argues that establishing the certainty of knowledge upon the self-consciousness of the individual leads to the separation of theory and practice, and ultimately to the abandonment of any justification of the rationality of practice, thereby consigning practical life to something that is irrational and theoretically irredeemable.

Gadamer's theory of understanding as a philosophical hermeneutics is about the conditions of all human experience. It is an attempt to give an account of the universal conditions of those forms of knowledge that are justified on grounds other than scientific experience. For this reason, Gadamer's analysis of the structure of experience and understanding is very important for a comprehensive grasp of the hermeneutic claim to universality. Hence, we will first examine Gadamer's concept of hermeneutic experience.

### **Experience, Understanding and Interpretation**

In the first part of *Truth and Method*, in which Gadamer discusses aesthetic experience, he makes the distinction between immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) and mediated hermeneutic experience (*Erfahrung*). At the end of the analysis of historical understanding, he explicates experience again (Part II, II.3.B). Therefore, in this section we will first point out certain issues

related to the hermeneutic concept of experience and then, toward the end of this chapter return to the discussion of experience.

The kind of experience to which *Erfahrung* refers is not something like the sedimented moments of the elements of experience in the consciousness of a subject, but rather it is a continuous process of integration and negation. *Erfahrung* is something the subject undergoes and suffers. In his review of *Truth and Method*, Fred Lawrence states that Gadamer deconstructs the "taken for granted self-understanding" in order to clear the way for a conception of the limits of authentic human experience.<sup>220</sup> He also points out that the "realized experience" (*Sein als Erfahrung*)<sup>221</sup> "assumes a systematic key place."

Gadamer develops the hermeneutic notion of experience, first, in the context of a critique of the scientific concept of experience and the metaphysical assumptions underlying it. The experience of the human sciences reveals an approach to truth that is not confined to the limits of the scientific method. An alternative view of experience that explains the problem of understanding in the human sciences reveals the problematic character of the "notion of cognition" prevailing in modern philosophy.<sup>222</sup>

Gadamer observes that the notion of experience as the pure grasp of an object lies at the basis of the scientific ideal of knowledge. The validity of experience is held to be determined by an external measure; i.e., the object itself and the purpose it will serve. The ideal of objectivity implicit in this notion of cognition aims at achieving a knowledge validated by the conditions set by the object as it presents itself to human experience. In this regard, the scientific approach places its real objective in the results of knowledge. However, science regards the determination of the value of these results, or their relative placement within the context of the totality of human ends, as being outside of the scope of its task.

In the human sciences, on the other hand, determining the value of the results of their activity is always the main issue. What will be the objective of knowledge in the human sciences, and how the validity of their results should be determined, are the questions that appear problematic. Hermeneutic experience describes the forms of experiences of human life that are not based primarily on alienating distantiation (*Verfremdung*)<sup>223</sup> but rather on those in which the relation of belonging lies at the basis of understanding. The experience of the human sciences differs from the experience in the natural sciences, because understanding belongs primordially to its subject matter.

Some of the problems in Gadamer's hermeneutics emerge from his views concerning scientific method, knowledge and experience. The universal claim of the scientific method and its encroachment upon the human sciences are subjected to critique by Gadamer. It is beyond the scope of our study to determine whether this critique is successful. However, certain elements of this critique are relevant to the discussion concerning the universal and transcendental aspect of hermeneutic theory.

Gadamer argues that, despite the scientific method's claim to universal validity, it limits experience and knowledge to those verifiable by the criterion of methodic certainty, and thus leaves out the search for truth and knowledge that goes beyond it.

Gadamer also argues that within the limits of scientific method, the question concerning the transcendental conditions of human experience and of speech and communication cannot be raised.<sup>224</sup> Some of the problems related to the application of scientific method to the human sciences arise from the fact that the scientific method cannot account for human *praxis* according to the ideal of objectivity. The concept of experience becomes restricted to the certainty of the results of knowledge.

The search for certainty also gives rise to a biased emphasis on methods of verification, exactness, etc. From the methodological perspective, historical understanding remains in opposition to the ideal of a-temporal knowledge. Hermeneutics becomes a philosophical subject precisely because it concerns "the transcendental conditions of the possibility of all experience."<sup>225</sup>

Gadamer tries to argue against the universality of experience as it is posited in the scientific concept of experience. The universality of scientific experience is posited in the sense that the validity of knowledge is measured by the general validity of its results. The goal toward which the experience is oriented finds its unity in the fact that the results of experience acquire a determinate status over the process.

This kind of universality might be called the unity of the concept or true universality of concepts in the Hegelian sense.<sup>226</sup> Scientific experience tries to move from individual experience to the unity that gives rise to and transcends the particularity of the object. Gadamer points out that this description is true in the sense of the process of induction as described by Aristotle. Gadamer clarifies this, using an explanation in which Aristotle describes how various perceptions unite to form the unity of experience when many individual perceptions are retained. But what sort of unity is this? Clearly it is the unity of the universal. But the universality of experience is not yet the universality of science. Rather, according to Aristotle, it occupies a remarkably indeterminate intermediate position between the many individual perceptions and the true universality of the concept. Science and technology start from the universality of the concept.<sup>227</sup>

What is clear here is that the unity of experience cannot be reduced to the unity of the diverse moments of experience. Gadamer explicates the process of arriving at the unity of experience based on the contingency of observation in Aristotle's example of fleeing army coming to stop.<sup>228</sup>

The universality of the experience can be asserted in spite of the contingency of its constituent. Experience is valid in a "really universal way" because of the principle—which fills the role of the commander in Aristotle's example.<sup>229</sup> For Gadamer this "image illustrates the way in which the unprincipled universality of the experience . . . eventually leads to the unity of the *arche* (which means both 'command' and 'principle')."<sup>230</sup> Gadamer points out that even if we postulate "the universality of the concept" as "ontologically prior" to the movement of experience, the "co-ordination" and determination of the individual observation are "ultimately incomprehensible."<sup>231</sup> Even when the principle governing the unity of the process of experience is specified, there is no concrete rule for the application of the principle.

The principle for the unity of experience can explain only the results of experience, but not the process of experience. According to Gadamer, "This process is essentially negative."<sup>232</sup> Negativity is intrinsic to the process of experience as the generation of a determinate knowledge of the subject matter is determined by virtue of the cancellation of the previous experience of the thing, as well as by what we thought we previously knew about the object. Gadamer writes: "We cannot, therefore, have new experience of any object at random, but it must be of such nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before"—i.e., of a universal. The negation by means of which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience *dialectical*.<sup>233</sup>

The fact that experience has the characteristic of negativity does not contradict the achievements of scientific or any other kind of experience. On the contrary, "experience is valid so long as it is not contradicted by new experience . . . [this] is clearly characteristic of the general nature of experience."<sup>234</sup> The hermeneutic problem is related to the question why the same text or an historical event is in need of continuous interpretation, why its meaning is not determined

once and for all. For this question to be settled, it must be established that the new experience of something is possible on the basis of previous experience, as well as its negation in the process.

However, Gadamer does not follow all the implications of Hegel's idea of the negativity of experience. That negativity belongs to experience means for Gadamer that experience never involves a complete and pure grasp of the object in its totality. The object can always be experienced as something new, which means that it is also experienced as something that it was not previously supposed to be. In view of this new aspect of the object, "both things change, our knowledge and its object."<sup>235</sup> The dialectics of experience allow the reversal of previous knowledge, but not the transformation of the previous experience of the object into absolute knowledge. Gadamer argues that experience is always open for its object. This aspect of experience as self-critique, self-reflection and alteration of previous knowledge in the face of the renewed self-presentation of the object, never allows for the "complete identity of consciousness and its object."<sup>236</sup>

This proximity to Hegel, with whom "the element of historicity comes into its own,"<sup>237</sup> has its limits in Gadamer's concept of experience as an open process. However, Gadamer agrees with Heidegger that Hegel's description of "what is dialectical in terms of the nature of experience"<sup>238</sup> is important, but "applying Hegel's dialectic to history . . . does not do justice to hermeneutic consciousness."<sup>239</sup>

Gadamer combines the openness and negativity of experience in order to prove that the truth of experience is other than scientific certainty, because the openness of experience calls for an always "radically undogmatic" attitude from us.<sup>240</sup>

Hermeneutic experience is often contrasted with the kind of experience which prevails in the natural sciences. This has to do with the "objectives of knowledge." Knowledge in the natural sciences is oriented to the results that are imposed on the research itself; in the human sciences, knowledge is existential, that is to say, it cannot be pre-determined. For this reason, hermeneutic discussion concerning the method of the sciences does not indicate a purely apologetic engagement with the sciences, but rather involves questions concerning what "precedes and makes" science possible in the first place.<sup>241</sup> Interpretation as the method of the human sciences' research procedure thus becomes the central problem of philosophy.<sup>242</sup>

The concept of the openness of experience as revealing the finitude of human nature is central to the hermeneutic understanding as recognition of the reality and the otherness of its subject matter. However, the attempt to recognize the otherness of the objects of the humanities can be conceived from an opposite perspective, i.e., the perspective of a meaning's difference from the past. According to Gadamer, "modern consciousness--precisely as historical consciousness--takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition." The contents of tradition, recognized as something distant and alien, require a reflective transformation into an historical context in order to find the significance and relative value of its object. "This reflexive posture toward tradition is called *interpretation*."<sup>243</sup>

The experience of historical distance is transformed into a radicalization of interpretation in the sense that interpretation is the imposing of meaning upon the contents of tradition. It is this concept of interpretation that brings us to the hermeneutic experience as a corrective to hermeneutic nihilism. Interpretation is the understanding of meaning.

## **Interpretation and Understanding**

The concept of interpretation, after Nietzsche, signifies not the "discovery of pre-existing meaning, but the positing of meaning."<sup>244</sup> The modern concept of interpretation, since Nietzsche, has a claim to universality quite different from what Gadamer means by the universality of understanding. Nietzsche has radicalized the critique of the certainty of self-consciousness to the extent that not only facts and phenomena, but all theoretical assumptions of objectivity become suspect. Interpretation, if it is considered to be reading our own meaning into a text, "is no longer the manifest meaning of a statement or a text, but the text's and its interpreter's function in the preservation of life."<sup>245</sup>

For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, "interpretation is not an isolated activity of human beings but a basic structure of our experience of life. We are always taking something as something. That is the primordial givenness of our world orientation, and we cannot reduce it to anything simpler or more immediate."<sup>246</sup> However, interpretation cannot be understood from the point of view of the immanence of self-consciousness that can return to the givenness of the object as an element of experience.<sup>247</sup> Rather, Gadamer approaches understanding as the experience of the world as given interpretively, i.e., through its constitution in language.<sup>248</sup> If the primacy of self-consciousness is denied, there is no longer a problem of grounding experience in a higher principle, but understanding is itself a participation in the sense of taking the whole on oneself, not taking a part.<sup>249</sup>

It is possible to understand the meaning of something unfamiliar only in the context of the familiar. The most general context of understanding is the world. Our experience of the world is given not as an aggregate of objects, but as already linguistically organized. The structure of experience, primarily the experience of something as something, refers to this fact. What is confronted as unfamiliar is always also brought into a world, into a familiar context. Gadamer speaks of works of art brought into a structure. When, for instance, a drama is staged, the work undergoes a "transformation into structure." In this transformation the work realizes itself.

Thus, understanding is not the process of imposing our own meaning onto the work, such that the artwork loses its own world; rather the reverse is the case, that is, "what no longer exists is the world in which we live as our own. Transformation into structure is not simply transposition into another world."<sup>250</sup>

In fact our own world is transformed into one which was only a potentiality in "undecided possibilities." A work of art, in being transformed into structure, comes into speech; the unfamiliar is integrated into the familiar and the world of meaning of the work of art opens up for us a "wholly transformed world".<sup>251</sup>

Because self-understanding is not an immediacy of self-consciousness but is achieved through the understanding of the other, when we interpret the works of art we also interpret ourselves. Because self-understanding requires the alterity of the other in its self-identity, the experience of art as the experience of the exceptional and distinctive provides the otherness necessary for self-understanding. However, the artwork cannot remain as something alien and strange, for the continuity of the work as artwork belongs already to our world. Concerning the work of art, Gadamer writes: "We learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means we sublate (*aufheben*) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence."<sup>252</sup>

The principle of self-consciousness lies at the basis of philosophical idealism and influenced the theory of knowledge and concepts of psychology. After the criticisms by Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger, the "social role of the individual rather than his self-understanding moves into the foreground."<sup>253</sup> What are the answers to these questions: how does the ego maintain its self-

identity? how is the continuity of its selfness constituted? does such an ego that vouches itself in self-consciousness exist? Both in Hegel's concept of the dialectical struggle for recognition and in Kierkegaard's concept of religious inwardness, in the sense of choice lay the basis for an "ethical concept of continuity" of consciousness.<sup>254</sup>

Interpretation has therefore acquired a universal dimension in the modern human sciences. One's relationship to the past as well to one's contemporaries requires interpretation, because the meaning of what a text or person says is not understood at first sight. The turn toward interpretation is not only the result of a "reflexive posture," but also is the result of the awareness of alienation from the past. "An explicit reflection is required on the conditions which enable the text to have one or another meaning." Therefore, the necessity of interpretation implies the "'foreign' character of what is yet to be understood."<sup>255</sup> Whatever is immediately evident and persuasive would not require interpretation.

Interpretation in this wider sense "has become a *universal concept* determined to encompass tradition as a whole."<sup>256</sup> This general sense of interpretation goes back to Nietzsche. For him, all statements dependent upon human reason are "open to interpretation, since their true or real meaning only reaches us as masked and deformed by ideologies."<sup>257</sup> In Gadamer's view historical criticism is an extension of this assumption. All the material of historical studies requires critical interpretation because of their foreign and fundamentally different situation from our own.<sup>258</sup> The historicity of understanding is asserted against the attempts to derive a nihilistic conclusion from the historical life.

## The Historicity of Experience

Gadamer does not draw a nihilistic conclusion from the finite nature of human understanding; instead he recognizes historicity as the foundation of man's orientation towards the world. There are several ways in which the concept of historicity can be understood in Gadamer's hermeneutics. First, Gadamer speaks of historicity in the sense of the finitude of human existence and knowledge. This principle will serve a herme-neutical theory in the following way. While hermeneutics previously engaged itself with the problems of interpretation of texts and the problem of method in the historical studies, the task of philosophical hermeneutics is to extend this to a reflection on the nature of "all that can be understood."<sup>259</sup> Everything is included in the experience of understanding. In this sense, the historicity of understanding primarily corresponds to the Dilthey's concept of "ordinary understanding" (*Menscherkenntnis*).<sup>260</sup> The historicity of understanding signifies the pre-reflective experience of the world. As Gadamer writes: "What I am describing is the mode of the whole experience of the world. I call this experience hermeneutic, for the process we are describing is repeated continually throughout our familiar experience."<sup>261</sup> This basic orientation toward the world is through its interpreted existence in language.

Secondly, historicity not only signifies comportment toward a linguistically "organized"<sup>262</sup> natural world, but also "the unity of the world we live in as men," that is the world as constituted by "historical tradition and the natural order of life."<sup>263</sup> And finally, the mediative nature of understanding is also implied by the historicity of understanding. The finitude of human understanding and the openness of experience to the world find their limitation in dependence on, and mediation by, language which also asserts its own otherness against the individual consciousness in the orientation of language towards totality, towards a universality.

Understanding, as always limited and finite, is mediated through language. "For men's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal in nature."<sup>264</sup> For this reason

Gadamer tells us that "language is the record of finitude."<sup>265</sup> In experiencing the world in language, especially in the language of art, we discover our own limitations. Thus, the experience of art is one of the forms of experience in which the transcendence of reality and the finitude of human experience is disclosed.

## The Experience of Art

We choose Gadamer's analysis of the experience of art and the concept of practical judgment in order to present models of understanding other than historical understanding. In these models, too, Gadamer's insight into the structure of understanding is demonstrated. The scientific concept of experience emphasizes repeating the process of experiment and leaves out the continuity of experience. Since the objectivity of method guarantees the possibility of repeating the process of experience that leads to the results, the process must be "capable of being checked in the human sciences also."<sup>266</sup>

The specific nature of the experience of art reveals certain aspects of understanding that make the investigation into aesthetics an integral part of the overall purpose of *Truth and Method*. Gadamer characterizes this distinct feature of the experience of the human sciences as "extrascientific."<sup>267</sup> The experience of art illustrates a mode of experience that surpasses the methodological limitations of science. Knowledge in the human sciences always remains close to the experience of art.<sup>268</sup>

Gadamer analyzes the approaches to aesthetics, history and language from the point of view that accords a primacy to the mutual belonging of subject and object. To proceed with the assumption that alienation and distantiation is a necessary condition of knowledge in the humanities cuts the ground from under the possibility of knowledge in the first place. Gadamer argues that the fact that the experience of art preserves its continuous relevance in life and the fact that the works of art remain contemporaneous with every age provide us with a counter-example to respond to the assumption of historical alienation.

The experience of art achieves this timeless contemporaneity in the linguisticality of all experiences of the world. These forms of experience point to a truth that precedes and surpasses any knowledge.<sup>269</sup> Gadamer also declares that unless it is taken in the wider sense of a *liber naturae*, textual understanding does not exhaust the scope of hermeneutics.<sup>270</sup> Textual understanding concerns only one of the experiences of meaning in which the limits of understanding are revealed.

We will analyze the forms of experience in which the understanding subject transcends its own limits. Examples of the experience of art and moral deliberation show that understanding process as appropriation is a transformative and productive.

As we have seen, the general task of *Truth and Method* has always been considered from the point of view of its negative task, i.e., anti-objectivism and anti-methodologism. Hence, its positive task has been preempted by these debates. This ignoring of *Truth and Method*'s positive task is shown by the general neglect given to the critique of aesthetics that occupies Part I of *Truth and Method*.

The positive task Gadamer sets for himself concerns an understanding of the experience of the interpretation of tradition. Artistic tradition in particular presents a case of transcending the context of the problems of understanding in the human sciences dominated by idealism and positivistic historicism. We must refer to the significance of this task as the expressed purpose of the text. The investigation of *Truth and Method* "starts with a critique of aesthetic consciousness

in order to defend the experience of truth that comes to us through the work of art against the aesthetic theory that lets itself be restricted to a scientific conception of truth."<sup>271</sup> Concerning the experience of art, for instance, Gadamer writes that his work is "concerned with truths that go essentially beyond the range of methodological knowledge."<sup>272</sup>

In the first part of *Truth and Method*, the positive task Gadamer sets for himself is to clear away the obstacles preventing an understanding of the truth of art and tradition in general. Among the philosophical disciplines, aesthetics has acquired a relative autonomy even at the expense of losing its cognitive value and hence its truth claim. In its struggle for autonomy, aesthetic experience is freed from its claim to be knowledge, because it is not conceptual; and from its claim to truth because it is based on feeling.<sup>273</sup> Hence, it is not thought to be science, because it is not universal. The first part of *Truth and Method* is devoted to "freeing up the question of truth in the experience of art."<sup>274</sup>

Gadamer intends to give a justification of the truth of the experience of art on the basis of the cognitive value of judgment. He argues that the experience of art and moral judgment involve modes of knowledge that are immediate in the sense that the experience of their object is contemporaneous and the historical distance is overcome without recourse to reconstruction of the conditions of their object by submitting them to a logical criterion, or demonstration. The universality of practical and aesthetic experience cannot be grasped as an empirical or abstract universality, nonetheless, it is a concrete universality.

The experience of truth in the moral and aesthetic realms cannot be verified by empirical certainty, yet the certainty of these experiences is binding for every individual, even though the whole, the totality of life, or the totality of mankind is never empirically given.

It is not only the objectivization of history, but also the subjectivization of aesthetics and practice that overlooks the historicity of human understanding. Gadamer argues against the hermeneutic nihilism that results from the notion that the meaning of the work of art is indeterminate. It is the effect of subjectivism in aesthetic theories that gave rise to what Gadamer calls "aesthetic differentiation."<sup>275</sup> The art work is abstracted from its living world, and the artist is abstracted from his historical world, and art itself is purified out of its existence. Aesthetic perception is not pure seeing and hearing. These are "dogmatic abstractions. . . . Perception always includes meaning."<sup>276</sup> Even understanding abstract art, something like an "absolute music" involves getting into a "relation with what is meaningful."<sup>277</sup> Perception is already understanding, in that perception interprets something as something. The work of art perceived as an artistic product itself is more than art, it is its meaning. Interpretation is not something imposed on the work, rather interpretation belongs to the being of the work itself.<sup>278</sup>

Gadamer intends to transcend the "purity of aesthetic"<sup>279</sup> to get beyond the entanglement of the subjectivity of the experience of art and turn to the ontological structure of the work of art in order to determine its meaning. Gadamer develops a critique of subjectivist theories of art. He analyzes the concept of aesthetic genius in the Romantics' aesthetic theory. In certain aesthetic theories the concept of genius serves for explaining the inexhaustibility of the interpretation of the artwork. After Kant, the concept of genius is employed to explain the completeness of the work of art as the distinctive character of the artist, while it belongs to the interpreter to conceive this completeness without reference to a purpose, which is what distinguishes the art from a craft. The indefiniteness of the work of art in reference to a purpose and its completeness in reference to the genius, is taken into a conception of the indefiniteness of the work of art.

Take for instance, Valery's notion that all works of art are open and indeterminable, because the purpose of the work cannot be decided and, thus, the work is essentially incomplete. "From

this it follows it must be left to the recipient to make something of the work. One way of understanding a work, then, is no less legitimate than another.<sup>280</sup> The concept of genius conceived from the side of the recipient leaves no criteria for appropriateness of interpretation. Gadamer concludes that it leads to an "untenable hermeneutic nihilism."<sup>281</sup>

The objectivity of understanding in the human sciences is dependent upon the characteristics of the subject matter. The appropriateness of the interpretation is bound to the work of art itself, because, if the interpretation is possible, it must be appropriate to the work of art; it is the interpretation of the work, and it must have its own identity and coherence.<sup>282</sup>

The aporia of the indeterminateness of meaning has found its expression in the arguments that claim that the unity of the work of art is constituted in its form. This implies that the art work is only an empty form which can be filled by the multiplicity of possible experiences in which an aesthetic object exists. The self-identity of the work of art is disintegrated into the formal unity of aesthetic experiences which annihilates the unity and continuity of the work of art.<sup>283</sup> The emphasis on the exceptional temporal quality of the experience of art leads to notions of the incompleteness of the work of art or the incompleteness of the experience of art.

Gadamer recognizes that the discontinuity of aesthetic experience points beyond itself and is grounded on the experience of the continuity of human life.<sup>284</sup> Kierkegaard's critique of aesthetic existence as momentary existence points to the need to transcend the transitoriness of the aesthetic existence, while at the same time preserving it. The aesthetic object is not immediately intelligible and not timelessly present to itself, nor is the experience of it. This is the conclusion of aesthetic subjectivism. It is necessary to integrate aesthetic experience into the continuity of the experience of self-understanding, because self-understanding is not a pure givenness of the consciousness to itself either. "Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other."<sup>285</sup>

The way to transcend aesthetic consciousness is to trace the history of its conceptual background. This is intended to show that, first, the experience of art contains more than aesthetic consciousness admits, and second, this remainder is related to the object of art, and to the being of the work of art.

Gadamer does not intend to prove that the work of art demonstrates its own truth but rather to show how to make sense of the experience of art. This already requires the admission of the truth value of works of art because, despite the efforts to "rationalize it away," in the works of art a "truth is experienced" in a way that cannot be constituted any other way.<sup>286</sup> Methodological hermeneutics ignores the fact that interpretive methods do not demonstrate the truth of art, but rather the truth of art is prior to this demonstration. In the second section, Gadamer shows the same to hold true with regard to historical consciousness.

Common to both aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness is the narrowing of the cognitive value of the experience of the human sciences by focusing on the "problems of method."<sup>287</sup> Gadamer does not deal with the general problem of methodologism, but with the logical difficulty of its application to the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Under the influence of John Stuart Mill's *Logic*, in which the inductive method is construed as the basic method for all sciences, a distinction was made between the logical and the "artistic-instinctive induction" that is specific to the human sciences.<sup>288</sup> The implication of this distinction is that the method of the *Geisteswissenschaften* is tied to particular psychological capacities, and understanding in the humanities requires "tact." Also implied in this distinction is the idea of a limitation to the universal validity of scientific method as its binding norm.<sup>289</sup>

The question Gadamer raises is how artistic-intuitive tact is acquired. He seeks the answer to this question by analyzing the concept of *Bildung*. It is one of the concepts that was central to the *Geisteswissenschaften* even though the idea remained without "epistemological justification."<sup>290</sup> Gadamer contends that *Bildung* provides the ground of legitimation for the human sciences and remained as their "special source for truth."<sup>291</sup>

What is specific about this concept is that it implies a specific form of universality. *Bildung* as "cultivating the human" reveals the real significance of the concept. Herder's definition of *Bildung* as "rising up to the humanity through culture"<sup>292</sup> confirms that the universality of human scientific knowledge is concrete, i.e., its universality and specific form of objectivity are content-dependent. It means that understanding in the humanities is also a form of human self-understanding, as self-formation.

The nature of such an understanding is a process, it is a becoming and nature, *physis*.<sup>293</sup> *Bildung*, as becoming, describes more the result than the process itself, but the result here is not something external to the process, but rather a continuous internal process without an end.<sup>294</sup> Gadamer applies Hegel's concept of sublation (*Aufhebung*) to *Bildung*. "*Bildung* is a genuine historical idea, and because of this historical character of 'preservation' it is important for understanding in the human sciences." This brings Gadamer close to Hegel who introduced historical ideas "into the realm of 'first philosophy'."<sup>295</sup>

Following Hegel in this initial step opens up a hermeneutic dimension in that we recognize the universality characteristic of the historical understanding. Rising to universality is not a specific capacity of theoretical reason "but covers the essential character of human rationality as a whole."<sup>296</sup> Thus, *Bildung*, defined as "rising to universality", requires the individual to leave his particularity behind for the sake of universality. It refers to the human ability to restrain one's desires and "hence freedom from the object of desire and freedom for its objectivity."<sup>297</sup>

Gadamer develops a critique of the experience of art that points to inadequate consequences of the subjectivist theories of aesthetics. This theory of aesthetics has found its consummation in the concept of aesthetic understanding as the re-experiencing (*Erlebnis*) of the artist's original creative experience. If the notion of the experience of art as *Erlebnis* is examined closely, it becomes clear that aesthetics here surrenders to the scientific ideal of objectivity in the sense that the aesthetic experience is divorced from the truth of the work of art.

Gadamer suggests that the experience of art is analogous to the experience of play. The work of art, like play, represents itself only in being played. All playing is a being played, a "self-presentation."<sup>298</sup> "Play is really limited to presenting itself. Thus its mode of being is self-presentation. But self-presentation is a universal ontological characteristic of nature."<sup>299</sup> Gadamer finds the work of art as both *energia* and *telos*.<sup>300</sup> Representation is a temporal category. Play realizes itself in the temporal happening of its various representations. The mode of being of the work of art is a "coming-to-presentation of being."<sup>301</sup> For this reason, the ontological structure of the being of the work of art has the character of a temporal event, as Heidegger called it (*Ereignis*).<sup>302</sup>

The process or event character of the work of art is not limited to the plastic arts but is valid for the literary arts as well as all literary works in general.<sup>303</sup> The truth content of a text always emerges in the "event" of reading.<sup>304</sup> However, the possibility of reading and being read is the ontological character of texts as literary art. "Literary art can be understood only from the ontology of the work of art, and not from the aesthetic experience that occurs in the course of the reading."<sup>305</sup> Because, both in the case of understanding texts and of understanding works of art,

the fundamental structure of understanding is, in each case, the same, "aesthetics has to be absorbed by hermeneutics."<sup>306</sup>

Through these excursions, Gadamer prepares the ground for showing the radical antithesis between aesthetic consciousness and the experience of art. The notion of aesthetic consciousness is of relatively modern origin. As Palmer puts it, "It is a consequence of the general subjectivizing of thought since Descartes, a tendency to ground all knowledge in subjective self-certainty."<sup>307</sup> Gadamer's critique of what is characterized as the aesthetic consciousness concerns the fact that—in Dahlstrom's description of the aesthetic project of German Idealism—"its appeal to consciousness or subjectivity [is] perhaps even wrong-headed."<sup>308</sup> Gadamer tries to demonstrate that the experience of art is not simply a matter of subjective consciousness, but a matter of the ontological disclosure of the object itself. The uniqueness of the experience of art is thus summed up in the words of Georg Simmel: "The objective not only becomes an image and idea, as in knowing, but an element in the life process itself."<sup>309</sup>

In the experience of art, the aesthetic object addresses perception. However, perception is not a pure grasp of the thing, but already includes an interpretation. The experience of art works discloses the interpretive nature of all our experience of the world.

Gadamer's analysis of aesthetic experience shows that perception, even if it is psychologically conceived as a response to a stimulus, is never a mere representation of what is there. For perception always retains an understanding of something as something. All 'understanding as' is an articulation of what is there, in that it "looks-away-from, looks-at, sees-together-as."<sup>310</sup>

The aesthetic object as a phenomenon in the world is already constituted in its different self-presentations and different aspects of its being. It cannot be exhausted by our cognition of it. The historicity of understanding essentially refers to this aspect of experience. Gadamer expresses this feature of experience when he asserts that "understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood."<sup>311</sup> The role attributed to historicity as the condition of experience must not be confused with the historicist concept of the historical conditions of understanding. The idea expressed by the concept of historicity is that experience is not an immediate cognitive relation to the object.

Since the experience of art illustrates the interpretative and temporal nature of experience, Gadamer argues that despite the temporality of the mode of being of the aesthetic objects, it is possible to understand how works of art present themselves in a timeless way. Gadamer has chosen the example of the classical for explicating the historicity of the objects of the human sciences in *Truth and Method*, and extends this notion to all works of art, especially linguistic art.<sup>312</sup>

Certain texts that have acquired the status of the classical represent the whole historical tradition in its authority through the claim to truth that is embodied in them. The classical "signifies a period of time, a phase of historical development but not a supra-historical value."<sup>313</sup> The contemporaneity of classical works of art is brought about "on account of their effective history."<sup>314</sup>

Thus, the concept of the classical represents something being in history, while at the same time not being limited by history. In this sense, it is a "mode of being historical" which preserves truth in a process of constantly proving itself as valid.<sup>315</sup> The self-legitimation of the classical is due to the fact that the classical preserves its truth claim in history within a tradition, and as such requires our recognition.<sup>316</sup>

The discussion concerning the classical has no independent value in itself unless it is considered as an illustration of the historical mediation between past and present. Gadamer carries out the analysis of understanding in the light of the historical mediation which appears as the

"effective substratum" of all historical activity. The defining characteristic of an historical activity cannot be conceived other than as a process.<sup>317</sup>

What is considered to be classical exemplifies the self-presentation of the object in its identity through change. Indeed, just as the analogy of play exemplifies how the self-presentation of the work of art can be beyond objective and subjective determination, the case of the classical illustrates the dialectical movement of finitude and the possibility of transcendence without undermining the historical character both of understanding and of the text in the continuity of an historical tradition.

The classical does not represent a dogmatic or supra-historical quality of the historical object, but rather is precisely an historical category itself. To call something "classical" by no means implies that a certain quality is attributed to a particular historical phenomenon; the classical refers to a "notable mode of being historical."<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, the classical denotes a mode of being historical, a mode of historical preservation, that continually proves something true about the historical writing.<sup>319</sup>

The mode of being of historicity that is characteristic of the objects of historical studies and of the interpreting subject is the common ground of their being in continual movement. Temporality is the common element of the mode of the being of the subject and the object of this study. On the side of the interpreter, the category of the classical refers to the historical reality as something to which historical consciousness belongs. The classical signifies the capacity of works of art or texts to present themselves in a "timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present."<sup>320</sup>

In the interpretation of the works of art a clearance is opened by the temporal distance. The fixity of written expression provides this clearance for understanding linguistic works. The principle of distantiation accounts for the possibility of confronting something as other, and its integration into the familiar. Only something unfamiliar or alien calls for interpretation. Equally, it must bring its own familiarity with it. The principle of distantiation is dialectically opposite to the consciousness of the history of effects. As Ricoeur suggests, interpretation must be taken as a distantiation of re-appropriation.<sup>321</sup> The intermediary position of hermeneutic understanding brings the "text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition."<sup>322</sup>

Similar to the temporal distance and the clearance opened by the written expression, moral experience reveals another form of distance between the subject and object. Practical experiences of moral decisions, applying a moral rule in a particular situation, involve a distantiation that cannot be explained through the modern distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge.

## **Practical Experience and Judgment**

Under the influence of the modern concept of method, the traditional meaning of the distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge is altered. In modern epistemology, practical and theoretical knowledge are defined according to the method of the sciences. The distinction between theoretical and practical is reflected in the methodological division of the sciences as the natural sciences and the human sciences with regard to production. Gadamer's account, on the other hand, is based on a revaluation of the concept of production in terms of moral practice, represented in Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* as a moral "production" distinct from natural scientific production, *techne*.

*Phronesis* is to be distinguished, on the one hand, from theoretical knowledge, *episteme*, and from technical reasoning, practical skill, *techne*, on the other. Moral practical reasoning involves a special kind of mediation between the universal and the particular in which both the universal and the concrete case are co-determined.<sup>323</sup> It is not a subsumption of the particular under the universal rule or a derivation of the particular from a universal; rather it is distinctive of *phronesis* that it involves an "interlacing of being and knowledge."<sup>324</sup>

It is important to note that Gadamer's return to Aristotle and moral reasoning has a critical significance. Two points require special attention. First, Gadamer recognizes that the modern division of sciences is based on the division of theoretical and practical knowledge, and upon the idea that the theoretical apparatus of natural sciences are superior because they find more practical applications. Here, practice is reduced to technical production, and the superiority of scientific method is proven by the results. The theoretical aspects of the human sciences, on the other hand, produce no similar results. The upshot of this argument is that the human sciences are not even practical, but only speculative or theoretical in the pejorative sense of the term.

The second point Gadamer makes is that philosophy can make a difference not by making rules concerning what specific methods must be used in the sciences, but by pointing out the preceding conditions of these reflections on the methodological peculiarities of the sciences. Philosophical hermeneutics is the heir to the older tradition of practical science.<sup>325</sup>

In the light of the above distinction, the ideal of the objectivity and certainty of scientific knowledge appears to be a specific form of certainty relative to the specific goal or the subject matter of an investigation. The claim that scientific method is itself independent from every content and, as such, is applicable to every content is misleading with respect to the goal of the sciences to utilize their results for human needs.

Gadamer accepts Kant's notion that the moral world of human life is a realm governed by freedom. The historical life-world in general is not subject to regularities and laws similar to those of nature. Only in imitation of the scientific method of the natural sciences can the human sciences be said to be "concerned with establishing similarities, regularities, and conformities to law which would make it possible to predict individual phenomena and process."<sup>326</sup> But they could not obtain these regularities because of insufficient data available in these domains. Thus, beside methodological accuracy, the second measure of the sciences is the success and the increase of knowledge.

We have outlined the purpose of the analysis of humanistic concepts of common sense and *Bildung* so as to illustrate the objective power of these concepts derived from the tradition of moral philosophy and their "critical significance."<sup>327</sup> The critical function of moral reasoning consists in its political content.<sup>328</sup> This has been changed when moral reasoning is included under the concept of judgment. Because judgment is considered as being among the lower powers of the mind, the *sensus communis* is deprived of its critical significance. The *sensus communis*, as judgment, concerns the individual, unique thing. As the sensible individual is agreeable to many, or if it has internal coherence, this is what Kant calls "reflective judgment." Reflective judgment is appropriate according to what is the formal and real element of the thing, and is hence not conceptual, but rather immanent knowledge.<sup>329</sup>

Kant's moral philosophy denies that morality can be grounded on "moral feeling." In this opposition, it not only excludes the *sensus communis* but also reduces it to aesthetic judgment as a faculty common to all individuals. Gadamer considers this a misconception concerning the common sense. Rather it is the real "sense of community, genuine moral and civic solidarity, but that means judgment of right and wrong, and a concern for the common good."<sup>330</sup> "Moral feeling"

is not an individual feeling but a common sensibility. Moral judgment might serve to restrict the judgment of others as detached from our own private, subjective conditions, but this limitation has nothing to do with avoiding appealing to the judgment of others.<sup>331</sup> This is the sense in which the *sensus communis* is divested of its political content.

Gadamer states that the "*sensus communis*" is the sense of the right and the general good that is to be found in all men, moreover a sense that is acquired through living in the community; it is determined by its structures and aims.<sup>332</sup> It appears that practical knowledge is concerned more with human possibilities than with those available to rational proof. Gadamer further comments that "it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge."<sup>333</sup> Gadamer aims to prove that the human sciences' claim to knowledge and truth has been emptied of its content by measuring it in terms of extrinsic standards, "namely the methodological thinking of modern science."<sup>334</sup> Contrary to the narrow concepts of practice and theory, the theoretical attitude "is in itself part of the practice of man." Objective behavior itself is based on man's ability to distance and restrain himself from the immediate desires which are all made possible by the gift of the "theoretical."<sup>335</sup> However, taking a theoretical attitude does not mean subjecting all our knowledge and experience to reflection.

## Hermeneutic Experience and Its Conditions

Gadamer turns to the structure of experience and the reality of the object as limiting the power of reflection and to effective history as exceeding experience prior to reflection. The first point to be made is that historically effected consciousness "has the structure of experience (*Erfahrung*)."<sup>336</sup> For this reason, the explication of the concept of experience must be understood in the context of the historicity of understanding. The contemporary conception of experience has become excessively influenced by the experimental sciences, and, therefore, "the inner historicity of experience" is now overlooked.<sup>337</sup>

Gadamer states that the aim of his study is to investigate "all experience of understanding" and indicates that "the section on experience (Part Two, II.3.B) takes on a systematic and key position" in this investigation.<sup>338</sup> His analysis of experience in that section is closely related to his analysis elsewhere of the otherness of the historical object.

The situation of consciousness as historical consciousness and also as the consciousness of being as such brings out the question of the possibility of rising reflectively out of the historical conditions of understanding. The historicity of understanding must be considered as a reflexive act, which is the implication of Gadamer's concept of the "consciousness of the historical effects." We raise this issue in order to determine the ontological implications of the hermeneutic requirement of reflection. Hermeneutic reflection upon the status of consciousness that is effected by history brings us back to the pre-understanding or the pre-judgment that constitutes its initial directedness.

Gadamer connects the reflective activity of consciousness with the consciousness of Being. He writes: "Reflection on a given pre-understanding brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back*. Something — but not everything, for what I have called the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* is inescapably more *being* than consciousness, and being is never fully manifest."<sup>339</sup>

This raises an important question concerning the nature of consciousness and the reflective capacity that belongs to it. Gadamer writes: "However much we emphasize that historically effected consciousness itself belongs to the effect, what is essential to it as consciousness is that it

can rise above that of which it is conscious. The structure of reflectivity is fundamentally given with all consciousness. Thus, this must be the case for historically effected consciousness.<sup>340</sup> If through reflection consciousness can rise 'above' what it is conscious of, then this would imply that by means of reflection consciousness could go beyond effective history.

The fact that this question arises belongs to the Hegelian elements of Gadamer's thinking. But, unlike Hegel, Gadamer concludes that the ability of consciousness to rise above the conditions determining it does not mean consciousness can attain an absolute standpoint from which it can know both its own self and the object of its activities.

There are two issues involved here. The possibility of hermeneutic analysis shows that the historicity of understanding includes the ability to comprehend reflectively that of which it is conscious. But this does not mean that consciousness can grasp the totality of the being of the object, but rather only the aspect that is revealed. This much is clear from the remark mentioned earlier to the effect that being is never fully manifest.

The second issue involved is the concept of the subject of hermeneutic understanding. Gadamer emphasizes the historicity and finitude of understanding in the sense that the subject can never become a self-transparent object. This is the whole issue behind the critique of objective subjectivism.<sup>341</sup> The subject can never become an object to itself.

This can be explained more clearly from the point of the phenomenological notion that consciousness is always a "consciousness of something." The reflectiveness of consciousness can mean awareness or being conscious of something. On a higher level, reflection would be an awareness of consciousness as being the consciousness of different things. The concept of self-consciousness applies to this second awareness. If it is asserted that consciousness can discover that certain structures pertain to its own activity at the first level, this would mean that the structures of consciousness are free from effective history.

Gadamer avoids accepting that self-reflection could reveal the structure of consciousness to itself, free from its contents. For, if such possibility of self-reflection exists for self-consciousness, then the laws or the structures discovered within consciousness would provide an absolute basis for our knowledge of objects, and Gadamer's hermeneutics would be no different from Hegel's idealism.<sup>342</sup>

The reflective nature of consciousness, together with its ability to escape the boundaries of the particular objects of its experience, are very crucial for proving the historicity of understanding. The task of hermeneutics is to establish the otherness of history in order to demonstrate that historical determination is an effect of the finite nature of human existence, not the result of the fact that human life is lived in the course and development of history.

But how can the otherness of history be established without denying the reflective nature of consciousness? This issue is related to the notion of reflection and its role in experience. Gadamer finds in Hegel's speculative and dialectical thinking the true expression of the dynamic nature of experience. Speculation, as referred to here, is employed in the sense used by Hegel, that is, as a "mirror relation."<sup>343</sup>

Reflection, used in this sense, requires a counterpoint against which immediate experience can be compared. Without such a differentiation, the identity of the object cannot be established. Here, "speculative means the opposite of the dogmatism of everyday experience."<sup>344</sup>

Speculative thought reduces the immediacy of the object to a moment within the process of a dynamic whole. In order to go beyond unreflective everyday experience to the totality of the process in which the immediate experience is a part, the initial objective presentation of the object comes to be seen as only a particular determination of the object within the context of apperception.

The model of speculative thinking is not favorable to the appositive view that takes the object as given in the immediacy of experience. Speculative philosophy makes it possible to think that the object is potentially capable of being infinitely determinable according to the context of its perception.

Gadamer does not accept the claim that subjective consciousness can overcome its own historical conditionedness, or overcome its pre-judgments through self-reflective activity. This objection immediately forces him to deal with Hegel's concept of absolute knowledge. Gadamer wants to adopt the speculative reflection described in Hegel's dialectic, but to reject its claim to absolute science. Thus, the dialectic of absolute sciences can be refuted on the basis of the finitude of the understanding.

Prior to raising objections to Hegel, the strength of Hegel's account of reflective experience must be appropriated in order to defend the historicity of experience. At the center of the problem of reflection is the experience of the other. The vigor of reflective philosophy comes into view in Hegel's critique of Kant's thing in itself. Hegel claims that insofar as reason sets the boundaries between that which is known (the phenomenal) and the unknowable (the thing in itself), consciousness becomes self-consciousness by recognizing that reason itself sets this limit and thus has already traversed the limit of the phenomenal in absolute consciousness.<sup>345</sup> The other, in this understanding, becomes part of self-consciousness, because the other is recognized as the result of an act of consciousness itself. However, it is a failure not to see that the recognition of otherness is merely a stage of consciousness in the dialectical process.

The recognition of otherness has to do with attempts to criticize Hegel from the point of view of reflective philosophy. Gadamer tries to challenge Hegel's arguments for the sublation of otherness on a new ground, on the basis of which the other would be recognized as being outside the reflectivity of consciousness. This can be shown by drawing the boundaries of reflection. For this reason, Gadamer introduces the historicity of experience into the discussion.

The concept of experience must be evaluated under the light of historically effected consciousness in such a way that "immediacy and superiority of work do not dissolve into a mere effective reality in the consciousness of effect—i.e., we are concerned to conceive a reality that limits and exceeds the omnipotence of reflection."<sup>346</sup>

The experience of the Thou constitutes the original phenomenon of hermeneutics. The experience of the Thou represents a model of knowledge according to which reflection can go beyond the particular effects of the historical object, although it cannot sublate the being of the object into self-consciousness. Therefore, Gadamer asserts that: "[T]he experience of the Thou throws light on the concept of historically effected experience. The experience of the Thou also manifests the paradox that something that stands over against me asserts its own right and requires absolute recognition; and in the very process is 'understood.'"<sup>347</sup>

Historical distance, as incorporated into the reflectivity of experience, involves a distanced objectivity. The object of understanding stands on its own in its otherness, because the tension created by reflection and temporal distance is effective in all understanding. Second, this involves a transcendence, both on the side of the meaning of the object, as well as providing a self-transformation, self-transcendence of the interpreter. Thirdly, it is productive as actualized in its application into the present situation. And finally, it makes it possible to make a projection of possibilities into the future.

In this analysis of experience, Gadamer achieves his purpose to demonstrate that fore-understanding and prejudices do not exert inescapable domination over the process of understanding, but are constantly confirmed or negated.

If anything, the hermeneutic task described here involves an endless historical process not because of its lack of fulfillment in the timeless validity of an Hegelian absolute knowledge, but because of the temporality of the experience of Being. Gadamer's hermeneutics is definitely in conflict with the concept of knowledge based on Cartesian self-certainty or on the reflective self-consciousness. The criterion of givenness of the self-identity of the subject to its own consciousness is abandoned in favor of the dialectical movement of self-understanding through the other. The other must be preserved as other in its discontinuous existence within the continuity of the hermeneutic experience as the understanding of the familiar, if it is to provide the alterity necessary for the subject's self-understanding.

All further considerations aside, Gadamer's notion that understanding is also a self-understanding in the humanities should not be taken in the sense of an "existential" self-understanding. Understanding as self-understanding is an heuristic concept, not an existential one. It is based on the observation that every knowledge presupposes or is oriented toward a whole, even if the whole is not given. The knowledge of the object given in the natural sciences is no different from that of the human sciences in this sense. The totality of nature is never given to scientific experience, but the unity and totality of nature is presupposed in every form of research on a particular object. The continuity and the unity of the scientific research is a presupposition based on the goal that it will be utilized for human purposes.

Similarly, for instance, historical study presupposes the unity of the history of the world historical phenomena, while the continuity and unity of historical understanding presuppose the continuity of human self-understanding. It will be admitted that these suggestions will bring Gadamer closer to Kant, as conceiving the totality and unity of nature and the historical world as regulative ideas. It may sound surprising, but Gadamer reads Kant through Hegel, and vice versa. In an effort to reinterpret Hegel's objective spirit and the dialectic mediation of human consciousness through the objective forms of historical life, while preserving Kantian limits of knowledge, Gadamer tries to avoid the implications of Hegel's dialectics of absolute knowledge.<sup>348</sup>

Most theories of understanding in art and history approach their subject matter from the perspective of historical alienation and the uniqueness of the individual who has created the artwork or participated in an historical event. From the critique of empirical and idealist conceptions of aesthetic and historical understanding, Gadamer draws the conclusion that language as the "universal medium of this mediation" should replace idealist and empirical approaches.<sup>349</sup> Thus the historicity of understanding means not only that understanding comes out of the concrete situation which is both the condition of understanding as well as its limitation, but also orients us towards the universal self-presentation of the objects of our understanding, like art and history.

Historicity thus implies the nature of understanding as a process, as well as its confrontation with the otherness of the object of understanding. "Every experience is a confrontation. Because every experience sets something new against something old."<sup>350</sup>

As we can see, Gadamer looks for the mediative nature of understanding in the basic structure of experience itself. Gadamer gives as evidence for the openness of experience the fact that the nature of experience cannot be reduced to a theoretical fixation of consciousness upon its objects. This paves the way for his concept of determining meaning not through an approach from the perspective of propositional logic, but through the logic of question and answer. Thus, hermeneutic understanding is not be conceived as a matter of constructing a self-identical meaning of a text or work of art or a historical event, but rather as a continuous dialogue.

Dialogue, considered as the model for hermeneutic understanding, confirms the mediation of meaning by raising questions to which the text serves as an answer, hence, we also question ourselves in the face of the truth claim of the text. The testing of pre-understanding and the pre-judgment that condition understanding take place in this confrontation. Referring back to *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains it in the following way: "I have tried to describe more accurately . . . how this process of challenge mediates the new by the old and thus constitutes a communicative process built on the model of dialogue. From this I derive hermeneutics' claim to universality. It signifies nothing less than that language forms the base of everything."<sup>351</sup>

In order to make good on the claim to universality and to the comprehensive unity of understanding meaning, philosophical hermeneutics directs its reflection on the limitations of objectifying thought represented by the scientific concept of method, as well as on the forms of experience that point beyond the sphere of methodological knowledge. The universality of hermeneutic experience is threatened by the distinction of fact and value and the objective and subjective conditions of knowledge, advanced in epistemological theories.

Hermeneutic reflections on understanding as an integration that becomes continually wider in extent and, thus, is universal reveals also the transcendental aim of philosophical hermeneutics that concerns the possibility of understanding in general. For this reason, hermeneutic philosophy adapts the strategy of a transcendental theory to describe the conditions of knowledge whose universal validity is confirmed by the fact that hermeneutic reflection is itself submitted to the same conditions. Hermeneutic philosophy circumvents this contradiction by returning its reflection back on the all-embracing character of these conditions.

Hermeneutics abstains from a claim to absolute knowledge by leaving aside any distinction between the empirical and ontological experience of meaning and subsuming them under the principle of the historicity of understanding. The dependence of understanding on prior conditions starts with the preconceptual structure of experience. The phenomenological description of experience exposes the fact that experience and its content are correlative, and these two should be included in the continuity of the universe of the meaning. Conceptual thinking and objectivity of method dismiss the original relation of experience to its content in a manner in which the autonomy and the self-identity of the historical object cannot be recognized as a concrete and unique phenomenon. Instead, objectivity is projected as a result of a reconstruction of the historical and subjective conditions underlying the creation of the object. Methodology concerns the abstract rules and principles of knowledge which have nothing to do with the specific contents of human knowledge or even the achievements of particular sciences. Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its subject matter the experiences which are bound to the already existing and yet changing, continuous complexes of meaning. Hence, the validity of the scientific method depends on its versatility and suitability for all purposes regardless of the content of the experience.

Thus, the universality of scientific method, as it concerns the formal relation between the subject and the object, covers over the difference and distance between knowledge and its object. The distance and the difference of the object of study and its experience become the central problems of the human sciences. Hermeneutics recognizes the independence and otherness of historical meaning towards which it stands in opposition by virtue of the historicity of understanding, but at the same time elevates this relation to the task of a mediation. The principle of understanding signifies the dependence of understanding on a given content and, thereby, historicity assumes the role of a continuous mediation content of a tradition. However, the mediation of content through the principle of historicity is not *eo ipso* a mediation of all the contents of history, because time, as the structure of the mode of being of objects and as the

medium in which the temporality of life is structured, must be experienced and appropriated within the continuity of history. It is not just the mere passage of time as historical continuity that constitutes the unity and continuity of the object in history, so the experience of an isolated subject cannot overcome the temporal distance. For this reason, it is necessary to suppose either that the continuing unity of meaning can be reflectively construed, or that the unity of difference from, and dependence upon, its content is built into the activity of understanding.

It is not only the case that hermeneutic reflection goes beyond the immediacy of its own temporality in recognizing the identity of the object in its own temporal structure; it also rises above the difference of its object in relation to the understanding subject. However, the power of reflection cannot extend beyond the temporal horizon encompassing the whole. The reflectivity of hermeneutic experience contains its own critical element in that it submits understanding to the measure of its object's own self-presentation, and also to the historicity as the temporal mode of the relationship between subject and the object. Language as a medium transcends the limits of hermeneutic reflection. The relation between language and reality and also that relation between historical continuity and the contents of tradition cannot be transcended by an emphasis upon the achievement of understanding unbroken by reflection. Hermeneutic understanding finds its universality always in concrete forms of the experience of life: a tradition mediated through language, such as art, history and moral practice.

However, despite Gadamer's emphasis on the ontological structure of understanding and the historicity of understanding, this thesis cannot be maintained without difficulty if historicity is taken in the sense of the historical conditioning of human knowledge. The objections to Gadamer's hermeneutics emerge from this point of view. We turn, in the next chapter, to the critical issues that Gadamer's theory raises.

## Chapter IV

# Methodological and Critical Problems of Philosophical Hermeneutics

Is the philosophical hermeneutics expounded by Gadamer a theory about interpretation as practiced in the humanities, or a philosophical theory concerning the epistemological conditions of human experience in general? In the preceding chapters, the issues have been dealt with from these points of view. Two major questions emerge from Gadamer's thesis that understanding is an historical process. First, if understanding is historical, then interpretations of texts from the past would remain relative to historical conditions in which the interpreter studies. Second, if the historicity of understanding signifies the mutual relation between the subject and history, then understanding history, as well as any theory about historical understanding, would remain relative to an historical tradition and to its effects on the present understanding. Thus, Gadamer's theory faces objections from those who require a method and norms for the objectivity of textual interpretation, as well as from those who wish to establish critical norms for understanding history.

The critique of philosophical hermeneutics made by Betti concerns the method and norms of interpretation. Betti's objections center on the role of the historicity of understanding, that is to say, on the application of understanding to the interpreter's present situation. Betti construes the principle of historicity as the historical conditionedness of all processes of interpretation. Therefore, in Betti's view, because of Gadamer's emphasis on how every understanding must apply to the interpreter's situation, Gadamer falls into subjective relativism; and because of his doctrine of the historical conditionedness of interpretation, Gadamer falls into historical relativism. Hirsch, following Betti, has raised objections against philosophical hermeneutics from similar points of view. However, Hirsch goes even further, claiming that Gadamer's theory implies not only an historicist relativism, but also a hermeneutic nihilism. Hirsch's critique focuses mainly on the role of tradition and historical distance operative in understanding and the possibility of the fusion of the horizon of the text with the present horizon of the interpreter.

Habermas and Apel take issue with Gadamer precisely on the question of the possibility of reflectively transcending the historicity of the subject in order to subject tradition to a critical evaluation. These critics are not only concerned with the possibility of transcending the historicity of the subject, but also with transcending the historical horizon of tradition so that a critique of historical tradition becomes possible. In their view, Gadamer fails to articulate norms for the critique of tradition because of his reliance on the pre-reflective conditions of understanding which lie in tradition and history. They also recognize the central role of language as the ground of the transcendental conditions of historical understanding, as well as the basis of the hermeneutic claim to universality. Critical theorists are themselves forced into finding cases limiting the universality of linguistic understanding in order to establish the norms of justification for the normative validity of critical hermeneutics.

From the point of view of critical theory, philosophical hermeneutics deals only with the pre-scientific, pre-reflective conditions of understanding and, hence, ignores the conditions of reflectively establishing the normative validity of the human sciences' knowledge claims. From the perspective of the critical theorist, the hermeneutic principle of the historicity of understanding and the dependence of pre-reflective understanding on tradition as mediated through language must be supplemented with a transcendental reflection on the intersubjective validity of rationality. Therefore, the failure of philosophical hermeneutics to provide norms for objectivity, as well as

norms for critique, leads Gadamer to fall into either a blind conservatism or into historical, relative idealism. Gadamer's theory must presuppose either a universal historical standpoint or a linguistic idealism concerning the achievements of the past.

In the following chapter, we will examine the critical objections against Gadamer's hermeneutics, particularly the charges concerning the relativist and historicist implications of philosophical hermeneutics. Two aporia of hermeneutics, the question of method and the question of the critical norms of understanding, define these debates. First, we present the objections from the point of view of methodological hermeneutics and then from the point of view of critical theory. Then we conclude with a brief evaluation of counter arguments in defense of philosophical hermeneutics against the charges of relativism.

### **Canons of the Objectivity of Interpretation: Betti**

Betti has raised significant objections against Gadamer's hermeneutics from the standpoint of the hermeneutic tradition extending from Schleiermacher and Dilthey. He defends the thesis that the object of interpretation in the humanities is the meaning intended by the author and the historical agents. The meaning is entrusted to meaningful forms that are the objectification of human thought. These representative forms of the objectification of human thought mark the spontaneity of human experience as the concretization of human spirit in enduring manifestations. The objectivity of these representative forms of human spirit and one's approach to them guarantees the capacity to know the human mind that gave them expression.

Knowledge here is taken primarily according to the model of intuition, as the immediate grasp of what is present, what is given to one's experience. What is enduring in history as the objects of the human sciences are given in language, something present in speech in the form of a text and present in conduct as the actions that are the object of interpretation. For Betti, it is primarily through the objective forms of language and the structure of behavior that the interpreting subject encounters another mind.

For Betti, hermeneutics is a method applied to interpretation in the humanities to guarantee the objectivity of the results. By employing correct methods and interpretive canons, an interpreter is able to reach out beyond his own historical conditions to understand the meaning of a text as intended by the author. The rules and canons guiding the interpretation are universally applicable to any text.

Betti articulates four canons, dealing with the object and the subject of interpretation. The first is the "hermeneutic autonomy of the object." This autonomy means that the object "should be judged in relation to the standards immanent in the original intention."<sup>352</sup> The second canon of interpretation concerns the "coherence of meaning." It is Betti's version of the hermeneutic circle<sup>353</sup> signifying the internal relationship between the particular parts and the whole of a text. These two canons specify the object of understanding as the meaning intended by the author and its internal coherence.

The third canon deals with the "actuality of understanding," which corresponds to Gadamer's concept of fore-understanding. It concerns the fact that the reconstruction of the meaning intended by the author can take place only in terms of the subjectivity of the interpreter. The fourth canon deals with the "meaning-adequacy in understanding." It requires that the interpreter must bring his subjectivity into harmony with the stimulations of his object.<sup>354</sup> Betti recognizes the fact that the interpreter could understand the subject matter in terms of his own experience, but he must make

every effort to control his "prejudices" and subordinate his own knowledge to the meaning of the object conveyed in the text."<sup>355</sup>

From the methodological point of view, according to Betti, Gadamer's theory fails for the following reasons: first, the dialogical approach to interpretation undermines the "autonomy of the object of interpretation" by inserting the subjective fore-understanding into the process of interpretation. This inevitably leads to subjectivism.<sup>356</sup> The second objection pertains to the question of the "objectivity" of interpretation. It concerns the determination of the object of understanding which is the meaning of the text.

According to Betti, Gadamer's emphasis on the role of pre-judgments in interpretation leads him to confound the subjective conditions of understanding with the conditions of objectivity defined by the methodological canons and the rules of hermeneutics. Thus, the consequence of philosophical hermeneutics is to put "into doubt the objectivity of the results of interpretative procedures in all the human sciences."<sup>357</sup> In Betti's view, Gadamer's reliance on the *a priori* historical conditions of understanding leads him to historical relativism. According to Betti, by also including "application" as an integral part of hermeneutic process of understanding, Gadamer succumbs to subjectivism.

Betti criticizes Gadamer's hermeneutics in terms of the question of the method of interpretation. The question is how Gadamer's hermeneutics could adjudicate between correct and incorrect interpretation. Betti writes: "The obvious difficulty with the hermeneutic method proposed by Gadamer seems to lie, for me, in that it enables a substantive agreement between text and reader—i.e., between the apparently easily accessible meaning of a text and the subjective conception of the reader—to be formed without, however, guaranteeing the correctness of understanding."<sup>358</sup>

In Betti's view, turning from the "'existential' foundation of the hermeneutic circle" to the circularity of textual interpretation is an intrusion into the study practices of the humanities.<sup>359</sup> For Betti, Gadamer's ontological concept of understanding endangers objectivity precisely because of Gadamer's emphasis on the subjective conditions of interpretation in the form of fore-understanding and pre-judgments.

Betti admits that every interpreter is bound to a particular point of view. Only as a participant (*Beteiligter*) and an historical being can one understand history.<sup>360</sup> However, the historicity of the interpreter plays a minimal role in understanding. Understanding may depend on the perspective adopted by the interpreter and the same phenomenon may be seen from different points of view, but one should not derive from this situation any conclusion concerning the objectivity of understanding.<sup>361</sup> Insofar as one means by fore-understanding the expertise of the investigator in the subject matter, it is admissible.<sup>362</sup> In Betti's view, Gadamer's emphasis upon the fore-understanding in the constitution of interpretation entails the "loss of objectivity."<sup>363</sup> Betti intends to protect and to demonstrate the epistemological possibility of objectivity in the humanities.<sup>364</sup>

Betti takes Gadamer's concept of the historicity of understanding to be the "historical conditioning of the process of interpretation."<sup>365</sup> For Gadamer, understanding always requires interpretation. Since understanding is an historical process, temporal distance is the only criterion for the objectivity of meaning. Its correlate from the subjective side is the "fore-conception perfection" as the criterion of the objectivity of understanding.<sup>366</sup> In Betti's view, Gadamer is concerned only with the internal coherence and conclusiveness of the desired understanding. This entails that the interpreter can claim a monopoly on truth. Hence, it endangers the apprehension of the meaning as other.<sup>367</sup> Since, for Gadamer, anticipation of meaning includes the "whole of

tradition," Betti argues that Gadamer confuses the possibility concerning the totality with the being-in-itself of historical phenomena.<sup>368</sup>

Betti finds that hermeneutic understanding is for Gadamer guided only by present concerns and applications.<sup>369</sup> The transposition of the meaning of the text into the present is, however, completely out of the question.<sup>370</sup> Objectivity can be attained with the self-effacement of the subject and with a determined overcoming of one's prejudices.<sup>371</sup> If self-knowledge and the responsibility for the future become essential to historical understanding, lack of self-knowledge and meaning-inference abandons one to the relativity of historical conditions.<sup>372</sup>

The other aspect of Betti's critique involves the normative goals of hermeneutics. Betti argues that the hermeneutic problem cannot be restricted to the *quaestio facti*, but must also answer the *quaestio juris*.<sup>373</sup> Gadamer answers that hermeneutics cannot pretend to be methodologically neutral and reminds us that the descriptive aim of hermeneutics is limited to showing the possibility of understanding, not to prescribing necessarily what it ought to be. Still, the question remains whether Gadamer can avoid the problem that pertains to the relation between description and the application of the rules revealed in such a description to the concrete practices of the interpretation of texts. If Gadamer did not also claim that the relations he describes are universal in all understanding, there would no question of a purported normativity in his theory.

Betti seems to be dissatisfied with Gadamer's reply. Richard Palmer summarizes the result of this exchange: "For Betti, Gadamer is lost in a standardless existential subjectivity."<sup>374</sup> The debate between Betti and Gadamer surrounds the issue of what description entails. Is it at all possible to distinguish the meaning of the text in itself from the meaning as one understands it as it appears to a subject in any particular time in history? Although the issue is genuine and unavoidable, one cannot answer this without considering the historical conditioning of hermeneutic understanding in a given tradition.

The Betti-Gadamer dispute has its source in two different conceptions of the relations between understanding and interpretation. For Betti, understanding follows as a consequence of interpretation.<sup>375</sup> Betti maintains that the same prerequisites of knowledge are common to both the natural and the human sciences, although he distinguishes them on the grounds of the respective differences of the objects of these sciences, and on their interpretive procedures.<sup>376</sup>

Betti argues that Gadamer's denial of the requirement of a method of interpretation is a threat to the objectivity and the validity of understanding. In fact there is no possible resolution to their disagreement. For Betti the object of understanding is the meaning of a text as intended by the author. Meaning is fixed permanently by virtue of forms of representation. These forms are formally unchanging and can be receptacles of meanings intended by a human mind.<sup>377</sup> For Betti these meaningful forms represent the objectification of mind, and interpretation is a process in which the meaningful forms are apprehended as the objectification of another mind, a process which reproduces the original creative activity of the author.<sup>378</sup>

Yet how could Betti's own views in the objectivity of interpretation withstand historical change? Does objectivity here mean an understanding of the complete and absolute truth of the text? For Betti the hermeneutic task is also never completed in a perfect enlightenment. But he accepts Dilthey's notion of productive life as the ground of the possibility of the infinite manifestations of meaning. According to Betti, "The meaning contained within texts, monuments, and fragments is constantly reborn through life and is forever transformed in a chain of rebirths."<sup>379</sup> Although the empirical subject depends on the contingent conditions of history, transcendental subjectivity is free from the effects of history.<sup>380</sup>

Betti criticizes Gadamer by arguing that textual meaning is determinate and that it is what the author actually intended. While Betti asserts that an interpretation must fully correspond to the meaning intended by the author, at the same time he commits himself to the view that the task of interpretation is always open and cannot fulfil the required correspondence. He himself fails the test that he requires of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Hirsch's attempt to carry out Betti's distinction between meaning and significance runs into a similar difficulty.<sup>381</sup>

### **Validity of Interpretations: Hirsch**

In his critical review of *Truth and Method*, Hirsch has summarized the most controversial issue concerning Gadamer's hermeneutic theory in this statement: "If we cannot enunciate a principle for distinguishing between an interpretation that is valid and one that is not, there is little point in writing books about texts or about hermeneutic theory."<sup>382</sup> The debate concerning the method and the validity of interpretation, which Ricoeur called "the central aporia of hermeneutics,"<sup>383</sup> is defined by the possibility of reproducing the original meaning of a text. The impasse defined by Betti and Hirsch's objections to philosophical hermeneutics has emerged from differences in their views of the object of interpretation. Betti and Hirsch maintain that reproduction of the author's meaning is the sole object of interpretation, and it is the sole criterion for the validity of understanding. Hirsch's critique of philosophical hermeneutics is based on the doctrine that the meaning intended by the author must be the criterion for the correctness of interpretation.<sup>384</sup>

In Hirsch's view, since Gadamer does not accept the meaning intended by the author as a criterion for the correctness of interpretation, and denies the possibility of adopting the historical categories of another historical period, Gadamer cannot establish the horizon of a text such that the interpreter's own horizon could merge with it. Therefore, the interpreted text can only be a new creation, not the pure expression of the meaning inherent in the author's text.<sup>385</sup> In the absence of a determinate criterion or a regulative norm, Hirsch asserts that Gadamer must acknowledge a "nihilistic" indeterminacy of meaning.<sup>386</sup>

Hirsch distinguishes the meaning of a text from the significance it may have for different interpreters or different historical periods.<sup>387</sup> Even if the text is interpreted as bearing different significance, the meaning is determinate in the sense intended by the author. However, Hirsch asks whether there is a difference between historical distance with a temporal gap between a distant past and present, and a short temporal distance between the subjects communicating in the present. Hirsch reduces the temporal distance to the personal differences of individuals.

For Hirsch, interpretation is possible because reproducibility is a quality of verbal meaning.<sup>388</sup> Hirsch suggests that reproducibility is the reason that verbal meaning is also a shared meaning.<sup>389</sup> Hirsch recognizes that the meaning intended by the author must be determined, so that it can be reproduced as well as remain comprehensible and shared by others; otherwise the meaning intended by the author would be only a mental property. He distinguishes meaning into willed types and shared types.<sup>390</sup> The reproduction of determinate or willed meaning is possible through the mediation of the shared meaning. Hirsch, without acknowledging it, construes the circular relation between reproduction and shareability of meaning in a way that resembles the circularity of the individual belonging to history and the historicity of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Hirsch, too, cannot escape from the mediation of history in interpretation. In order to construe the intended meaning, the interpreter must start from the shared meaning; then he must determine

the willed meaning as the meaning chosen from a particular sphere of shared meaning. But the question that arises is how to establish the textual meaning as determinate if the willed meaning has been chosen by the author from among the possible range of shared meanings. This brings us back to a central problem underlying historicism: In order to understand a text the whole context to which the text belongs must be known.

Since Hirsch recognizes that this task as impossible, he realizes that the "fusion of horizons" is not based on the differences of individuality between the author and the interpreter.

Hirsch evaluates Gadamer's work as oscillating between skepticism and nihilism because of the central role of the doctrine of the historicity of understanding. Since Gadamer denies the author's prerogative for determining the meaning of the text, he must appeal to tradition and history for the determination of the meaning. For Hirsch, Gadamer tries to save the validity of interpretation from the "ruins of historicity"<sup>391</sup> by appealing to tradition, effective history and the fusion of horizons.

According to Hirsch, the principle of historicity is introduced in order to explain the differences between the meaning of a text in the present and the past. A distinction between the text's meaning and its significance would explicate this situation better. Without this distinction, Gadamer cannot rescue interpretation from the "indeterminacy of textual meaning." This leads Gadamer to the untenable position of "hermeneutic nihilism."<sup>392</sup>

Hirsch understands the concept of historicity in the sense of the historical determination of the subject. The historicity of understanding expresses the notion that the meaning of a text from the past is inscrutable to us except from the present perspective. In fact, the sense Hirsch attributes to historicity is quite contrary to what it means for Gadamer. According to Hirsch, the doctrine of historicity is introduced by Gadamer for the purpose of explaining why a text produced in the past does not have the same meaning in the present. Therefore, Hirsch infers, understanding is limited to the meaning of texts in the present. After all, in this sense, every expression becomes temporally distant from the present moment as soon as it is uttered.

In his later work, *Aims of Interpretation*, Hirsch attempts to evaluate the implication of historicism in Gadamer's theory from another angle. Hirsch recognizes that Gadamer makes an attempt to deal with the problems of historicism. But Hirsch claims that Gadamer entertains the notion that the past is inscrutable. We must either reconstruct the past in its own perspective or interpret it from our own perspective. Since Gadamer denies the possibility of reconstructing the past, he chooses to specify the conditions of "revitalizing" the past from the perspective of the present. By presenting both the doctrine of historicism and Gadamer's theory of the historicity of understanding in this way, Hirsch not only inverts historicism but also denies the central principle of Gadamer's approach, that not historical alienation but rather familiarity is the basis of a historical hermeneutics. The principle of the historicity of understanding in Gadamer's theory is suggested to account for the individual's relation to historical continuity.

Hirsch is also of the opinion that Gadamer's hermeneutics entails another fallacy of historicism: that the past has its own homogeneous horizon.<sup>393</sup> For Hirsch, from Gadamer's concept of a homogeneous past, Gadamer effects a transformation into the notion of a homogenous present as tradition. Therefore, according to Hirsch, Gadamer recommends "that we revitalize the inscrutable texts of the past by distorting them to our own perspective."<sup>394</sup> Hirsch asserts that as a "skeptical counter-proposal" on the premises of historicism, Gadamer argues that "it is far better to distort the past in an interesting and relevant way than to distort and deaden it under the pretense of historical reconstruction."<sup>395</sup> Therefore, both the historical reconstructionist and "Gadamer in his historical vitalization are extreme historicists and perspectivists."<sup>396</sup>

From the standpoint of the premise of historicism that the past has its own homogeneous horizon, it might be quite reasonable to describe an historical period as sharing a certain cultural perspective.<sup>397</sup> According to Hirsch, in order to deal with this fallacy, Gadamer "assumes a present that has its own peculiar deadness."<sup>398</sup> The notion that the present has its own homogeneity is just as much an artificial construction as are reconstructions of the past.<sup>399</sup> Hirsch argues that: "The distance between one culture and another may not in every instance be bridgeable, but the same is true between persons who inhabit the same culture. Cultural perspectivism . . . forgets that the distance between one historical period and another is a very small step in comparison to the huge metaphysical gap we leap to understand the perspective of another person in any time or place."<sup>400</sup> It must be noted that Hirsch reduces Gadamer's concept of the temporal distance to the differences between individuals, and thus returns to the metaphysics of individuality of the sort that is criticized by Gadamer in the context of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics.

Hirsch argues that a theory of interpretation should not mix the descriptive and normative elements of interpretation; rather these two should be disengaged. The descriptive aspect of hermeneutics deals with the nature of interpretation, while the normative element concerns the goal of interpretation. The goals of interpretation are, according to Hirsch, determined by "value-preferences."<sup>401</sup> Since there are value preferences involved in interpretations, these are not arbitrarily chosen, but impose ethical choices.<sup>402</sup> But deriving the normative from the descriptive aspect of interpretation is circular and tautological.<sup>403</sup> According Hirsch: "Interpretative norms are not really derived from theory, and that theory codifies ex post facto the interpretive norms we already prefer."<sup>404</sup> Hirsch reminds us that Schleiermacher upholds the universal canon of interpretation against anachronistic interpretation: "Everything in a given text which requires fuller interpretation must be explained and determined exclusively from the linguistic domain common to the author and his original public."<sup>405</sup>

Hirsch seems unconvinced by his own argument concerning the "fusion of horizons," since he comes back to the issue in terms of perspectivism in *The Aims of Interpretation*. He describes perspectivism in terms of the Kantian concept of transcendental and empirical subject. "Perspectivism is a version of the Kantian insight that man's experience is pre-accommodated to his categories of experience."<sup>406</sup> Dilthey has transferred these categories from science to the historical sphere of experience. Dilthey called these categories "life-categories," that establish the possibility of historical experience. For Hirsch, these cultural categories are not universal in the same way that the categories of scientific experience are universal, but change and differ according to changing cultures. Therefore, verbal meaning is completely relative to historical subjectivity. "Cultural subjectivity is not innate, but acquired; it derives from a potential, present in every man, that is capable of sponsoring an indefinite number of culturally conditioned categorical systems."<sup>407</sup> Hirsch revives the dictum of historicism by claiming that "every interpretation of verbal meaning is constituted by the categories through which it is constructed."<sup>408</sup> So "verbal meaning can exist *only* by virtue of the perspective which gives it its existence."<sup>409</sup>

Hirsch argues that the interpreter can and must adopt the categories within which the author produced the meaning intended in his text. This is possible because man has the ability to adopt different cultural categories in "reflective thought."<sup>410</sup> An interpretation that is complete could not be interpretation, but a kind of absolute knowledge which is not possible given the finitude and the temporality of human understanding. Hirsch recognizes that a concept of complete hermeneutic understanding is self-contradictory. He offers an alternative formulation of the hermeneutic circle, which he calls "corrigible schemata."<sup>411</sup>

Hirsch's conception of the hermeneutic circle as "corrigible schemata" is almost similar to fore-understanding and also a similar concept of the fusion of horizons. In the context of hermeneutic understanding, corrigible schemata signify the notion that knowledge already acquired is not a mass of accumulated information, but rather consists of organized patterns that we make use of in the acquisition of new knowledge. These schemata play a role in assimilating new experiences into already acquired knowledge. They are not fixed, but open to change, and, hence, corrigible.

However, Hirsch finds the concept of pre-understanding that is adapted from Heidegger's existential hermeneutics and applied to textual interpretation by Gadamer as radically unalterable. "Unlike one's unalterable and inescapable pre-understanding in Heidegger's account of the hermeneutic circle, a schema can be radically altered and corrected."<sup>412</sup> Gadamer explains, however, that fore-understandings are always "worked out," modified in respect to the "things themselves," which is the "first, last and constant task" of understanding.<sup>413</sup> Gadamer states that "the working out of this fore-projection" is constantly "revised in terms of what emerges." This constant process of new projection constitutes the "movement of understanding and interpretation."<sup>414</sup>

Yet, Hirsch's concept of schema remains primarily psycho-linguistic. He only transforms this basic cognitive concept into hermeneutics and claims that the "most elementary aspects of verbal interpretation follow the same ground rules as our perception and interpretation of the world." It also applies to speech formation. "Our semantic intentions seem to be matched against preformed schemata which we either use as previously formed, or, later, to better match our semantic intentions."<sup>415</sup> With these, Hirsch realizes that he comes very close to Gadamer's position and acknowledges this convergence.<sup>416</sup>

Two common threads runs through the critiques of Betti and Hirsch. They believe that there can be only one invariable meaning for a text, and this meaning is determined by its author and cannot be changed even if a correct understanding of this meaning cannot be accomplished in the present. The task of the interpreter is to bring this meaning into the open by employing specific methods and canons of interpretation. The validity of understanding can be established on the basis of whether the interpreter uses proper or improper methods in interpretation or evaluates the relevant evidence concerning the conditions in which the text came into being.

Their objections concern the fact that Gadamer's hermeneutics fails to take into account the fact that the text might not fulfil the pre-understanding, but still remains meaningful in its unity and completeness. What would happen when the expected unity and completeness does not yield to understanding, and the supposedly established parity between the fore-understanding and the meaning of the text breaks down? These critics believe that Gadamer's theory entails that when a disparity arises between the fore-conception of completeness and the texts itself, parity of understanding must always be restored in favor of the interpreter's fore-conceptions, because Gadamer does not specify any criterion of the correctness of an interpretation. For Betti and Hirsch, a text has its own autonomy as the unique expression of another mind. The disagreement between Betti, Hirsch and Gadamer cannot be reconciled, because they all adhere to quite opposite metaphysical presumptions concerning the subject and the object of interpretation.

### **Critical Norms and Hermeneutics: Habermas**

In addition to the criticisms of "Gadamer's alleged subjectivism and relativism"<sup>417</sup> made from the point of view of methodological hermeneutics, Habermas accused Gadamer of

"dogmatism" and relative idealism.<sup>418</sup> Habermas's objections against philosophical hermeneutics focus on three points: the relation between rationality and tradition, the problem of the methodology of the social sciences, and the universality of hermeneutic experience based on language. Habermas draws on philosophical hermeneutics for his own project of developing a critical theory of the social sciences.

Habermas values hermeneutic theory, inasmuch as it reveals the historical conditions of all knowledge and the possibility for developing a critique of the especially positivist theory of sciences. In addition, Gadamer's emphasis on language as the medium of the continuity of tradition, as well as the intersubjective ground of understanding in which both natural and the social sciences operate, furnishes a means to access the objects of the social sciences. The historically effected consciousness that requires an awareness of prejudices and controls our fore-understandings is more positive than the naive objectivism that falsifies the foundation of the social sciences.

However, Habermas's interest in hermeneutics is guided by his own project of developing a critical theory of the social sciences. He places hermeneutics within this project for a critical theory, which is an attempt to establish the ideal conditions of an unconstrained communication.<sup>419</sup> As a practical theory, critical hermeneutics "is designed to guarantee, within cultural traditions, the possible action-orienting, self-understanding of individuals and groups, as well as reciprocal understanding between different individuals and groups. It makes possible the form of unconstrained consensus and the type of open intersubjectivity on which communicative action depends."<sup>420</sup>

Habermas's critical theory requires a quasi-objective methodological reflection capable of emancipating reason from the domination and authority of tradition to establish the normative ideal of a neutral, prejudice-free communicative situation. Critical theory, then, is an attempt to transcend the so-called false consciousness of tradition and ideology, in order to attain conditions of objectivity and action. This cannot be achieved insofar as philosophical hermeneutics remains bound to the universality of the linguistic nature of understanding, to tradition as the pre-reflective condition of understanding, or to the concrete universality of practical reason. As such, philosophical hermeneutics remains an obstruction for the critical theorists' activist program of emancipation through reflection upon the limitations of language and history. Thus, Habermas criticizes hermeneutics' claim to universality and its implication for a philosophy of history.<sup>421</sup>

Habermas argues that tradition, for Gadamer, is the only ground for the validity of prejudices.<sup>422</sup> According to Habermas, philosophical hermeneutics fails to provide a critical norm as a requirement for overcoming the uncritical acceptance of tradition. The emphasis on tradition as a continuous process which cannot be objectified as a whole covers over the fact that tradition is also the ground for the methodological activity of the social sciences.

Does Gadamer's hermeneutics point beyond the constraints of tradition, as pre-reflective conditions for understanding through reflection, to an emancipation from these constraints; or is this critical reflection itself bound to the conditions of hermeneutics? In other words, is it possible to take a reflective stand against tradition, to reproduce the original conditions in which the authority and power structures may be discovered, so that tradition may be assimilated and transformed into more objective forms in hermeneutic experience? In asserting the fusion of living tradition and hermeneutic research in a single point—understanding as part the process of tradition—Gadamer shifts the balance between authority and reason in favor of the former.

Habermas asserts that the antithesis between reason and tradition cannot be overcome by Gadamer's sole emphasis upon cultural, linguistically constituted tradition. Habermas asserts that

in addition to cultural tradition, the system of labor and domination, as well as language, are to be recognized as being constitutive of the "*objective context in terms of which alone social action can be understood.*"<sup>423</sup>

For Habermas, the relationship between language, labor and power is dialectical; any change in labor and power relations changes the categories of intersubjective communication. Thus, not only cultural tradition but also the social world as whole, consisting of labor and power relations, is characterized as sign-controlled and stimulus-produced. A one-sided emphasis on the linguistic constitution of understanding leads to a linguistic idealism; if one fails to consider the cultural tradition as part of a social process, then one relativizes it as labor, system and authority.<sup>424</sup> Accordingly, Habermas reasons, Gadamer only recognizes the change within the self-understanding of the subject in the latter's encounter with tradition and not as a change in tradition itself. Hence, Habermas charges that it is incumbent upon Gadamer to maintain that hermeneutic reflection, in appropriating tradition, changes it, or else Gadamer can be accused of setting hermeneutic experience as something absolute and always bound to the stability of tradition.

The question involves whether Gadamer's insight concerning the dependence of understanding in its prejudgment structure (*Vorurteilstruktur*) upon tradition serves for the justification of prejudices, as such. Is the interpreter able to escape the constraints of the prejudices embedded in tradition and language? According to Habermas, philosophical hermeneutics is one-sided in the sense that it does not acknowledge the possibility that the outcome of a present understanding could be better than the traditional understanding, or it could be independent of the past as opposed to being "subordinate to a tradition."<sup>425</sup> Gadamer does not distinguish the truth claim of the text from the rational examination of this claim.<sup>426</sup> In addition, Gadamer does not recognize the ability of historical consciousness to develop a criterion for the critique of tradition, independent of the effects of history. Habermas claims that the thesis of the historicity of understanding presupposes a transition to "the universal history in which these conditions are constituted."<sup>427</sup>

Habermas wants to supplement hermeneutic understanding with the objective method of the sciences. He is concerned with the epistemological implications of hermeneutic theory. For Habermas, Gadamer's critique of the absolutist methodology of the sciences is effective in all sciences or not at all.<sup>428</sup> Thus, Habermas takes an attitude against the ontological claims of philosophical hermeneutics in favor of method and procedures, and external constraints of rationality as opposed to Gadamer's position concerning the internal limitations of rationality.

In Gadamer's reluctance to propose a method of the social sciences, Habermas finds evidence that Gadamer "involuntarily makes concessions to the positivist devaluation of hermeneutics."<sup>429</sup> Gadamer's assertion that the hermeneutic experience "transcends the domain of [the control of] scientific method"<sup>430</sup> leads to this conclusion. Gadamer creates an abstract and unnecessary opposition between truth and method, hermeneutic experience and methodological requirement.<sup>431</sup>

Habermas contrasts scientific explanation with hermeneutic understanding, on the basis of the differences between the formal language of science and the everyday language of dialogical hermeneutics. Ordinary language allows the expression of individual phenomena, no matter how ineffable they may be, while scientific language requires the confirmation of the expression of individual experiences, according to a pre-established universality of theory.<sup>432</sup>

For Habermas, the technical language of the natural sciences and the everyday language of communication are different in that while the former is monological, the latter is dialogical. The fact that the activity of the sciences depends on natural language cannot warrant the claim that the

linguisticity of understanding is universal. In scientific communication "linguistic expressions appear in an absolute form that makes their content independent of the situation of communication."<sup>433</sup> The hermeneutic claim to universality is challenged by the existence of non-linguistic or pre-linguistic situations of understanding. Thus, hermeneutics discovers its own limitations: "Hermeneutic consciousness does . . . emerge from a reflection upon our own movement *within* natural language, whereas the interpretation of science on behalf of the life-world has to achieve a mediation *between* natural language *and* monological language systems. This process of translation transcends the limitations of a rhetorical-hermeneutic art."<sup>434</sup>

Habermas argues against the claim concerning the universality of hermeneutics by showing its limits in the cases of pre-linguistic understanding. From this, Habermas draws the conclusion that hermeneutic theory deals with the pre-reflective conditions of understanding, rather than with the validity and legitimization of the results of this understanding.

For Habermas, language alone cannot provide the objective structure for social action. He states that the "linguistic infrastructure of a society is a moment in a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraint of reality."<sup>435</sup> These constraints are natural as well as social. For Habermas, social and natural reality precede language. These two categories of constraints, Habermas claims, are not only "behind the back of language", but they also "affect the grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world."<sup>436</sup> The technological, economical and political factors always distort language and hence limit the possibility of objectivity in ordinary communication and interpretation.

In Habermas's view, Gadamer ignores the power relations in social life, power relations that may affect individual as well as social consciousness by repressing and converting what is considered to be an unacceptable expression or behavior under a given circumstance. The model provided by psychoanalysis may serve hermeneutics as an example of how to unveil the coercion involved in ordinary language. In the patient-therapist relation, the doctor does not take the patient's expressions in their everyday sense but by distancing and incorporating them to his theory, he reconstructs the pre-linguistic distortions in the patient's consciousness.<sup>437</sup> For Habermas, this is one of those pre-linguistic understandings that does not require dependence on the hermeneutics of everyday understanding but can bypass it. Therefore, against the naive trust implicit in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Habermas proposes a "depth-hermeneutics"<sup>438</sup> to carry out a critique of ideology.

Critical hermeneutics fills out the space left behind by philosophical hermeneutics by turning to a meta-hermeneutic reflection on linguistic communication. Critical reflection promotes emancipation by uncovering the distortions and false-consciousness built into ordinary understanding. According to Habermas, Gadamer fails to recognize the role of reflection and simply ends up accepting the piecemeal result of reflection, leading him only to a "relative idealism."<sup>439</sup> Philosophical hermeneutics leads only to reducing action to the interpretative achievements of the subject, and interaction to conversation.<sup>440</sup> The difference between Gadamer and Habermas concerns the question of whether intersubjective communication is based on the already tacit agreement between subjects or is rather the result of communication. It is also a question of whether historical understanding is possible on the basis of the past or only according to a future goal. Habermas takes his starting point from the presupposition that alienation and not agreement is at the base of historical life. Critical theory aims at establishing the transcendental norms for the validity of communicative action.<sup>441</sup>

The idea that the methodological principles of a theory of interpretation must also have a normative role is shared by all critics of Gadamer's hermeneutics. For instance, the canon of

appropriateness of understanding makes the meaning intended by the author into the normative criterion of objectivity and validity of interpretation. Critical theory makes the same demand: any principle guiding understanding must have a normative value.

Habermas holds that his regulative principle of rational discourse is only an anticipation and its final justification, and cannot be based on experience. Thus, although the norm of critique should be empirically tested in order to serve as the standard of rationality and truth, it is only a formal anticipation. Yet this can serve as a counterfactual criterion of correctness for actual practices and be regarded as normatively valid for the communicative practices in the life-world.<sup>442</sup> He grounds the critical social sciences on the universal validity claims implicit in communicative action. Yet, since they are relative to a "highly differentiated world view," it is not easy to derive from these "a universal core."<sup>443</sup>

Habermas's critique of philosophical hermeneutics is based on a cross section of positions held by the theorists of a methodological hermeneutics. Still, he agrees with Gadamer that the reproduction of meaning is not the ultimate aim. For Habermas, tradition is not only the ground of knowledge, but it is also the subject of this knowledge and reflection. Habermas agrees with Betti that tradition and authority belong to the pre-reflective level and cannot be suspended without methodological reflection.

Against this, Gadamer argues that critical reflection itself is limited by the constraints of language and the finitude of our existence. The question involves whether the interpreter is able or unable to escape the constraints of power and authority embedded in tradition and language. Habermas emphasizes the epistemological advantages of hermeneutic theory over its ontological claims. In Habermas's view, the hermeneutic circle has a pragmatic application.<sup>444</sup> The hermeneutic circle, for Habermas, forms the basis for developing new methods for social sciences. Habermas' concern with hermeneutics is epistemological, whereas Gadamer emphasizes the ontological aspect of hermeneutics. Habermas's critique of Gadamer shows his attitude in favor of method and procedures and external constraints of rationality as opposed to Gadamer's position concerning the internal limitations of rationality.

The dispute between Gadamer and Habermas has brought out the second impasse of hermeneutics concerning the role of language, tradition and the norms of understanding. Habermas advocates a more ambitious task for hermeneutics than that envisioned by Gadamer. Apel recognizes the difficulty involved in Habermas's project of the transition from linguistic communication to practical action. Apel thus shifts critical theory's perspective on philosophical hermeneutics. He asserts that "it is far more imperative to take recourse to the consistently unchallengeable presuppositions of discourse *qua* argumentation, which are upheld even by the skeptic and relativist as long as he *argues*, and to 'reconstruct' these as the transcendental-pragmatic ultimate presuppositions of every empirical hermeneutic reconstruction of social and spiritual history."<sup>445</sup>

Apel himself envisions a transcendental grounding of the normative validity of knowledge. His claim that Kant's transcendental conditions of knowledge should be transformed into a project of the transcendental validity of knowledge is a stronger argument against Gadamer than that raised by Habermas. We will next examine Apel's critique of philosophical hermeneutics in this respect.

### **Transcendental Conditions of Critique: Apel**

On almost all major points Apel and Habermas hold parallel views that intersect and supplement each other. Instead of repeating those objections of Apel which are similar to those of Habermas, I will point to certain issues that Apel emphasizes in his critique. Apel takes a critical position against hermeneutics from the point of view of the transcendental ideal of communicative agreement, from the point of view of the logic of the sciences, and, finally, from a practical-pragmatic orientation which he shares with Habermas.

Apel's own theory differs from Habermas's in that Apel bases his project on the Kantian concept of the transcendental conditions of knowledge. Apel projects a transformative transcendental philosophy in the sense of an anthropological epistemology and later a transcendental philosophical hermeneutics<sup>446</sup> based on the *a priori* status of language as the medium of the disclosure of the world. Language acts as the precondition of facts and events.<sup>447</sup> The transcendentality of language consists in "providing the necessary preconditions for perceiving the objects of knowledge and hermeneutically allowing meaning to appear."<sup>448</sup> Transcendental hermeneutics concerns the conditions of intersubjective validity claims.<sup>449</sup> These validity claims cannot be accounted for by recourse to the contingent *a priori* of the life world or to pre-understanding as a quasi-ontological concept of "meaning-event" or "truth-event."<sup>450</sup> It must appeal to the complementary non-contingent *a priori* of the ideal, universally valid presuppositions of arguments, that is, the argumentative discourse as constituting an ideal, unlimited communication community that is always counter-factually presupposed.<sup>451</sup>

According to Apel, Gadamer's hermeneutics provides an alternative to historicism from the point of view of the Heideggerian hermeneutics of existence. But existential hermeneutics can hardly provide a foundation for understanding meaning in the human sciences.<sup>452</sup> Apel finds the strength of philosophical hermeneutics in the critique of the objectivistic methodological ideal of historicism, but he also entertains the notion that hermeneutic abstraction from the methodological problems of the social sciences involves an abstraction from the problem of truth.<sup>453</sup>

It is true that the historicity of understanding is a condition of knowledge in the human sciences, and the knowing subject is not isolated from its involvement in the tradition. Tradition presents the interpreting subject with his own possibilities of being.<sup>454</sup> By denying the determination of understanding in tradition, the social scientist fails to achieve a de-dogmatization of the understanding of meaning and, thus, contributes to a hidden ideologization by repressing the unavoidable determination of his understanding by its historical engagement.<sup>455</sup>

Apel makes a distinction between pre-reflexive engagement and a reflexive distancing. In the case of philological hermeneutics a methodological abstraction is already suggested in the pre-scientific realm by the interpreter's situation. He is not expected to mediate meaning in the context of practical situations in life.<sup>456</sup>

Apel believes that for Gadamer application is the only criterion for determining the meaning.<sup>457</sup> In the first place, Apel presupposes philosophical hermeneutics as surrendering the "regulative ideal of a progress in understanding," in the sense of the Kantian concept of a moral "*practical progress*."<sup>458</sup> The example set by Kant's moral philosophy introduces a notion of progress that involves a normative value. Despite the fact that empirical conditions of life have a limiting effect on our efforts, in principle, it is possible to hold a "morally grounded idea of a *practical progress*."<sup>459</sup>

Apel's argument that normativity is already implicit in the concept of a moral duty is itself abstract. For Gadamer, when the question is raised in concrete cases demanding moral action, the possibility of moral action and the normative rule guiding actions are always co-determined in the practical situation. These normative rules cannot be postulated in abstraction. Gadamer at least

accepts an ethics of *phronesis*, as a communally accepted practical ethics, but without a claim to universal validity or to serving the progress of humanity.<sup>460</sup> According to Apel, however, without a normative-regulative ideal, this synthesis of an empirical morality and the establishment of it in tradition as a conservative notion cannot be synthesized with a view of seeing the conditions and the validity of understanding in the historicity of understanding, i.e., the context-dependency of understanding.<sup>461</sup>

Apel agrees with Betti that interpretation and application are different. The historical study of legal rules requires that the interpreter must presuppose a possible application; the normative interpretation of a judge, on the contrary, presupposes an actual application. These two cannot be the same.<sup>462</sup>

Apel also agrees with the view of traditional hermeneutics, contrary to Gadamer, that the intention of an author is "in fact a crucial criterion for the understanding of meaning in any kind of communication."<sup>463</sup> Thus, the hermeneutic circle serves as the "basic model of all concrete, situation dependent understanding." But this can, itself, be expressed with a universal validity. But the question, for Apel as for Habermas, is how one enters the circle in the case of the critical social sciences, i.e., how one can accept both the historical conditions of knowledge and the claim to universal validity. Apel refers to the first as concrete hermeneutics and the second as transcendental hermeneutics. These are presented as irreconcilable alternatives between which a choice must be made. This presents itself as the question of methodically entering the circle in the right way, as formulated by Heidegger. This is resolved in the hermeneutic claim that any empirical or concrete hermeneutic task is always incomplete, even incompletable, which can be understandable only as long as we hold that truth is the truth of the subject matter we are studying and eliminate the false idea that methodological clarifications get us closer to Apel's anthropological criteria of "universal consensual truth."<sup>464</sup> Truth is a quality of being. The incompleteness of our knowledge is the result of finitude, not the result of historical distance from a future state of consensus concerning truth. Thus, in Apel's view, Gadamer disregards the question of the standards and rules for differentiating between the meaning of truth and the truth of meaning. Apel moves toward overcoming of relativism and historicism entailed by hermeneutic theory by means of his own version of a transcendental hermeneutics.

Apel radicalizes Gadamer's position so that his critique would be seen as appropriate. According to Apel, Gadamer follows Heidegger's temporal interpretation of the being of humans in the sense of the temporal determination of understanding in tradition as a "fusion of horizon."<sup>465</sup> Apel finds that the radicality of Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics "lies in the supposition that the meaning of words or sentences is not timeless in a strict sense, but rather subject to the 'history of being' as history of the linguistic disclosure of the meaning of being."<sup>466</sup> Apel also claims that because of Gadamer's "philosophy of being there is no normative orientation-point for the constitution of meaning and truth beyond time."<sup>467</sup> Apel agrees with Hirsch that Gadamer represents a radical version of historicism and hermeneutic skepticism.<sup>468</sup>

Apel holds that the principle of historicity, considered as the possibility for and condition of objectivity and knowledge cannot serve Gadamer's desired goal to overcome the difficulties of historicism. Rather it fosters historicism.<sup>469</sup> Gadamer's solution for this is found in his appeal to Hegel's "absolute mediation of history and truth," a position from the standpoint of *reflection* that is "not to be overturned."<sup>470</sup>

Apel claims that Gadamer, under the influence of the dogmatism of a metaphysical position, does not allow his own claims into the process of validation. He argues that Gadamer resigns from the position of holding it necessary or even possible to argue for a "paradox free solution to the

historicity problem."<sup>471</sup> By simply demonstrating that reflective and speculative arguments against the validity of a hermeneutic claim to universality are merely formal and self-refuting, Gadamer tries to prove the validity of his own position.<sup>472</sup> Apel argues that by considering formal arguments as not addressing the real problem, one still cannot escape the necessity for an argumentative reason.<sup>473</sup>

In Apel's view, Gadamer's position amounts to the belief that the refutation of relativism-historicism cannot be held without self-contradiction. According to Apel, Gadamer fails to develop a counter argument against relativism because he trusts in the success of certain paradigmatic cases. Apel argues that Gadamer takes his models from the speculative-dialectical victory over the "philosophy of reflection" in the manner of Hegel or from the formal reflective philosophy of a neo-Kantianism that does not take into account the historicity of understanding.<sup>474</sup>

He argues that Gadamer easily capitulates to non-argumentative reason. Against the success of relativism and skepticism, we cannot simply claim that they are only negative and self-contradictory. For Apel these are not the only alternatives to "reflective philosophy."<sup>475</sup> In effect, Gadamer offers us only three alternatives: a) appeal to the standpoint of the end of history or absolute knowledge; b) a formal reflection without taking historicity into account, or c) understanding reason as a contingent product of history and, thereby, giving up the claims of philosophical arguments to universal validity.<sup>476</sup> From this point of view Gadamer "makes a virtue of the aporia of *historicism-relativism*."<sup>477</sup> Only a normative hermeneutics can do justice to the internal relationship between hermeneutics and practical philosophy.<sup>478</sup>

According to Apel, instead of "seeking a mediation 'ex-post-reflection,'" Gadamer's theory remains under the presuppositions of *a priori* structures of facticity and historicity.<sup>479</sup> Apel asserts that philosophical hermeneutics "culminates in the idea of a historical process or respectively happening of truth and meaning." Hermeneutic understanding must be supplemented with a normative turn which would substitute Gadamer's view of "understanding differently" with the "idea of progressively deeper understanding."<sup>480</sup>

Apel claims that the demand for consciousness of historicity by the interpreter is a demand that can only be understood as normatively relevant. If one denies this ontological embeddedness, Gadamer's theory comes very close to an objectivistic description of the behaviorist type, such as Wittgenstein's language-game theory. Without postulating a methodologically relevant normative goal, we cannot explicate historicity as an ontological principle. Interpretative understanding in the historical sciences is, unlike natural scientific understanding, not merely subject to natural laws, but must be developed by ourselves in a responsible manner.<sup>481</sup> According to Apel, philosophical hermeneutics surrenders "normative hermeneutics to a relative historicism."<sup>482</sup>

Apel contrasts Gadamer's position on the mediation of tradition with a "progressive, methodological approximation to the ideal of objectivity."<sup>483</sup> For Apel, the sciences increase our objective knowledge of the objects that are referred to in communicative speech. In this case, a "regulative idea" of a "possible progress in hermeneutic truth" should be intertwined with the historicity of understanding.<sup>484</sup> Such a regulative idea is the postulate that a final consensus of an indefinite community of interpretation and its application to social praxis is possible "in the long run."<sup>485</sup> Like Habermas, Apel emphasizes a future possibility against Gadamer's reliance emphasis on the factual and concrete relation between understanding and tradition.

The only agreement between critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics is the existence of limitations on the earlier concept of objectivity, not only in the human sciences but also in the natural sciences. According to Apel, Gadamer's hermeneutics has the advantage of revealing the "objectivistic methodological ideal of historicism." But Apel asserts that Gadamer goes too far in

disputing the plausibility of methodological hermeneutics' abstraction from the question of truth.<sup>486</sup> However, it is only on the basis of Apel's anthropological concept of truth that such a criticism can be validly made of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

It is not consensual truth but ontological truth that is the implicit ideal under which the question of the relationship between the hermeneutic methods of the human sciences and the mathematical natural sciences and the quasi-nomological social sciences can be resolved.

It cannot be conceived from the critical perspective, based on logical positivism, in which hermeneutic methods are ranked with scientific methods of formal certainty and empirical certainty, or by applying hermeneutics to the methodology of all sciences. Apel's critique is based on his assumption that Gadamer's approach to the hermeneutic sciences take into account "only the side of subject."<sup>487</sup> Description of the knowledge from the point of view of the subject lies also at the foundations of efforts to defend hermeneutic theory as a doctrine of perspectivism. We will next briefly discuss the interpretations of Gadamer's theory in terms of perspectivism.

## Hermeneutics and Perspectivism

On the basis of the belief that there is no criterion of truth in Gadamer's hermeneutics, some commentators have tried to defend his theory from the point of view of perspectivism. We choose Jean Grondin's and David Hoy's writings on the subject as examples to represent this point of view.

Grondin offers an interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics that denies the possibility of relativism in hermeneutic understanding. His understanding is based not on the grounds of the existence of a definite criterion of truth, but on the claim that relativism is itself indefensible.

For Grondin, the concept of the "enlightening of experience of the subject-matter" is a "criterion for interpretation."<sup>488</sup> According to Grondin, the "true is the immediate enlightening. The experience of truth has nothing to do with the application of a criterion."<sup>489</sup> Having argued that the lack of a criterion does not lead to an unchecked relativism, Grondin considers the notion of "subject matter," the *Sache*, as the criterion for distinguishing correct and incorrect understanding.<sup>490</sup> But considering the fact that "the thing-in-itself" cannot be discovered, the subject matter becomes the measure of correct understanding, only in the sense of the "subject-matter as it appears to us (*die Sache wie sie sich uns zeigt*)."<sup>491</sup> He then argues that hermeneutic understanding is necessarily and always only probable.<sup>492</sup> Due to the essential human condition, we are enclosed within the possibility of an enlightening evidence only, not that of a timeless point of view.

David Hoy also defends Gadamer against charges of "subjective relativism," and, thus, reminds us of the importance of the "subject matter," the *Sache*, for determining the correctness of interpretation. Hoy, nevertheless, concludes with a note that philosophical hermeneutics proposes a certain kind of perspectivism or contextualism.<sup>493</sup> "The only judge of the appropriateness of the context of one interpretation may be another interpretation, and perhaps 'truth' in these matters *is* closely connected to (although it can never entirely be reduced to) 'success'—that is, intersubjective agreement on the usefulness of the interpretations and their assumptions."<sup>494</sup>

Implications of perspectivism in Gadamer's theory might be considered in terms of textual interpretation. How a correct interpretation of a text can be distinguished from an incorrect interpretation may depend on the evaluations of perspectives within which these interpretations approach the text. However, Gadamer strongly objected to limiting philosophical hermeneutics to

the particular issues of textual interpretation. Then the question arises concerning the philosophical justification of his theory in terms of its own temporal conditionedness.

Rüdiger Bubner approaches philosophical hermeneutics in terms of a philosophical theory reflecting on its own historical perspective. Bubner observes that Gadamer's concept of historicity requires him to adhere to a certain idea of history, but, because of the Hegelian implications of such a philosophy of history, it seems undesirable, and Gadamer avoids it. Therefore, according to Bubner, this question cannot be avoided by simply introducing historicity as signifying the *a priori* conditions of understanding. Instead, we must take historicity as the reaction of philosophy to "its time." For Bubner, "to say this is to say nothing specifically about philosophy as long as this connection with time does not make it possible to recognize any feature which is relevant for the philosophical task of rational understanding. But it is *this* which must be meant by the hermeneutic category of historicity."<sup>495</sup>

As Bubner points out, in contemporary debates three senses of hermeneutics are thrown together. Hermeneutics in the sense of a contingent process of coming to an understanding; hermeneutics in the sense of rules of interpretation; and finally hermeneutics in the sense of a philosophical theory of understanding. The question arises where Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics stands within these distinctions. Although these different uses of hermeneutics are justified, they are not totally unrelated to each other, but rather converge in a center. According to Bubner, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* represents an attempt to broaden the scope of the experience of a successful understanding to a universal theory of hermeneutics.

Here we should note Bubner's comments concerning the role of critique and reflection. Bubner suggests that critical and hermeneutic reflections are complementary and presuppose each other. Bubner is one of those few authors who recognize that the question of the hermeneutic claim to universality and the possibility of a critique of tradition and ideologically conditioned communication practices have their sources in two different attitudes toward the role of reflection. Thus, the debate between Gadamer and Habermas focuses on a mutual misunderstanding concerning the limits and functions of reflection in hermeneutic understanding.

By formulating the central theme of Gadamer's hermeneutics in this way, Bubner indicates the existence of two unsatisfying results of hermeneutics: the fact that the critical aspect is neglected, and that from a one-sided emphasis on the successful understanding we cannot derive a philosophical theory. Bubner puts some of the blame on Gadamer in overemphasizing the requirement of proof demanded in the methodological procedures of sciences and opposing the hermeneutic experience of truth to demands for proof. This might give the impression that hermeneutic theory denies the relevance of a theory of science. Therefore, Bubner demands certain amendments to hermeneutic theory so that it can meet the requirements of a theory of science.

One of the reasons for the misunderstanding of hermeneutics is the perception that it preserves the dualism of the natural sciences and the human sciences. It is true that hermeneutics seems to protect the human sciences from the one-sidedness of natural scientific methodology. But does that also mean that hermeneutics adheres to a dualistic conception of science? According to Bubner, it does not. Hermeneutics opposes the inherent claim to absoluteness in any methodological trust in philosophical comprehensiveness.

Hermeneutics counters the naive conception of a comprehensive and absolute knowledge with the finitude and the limits set to knowledge in historical life. Bubner acknowledges that the model for such a concept of knowledge is provided by the older forms of theological and humanistic hermeneutics.<sup>496</sup> The posited supremacy of a text, whether sacred or classical, is as a matter of

principle, an acceptance of a truth claim which "limited all possibilities of knowledge which might come later."<sup>497</sup>

Bubner rightly observes —probably against Habermas's critique that Gadamer has been stuck with this outmoded form of theological and philological interpretation<sup>498</sup>— that this is nothing more than a model, but adequately illustrates the structure of the possible increase of human knowledge. This case is expressed in the concepts of fore-understanding and effective history. "Both categories reflect the fact that to acquire knowledge always presupposes that some knowledge is already given which can never be obtained from the knowledge acquired."<sup>499</sup> By formulating the problem this way, Bubner makes hermeneutics seem very close to the Kantian project of transcendentalism. What we need to account for is the *a priori* synthetic knowledge which adds to our already accumulated knowledge.

Bubner does not commit the common mistake of identifying this prior knowledge with history or tradition, but rather with the medium of language which carries, as well as changes, the content of historical tradition.

Although Bubner is right to insist that hermeneutic theory must be considered as a transcendental inquiry, his attempt to show that it fails. The reason for this is the following: if the transcendental conditions of knowledge are to be sought in social and historical practices, then the question concerning the possibility of understanding as it becomes explicit in philosophical reflection remains without an answer. Husserl has faced the same problem of accounting for the constitution of the "life-world" preceding all experience, the problem of how it would be possible to explain the constitution of the social and practical world that transcends the individual consciousness. Against Bubner's approach to the problem of the transcendence of hermeneutic theory, we point out Emerich Coreth's interpretation of the transcendental dimension of the hermeneutic theory of understanding.

As Coreth correctly observes, the circularity of understanding is recognized precisely because "the understanding subject itself is being seized and comprehended by this circular process of its own understanding."<sup>500</sup> But this continuous movement of understanding as a perpetual circular relation of the subject to the particular object takes place within the totality of the horizon of Being.<sup>501</sup>

We have emphasized hermeneutic philosophy's transcendental project of dealing with an understanding of Being, insofar as Being manifests itself in temporality and language. In the conception of methodology is hidden the idea of what counts as legitimate knowledge and, thus, as a limit set on the experience of truth. Also, critics of philosophical hermeneutics treat the sciences' limit, on knowledge and limits of human understanding on the same level and, thus, commit the mistake of identifying the finite nature of human knowledge with the relativity of knowledge.

Especially Habermas and Apel read Gadamer as a strict follower of the Hegelian notion that what is actual is rational, and what is rational is actual. Against Gadamer, they suggest that Gadamer sacrifices the empirical actuality of history not only to rational forces but also to forces of domination and work. They do not suggest that rationality should be abandoned in favor of this empirical actuality of history, but rather that the rational ideal should be posited as the goal of the actuality. They see such a goal in free communicative communities of interpretation and communication. Critical theory itself is based upon an idealist position in which it sets a rational goal for human action. Thus, Gadamer's critics are returning to an Enlightenment notion of progress and historical advancement.

But the question for Apel, as for Habermas, has to do with how one enters the circle in the case of critical social sciences. In this regard, both accept the historical conditions of knowledge and the claim to universal validity. In the debates on philosophical hermeneutics, we have noted the critics' concerns with the concrete problems of hermeneutics but also pointed out that hermeneutics is, in fact, describing the transcendental conditions of human understanding. The truth, revealed in hermeneutic experience, is the truth as a quality of being. The incompleteness of our knowledge is the result of finitude, not a result of empirical obstacles to consensus concerning truth.

But this observation can itself be expressed with reference to the universal relation between language and reality and the validity of historical knowledge within the continuity of history. As a response to these critiques, in the following chapter we will examine the transcendental aspect of hermeneutics.

## Chapter V

# The Ontological Conditions of Philosophical Hermeneutics

As outlined in the previous chapter, the debates between Gadamer and his critics about philosophical hermeneutics have brought little clarity to the question of relativism, because of their different interests within hermeneutics. Critics' objections seem justified in details but suffer from the general weakness that they play the historicity principle against method and norms without much clarification. The discussions have turned into a contest about whether the epistemological questions of traditional hermeneutics have become obsolete in the development of an ontological hermeneutics, on the one hand, and about whether reason can rise above its historical and linguistic conditions through reflection, on the other.

Although the outcome of these discussions is not clear, the epistemological and metaphysical assumptions underlying the critics' positions are detrimental to Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. The critical debates have led to the spread of the belief that philosophical hermeneutics implies a form of relativism. In this chapter, we will demonstrate that this is not the case. In order to present our thesis, we will proceed in the following order. First, a summary of Gadamer's response to the objection is presented. This will be followed by an analysis of the underlying general question that has not been articulated in the debates over particular problems of hermeneutic theory. In the remainder of the chapter, this general question is identified as being related to language as the universal condition of understanding and historicity as a matter of the temporality of human life and the experience of the continuity of history. This chapter concludes with an argument that only within the context of the central questions of the universality of language and the experience of temporality can the transcendental aim of philosophical hermeneutics be understood, and not in the context of the regional issues of the interpretation of texts or tradition and history.

### Transcending the Limits of Method and Critique: Gadamer's Response to the Critics

Gadamer attempts to meet the first set of objections which are more specific to the practice of textual interpretation. The differences of opinion between Gadamer and his critics are related to the conceptions of interpretation and the relevance of the human sciences for human self-understanding. Gadamer denies the possibility of attaining absolute knowledge and achieving a complete self-transparency of the subject's understanding of itself within the historicity of life.

Gadamer's response to Betti focuses on two issues. The first concerns the distinction between a philosophical theory about interpretation and the methodological problems of a general theory of interpretation. Gadamer argues that his project is descriptive, and that he does not propose a method. He simply intends to discover the common elements of the experience of understanding, that is to discover the conditions and the possibilities of understanding in general. The second issue concerns the charge of subjectivism. Gadamer contends that the validity of this charge depends on the validity of the epistemological scheme which is the basis of the subject-object distinction. Only on the basis of this model of interpretation can one consider the subject as confronting an alien object, and its cognitive activity as "subjective act." Hermeneutic understanding is a dialogical process which has the structure and logic of question and answer (which is the hermeneutic *Urphänomenon*).<sup>502</sup> "Understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood."<sup>503</sup>

Against Betti's criticism that he does not answer the *quaestio juris*, Gadamer insists that his philosophy is purely descriptive. Gadamer's response to Betti is instructive, because he makes clear his implicit assertion: "Fundamentally I am not *proposing a method*; I am describing what is the case. That it is as I describe it cannot, I think, be questioned. . . . I consider the only scientific thing is to *recognize what is*, instead of starting from what ought to be or could be."<sup>504</sup>

Such a defense presents a difficulty that is not merely specific to Gadamer's own position. As expressed by Michael Gelven, "Heidegger and other hermeneutic thinkers want to be true to both terms of their descriptive methodology: to let the facts speak for themselves; and at the same time to claim that there are no such things as uninterpreted facts—at least not in those cases where the hermeneutic method applies."<sup>505</sup> As Kisiel points out, "Gadamer focuses on the 'fact' that the actual situation in which human understanding takes place is always an understanding through *language* within a tradition, both of which have always been manifest considerations in hermeneutic thinking."<sup>506</sup>

Gadamer evaluates Betti's approach as a middle position between the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism. In asserting the autonomy of the text and the adequacy of the understanding to the object as normative principles, Betti seems to require that the subject-matter be the object of interpretation.<sup>507</sup> However, this is not the case. On the contrary, the object of interpretation which Betti refers to is the meaning intended by the author. What concerns Gadamer in Betti's theory is the fact that it remains an extension of the psychological method founded by Schleiermacher. Adhering to a view that hermeneutics is a "kind of *analogy with psychological interpretation*," the interpreter has to come to this creative path by "*rethinking* within himself."<sup>508</sup>

The main issue in Gadamer's and Betti's debate concerns the desire to maintain the objectivity of hermeneutic interpretation in the face of the Heideggerian critique of the epistemological model of the subject-object relationship.

The other issue between Betti and Gadamer concerns the notion of finitude. Betti holds a notion of knowledge which is free from any perspective. In his notion, there is the implicit belief that history can be transcended absolutely.

The strength, as well as the weakness, of philosophical hermeneutics lies in the role attributed to tradition and prejudice. What is not clear, however, is whether prejudice and tradition are co-extensive. Some of Gadamer's remarks suggest that tradition and prejudice cannot be separated in their co-determination of understanding and self-understanding. On the other hand, he makes a distinction between prejudices coming from our interest in the subject matter and prejudices coming from the use of language. It is necessary to make this distinction if one wants to avoid the critics' charges. Does Gadamer make this distinction? Hirsch, for one, believes that Gadamer does not do so. According to Hirsch, Gadamer supposes that prejudices are constitutive of understanding and that the elimination of unproductive prejudices is to be left to a temporal distance intervening between the interpreter and the subject matter. What Gadamer overlooks, Hirsch argues, is the fact that, while a short interval in time, for instance, between two speakers exchanging views does not threaten the homogeneity of prejudices and tradition, a long period of time does.

This is a perfectly legitimate objection and challenges Gadamer's argument that temporal distance serves as a criterion of legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. For this reason, in later editions of *Truth and Method* Gadamer modified the categorical statement concerning temporal distance as a criterion to a probable statement.<sup>509</sup>

Still, not only temporal distance, but distance in general helps to distinguish the productive prejudices from the unproductive ones. Yet critics finds this insufficient as a criterion for

objectivity. The gap opens up here between Betti and Hirsch on the one side and Gadamer on the other. In Gadamer's understanding, the idea of an objectivity in the sense of a subject matter that can be made present to us in itself, such that nothing can remain hidden from us, is not possible. There are two sides to this. Objectivity can be understood, on the one hand, as the possibility of the pure representability of the object, and, on the other, as the possibility of an exhaustive knowledge of it. Gadamer argues that in either sense, such an ideal of objectivity cannot be applied to the human sciences. For this ideal is based on the theoretical orientation of science and does not conform to the practice of even the natural sciences themselves.

Also, Gadamer argues against the distinction between the meaning and the significance of a text, as well as between understanding and interpretation. He argues further that the text cannot be conceived of as other than its realization in interpretation. As he states: "Despite all the differences which separate . . . the interpretation from the substance of reading, there is no intention to place the realization of the text aside from the text itself. On the contrary, the ultimate ideal of appropriateness seems to be total self-effacement because the meaning [*Verständnis*] of the text has become self-evident."<sup>510</sup>

In his reply to his critics, more specifically his reply to Apel's charges of relativism, Gadamer argues that unless an absolute knowledge or a notion of progress to a final truth is admitted to be available, one cannot speak of a danger of relativism.<sup>511</sup> This also relates to Betti's criticism that the application of understanding to different situations becomes the only criterion for the hermeneutic process. Gadamer argues that considering application as part of the understanding process is not tantamount to a naive, uncritical acceptance of tradition. However, it must be admitted that a true historical consciousness includes the possibility of a confirming, as well as of a critical appropriation of tradition. Gadamer claims, contrary to the views of Apel and Habermas, that "the hermeneutic reflection is limited to revealing the possibilities of knowledge which would otherwise remain unperceived. However, the hermeneutic reflection itself is not a criterion of truth."<sup>512</sup>

The point of disagreement between Gadamer and the critical theorists is related to the question of whether the self-understanding of the interpreter takes place within the orientations of the present or whether it can be affected by the continuity of the past in the present. Both Habermas and Apel start from the premise that the hermeneutic concept of historicity leads either to a blind conservatism or to a subjective relativism, unless a criterion of criticism is found and based on a more intersubjective foundation. Apel and Habermas propose a contingent criterion of correctness, a criterion whose application depends, according to Habermas, on the realization of an ideal of free communication, so that history and tradition could be understood more objectively; or whose application is, according to Apel, contingent upon the formation of a consensus of interpreters.

In his reply, Gadamer points out that Apel's ideal of progress and a "consensus in the long run" makes the legitimacy of the agreement of the free community of interpreters questionable.<sup>513</sup> The consciousness of historical effects implies both limitedness and the fallibility of consciousness. Since finitude is for Gadamer logically prior to the possibilities presented to consciousness through reflection, the counter-factual situation of eventual agreement cannot be supported as the condition for discourse. This hypothetically universal and "counter-factual"<sup>514</sup> agreement is not the actual condition of a reasonable dialogue. Rather, the true condition is the concreteness of historicity in the form of language and tradition.

There are two different conceptions of language operating in this debate. Gadamer maintains that every experience that can be called extra-linguistic still must be articulated and mediated by language if these experiences are to be brought to our attention. In other words, even if we accept

a form of non-linguistic experience, this experience becomes a subject of our consciousness through language. This would be called an interpretation and, as such, falls under linguistic constraints. Not only the understanding of culture but everything is included in the realm of understanding.<sup>515</sup> Gadamer declares: "There is no societal reality, with all its concrete forces, that does not bring itself to representation in a consciousness which is linguistically articulated."<sup>516</sup> In contrast to this, Habermas believes that a critical reflection is possible which escapes the constraints of everyday language.

The universality of language means here that language carries everything understandable within it, including the world of science and its procedures and methodology. Not only moral and practical activities but also scientific activities take place in a linguistically constituted universe. Habermas questions this conception and points out the non-linguistic domains of consciousness.

Gadamer responds to Habermas's claim that Gadamer fails to recognize the power of reflection: "My objection is that the critique of ideology overestimates the competence of reflection and reason. Inasmuch as it seeks to penetrate the masked interests which infect the public opinion, it implies its own freedom from any ideology; and that means in turn that it enthrones its own norms and ideals as self-evident and absolute."<sup>517</sup>

Against this practice, Gadamer argues that critical reflection itself is limited by the constraints of language and the finitude of our existence. Tradition is not a proof and validation of something. Nor is it obvious that reflection always demands validation. As Gadamer appropriately asks: "Where does reflection demand proof? Everywhere?" He rejects the absolute reflection on the grounds of the "finitude of human existence and the essential particularity of reflection."<sup>518</sup> Gadamer calls Habermas's position pure Romanticism which "creates an artificial abyss between tradition and the reflection that is grounded in the historical consciousness."<sup>519</sup>

At the core of Habermas's critique lie the different approaches to the role and the aim of reflection exercised in cognitive activity. Gadamer's own views of nature and the role of reflection have received scant attention. His arguments against the natural scientific conception of objectivity and its application to the human sciences are also based on an understanding of the role and the scope of reflection in knowledge. Gadamer reminds us that Dilthey formulated the human possibility of reflective thought as the "free distance toward oneself."<sup>520</sup> But the possibility of reflection is mistakenly identified as being the same as the objectivity of knowledge achieved through scientific method. In the introduction to the English translation of *The Problem of the Historical Consciousness*, Gadamer amends his position on the role of tradition and prejudices with a clarification of *Truth and Method*. There he states: "It is true that the prejudices that dominate us often impair true recognition of the historical past. But without prior self-understanding, which is prejudice in this sense, and without readiness for self-criticism—which is also grounded in self-understanding—historical understanding would be neither possible nor meaningful. Only through others do we gain true knowledge of ourselves. Yet this implies that historical knowledge does not necessarily lead to the dissolution of tradition in which we live, it can also enrich this tradition, confirm or alter it—in short, contribute to the discovery of our own identity."<sup>521</sup>

Responding to Habermas and Apel, Gadamer reiterates his answer that emphasis on the determining function of tradition in our understanding of the past is not tantamount to "uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism." He declares that "whoever reads the present sketch of . . . hermeneutic theory will recognize that such an assumption reduces hermeneutics to an idealistic and historical self-conception. In truth the confrontation of our

historic tradition is always a critical challenge of this tradition. . . . Every experience is such a confrontation."<sup>522</sup>

The model of dialogue serves to describe the mediation of the otherness of tradition challenging our prejudices, and the assimilation of it in confirming the claims of truth revealed in any confrontation with tradition. Since language constitutes the foundation of our experience of tradition and our dialogue with it and about it, Gadamer asserts that the hermeneutic claim to universality refers to nothing but the linguistic constitution of understanding.<sup>523</sup>

But Habermas and Apel can be accused of deferring the judgment of validity to a future probability of agreement or free communication. Gadamer asserts that the "question cannot be resolved in favor of the quickly obsolete new, nor in favor of that which has been."<sup>524</sup>

Hermeneutic reflection itself is not "a criterion of truth."<sup>525</sup> The conception of reflection here in question concerns the role assigned to reflection by Habermas and Apel as a means of transcending the hermeneutic situation and applying a criterion to the result of interpretations. For Gadamer reflection is an immanent component of understanding, but reflection here does not take us out of the totality of the hermeneutic situation. In other words, hermeneutic reflection is effective only negatively in opening up new possibilities of understanding an object by enabling us to discriminate the unproductive prejudices, but reflection on the outcome of understanding does not lead us to an absolute point from which we might judge the result.

Gadamer has responded against these critics both by redefining his position and by laying bare their presuppositions. Against Habermas's and Apel's charges that Gadamer advocates a passive acceptance and submission to the authority of tradition, Gadamer responded by restating that openness to tradition is not a blind obedience to it, but an openness to the possibility that it may contain truth. The recognition of the superiority of authority does not always imply an obedience, but it may involve the acknowledgement of its knowledge.<sup>526</sup> The view that authority always remains authoritarian and confining and critical reflection must always free us by dissolving the false appearances of tradition itself appears dogmatic.<sup>527</sup>

Gadamer also questions Habermas's contention that psychoanalytical dialogue would serve as a model for communicative social dialogue. In the psychoanalytical model, the power relation between patient and therapist is not one of equality. In this relationship, the patient submits to the authority of the therapist and his trust in the psychoanalytic techniques. Nor can this dialogue be conceived outside the common social world they share, so the whole complex of relations does not depend on anything other than the linguistic world. Thus, the model Habermas offers as a limiting case of the universality of linguistic understanding fails as an example of emancipatory and critical reflection.

Critics of philosophical hermeneutics approach the question with different concerns: one from the point of view of objectivity and method of textual interpretation; the other from the point of view of norms of objectivity and method in the social sciences. Habermas and Apel accept the hermeneutic thesis of the historicity of understanding, but differ on the question of whether hermeneutics provides us with any critical norm to transcend the historical and linguistic conditions of knowledge. Their own respective theories, based upon the ideal of communicative interest proposed by Habermas and the regulative ideal of a community of interpreters suggested by Apel, naturally extend the sphere of hermeneutics.

The question of the historicity of understanding concerns the question whether the norms for the validity of interpretation are given in such a way that the understanding of the meaning of a text from the past is not effected by the historical position of the interpreter or whether normative principles of interpretation must be postulated in such a way that they must govern the conditions

of the objectivity of understanding that will only be fulfilled at some eventuality in the future. From the standpoint of the former perspective, philosophical hermeneutics surrenders the ideal of a correct and valid understanding of the texts to the present contingencies of the interpreter and, thus falls, into a subjective and historicist relativism. From the latter perspective, Gadamer makes tradition the measure of the truth of meaning and the validity of interpretation, and, hence, falls into a conservatism and even an idealist relativism.

The source of this conflict lies in the different conceptions of history held by Gadamer and his critics. For Gadamer, historical process consists of an integration of the old with the new. He describes historicity and the linguistic nature of understanding as the conditions of this integration and the mediation of the historical distance. Gadamer intends to show that historical continuity and the mediation of tradition through this continuity are the conditions of understanding. It is not only temporal distance but also other factors, such as the "fixity of writing and the sheer inertia of permanence," that serve as distancing factors.<sup>528</sup> Thus, Gadamer proposes historicity and language as hermeneutic principles to explain the mediation of historical meanings.

It is argued that the historicity thesis is susceptible to the same paradoxical self-referentiality as that to which relativism is vulnerable. If all knowledge claims are historically conditioned, this must apply to the historicity thesis itself. Gadamer's own account must be the product of this historical development, and hence it is relative to its own historical conditions and cannot be described as universally valid. For Gadamer, such a critique is based on the assumption that philosophical knowledge only has significance and validity as the expression of a historical world view. On the contrary, Gadamer's account of historicity is not a metaphysics of history either. "'Historicity' is a transcendent concept."<sup>529</sup> Gadamer responds to this by pointing out the distinction between statements of fact and logical statements. He writes: "Thus we cannot argue that a historicism that maintains the historical conditionedness of all knowledge 'for all eternity' is basically self-contradictory. This kind of self-contradiction is a special problem. Here also we must ask whether the two propositions—'all knowledge is historically conditioned' and 'this piece of knowledge is true unconditionally'—are on the same level, so that they could contradict each other. For the thesis is not that this proposition will always be considered true, any more than that it has always been so considered. Rather, a historicism that takes itself seriously will allow for the fact that one day its thesis will no longer be considered true—i.e., that people will think 'unhistorically.' And yet not because asserting that all knowledge is conditioned is meaningless and 'logically' contradictory."<sup>530</sup>

The logical difficulty of this argument points to the same situation inherent in all logical paradoxes. An appeal to the distinction between a logical statement and a meta-statement about it does not solve the problem, given the fact that a meta-language cannot explicate the content of the statement, but can only signify something about the statement itself.

For Gadamer, historicism necessarily implies an absolute position from which the knowledge of the past is judged. Historicism presupposes an ideal present, in the light of which the past, in its totality, is revealed. Is Gadamer able to avoid historicism by denying the possibility of an absolute knowledge by emphasizing human finitude? Is the only argument possible against historicism the denial of an absolute knowledge? Gadamer's arguments rather depend on the concept of time as multi-dimensional, not as a linear concept of a movement of moments. For Gadamer, historical knowledge cannot be described as a matter of applying a privileged perspective of the present to the past, as naive historicism implies. "Historical thinking has its dignity and its value as truth in the acknowledgement that there is no such thing as the 'present,' but rather constantly changing horizons of future and past. It is by no means settled (and can never be settled) that any particular

perspective in which traditional thoughts [*überlieferter Gedanken*] presents themselves is the right one."<sup>531</sup> We notice that it is not the subject-matter itself or traditional thought that is indeterminable. Rather, of the perspectives in which "inherited thoughts" are presented, one cannot be determined as the right one.

Gadamer has acknowledged that hermeneutic theory entails a certain form of historicism, but not a relativistic historicism. Gadamer calls this version of historicism a "transcendental historicism."<sup>532</sup> Another difficulty arises from the hermeneutic emphasis on the revealing character of language at the expense of the declarative function of statements. There is a similar problem concerning the conclusion drawn from the interpretive nature of understanding and objectivity and the dialogical use of language and the lessening of the importance of the assertive function of language.

It is claimed by many critics that the historicity of understanding expresses the fact that human understanding is the product of the social and historical conditions in which individuals and communities live. To characterize the hermeneutic thesis in this way is not only inaccurate, but also misleading.

Many critics agree on the issue that, in a certain way, Gadamer juxtaposes truth and method against each other. Gadamer suggests that he is pointing to the fact that by focusing on method, truth and true knowledge become almost equated with knowledge and the experience of the sciences. Philosophical hermeneutics aims to prove that this exclusive limitation on truth is unjustified. Gadamer's work is "concerned with truths that go essentially beyond the range of methodological knowledge."<sup>533</sup> This is not an invitation to arbitrariness and the indeterminateness of hermeneutic claims to truth, as critics claim. In order to explore this controversial issue, we should pay close attention to the negative task of explicating the limitations of methodological knowledge before turning to the alternative mode of knowledge presupposed by hermeneutic theory.

For Gadamer, hermeneutics cannot be based on the self-consciousness of subject; rather it must be based on the objectivity of life.<sup>534</sup> *Truth and Method* is not intended to express the fact that the antithesis of truth and method should be mutually exclusive.<sup>535</sup>

Gadamer avoids giving a definition of truth; instead, he describes the forms of experience in which truth is experienced. Objections against Gadamer's theory concerning the lack of criterion for objectivity and criticism imply that, for Gadamer, truth is itself relative. Rather, their contention is about the supposed lack of criteria for determining the truth or validity of any interpretation or the experience of historical phenomena. Even if it is granted that the historicity thesis engenders a conception of truth that changes according to the historical conditions of human experience, does this entail that truth itself is relative? How does one infer, from Gadamer's denial of an a-historical knowledge, to the relativity of truth? Such an approach to the implication of the historicity thesis for the concept of truth simply raises a negative point, that the hermeneutic concept of truth does not conform to the traditional view of truth as a-temporal.

This notion of the traditional concept of truth is itself mistaken on two accounts. First, the traditional notion of truth signifies not an a-temporal quality but the intelligibility of Being. Second, the traditional concept of truth as correspondence to the being of the object is not denied by Gadamer. Rather, Gadamer returns to language as the medium in which this correspondence is verified. However, this correspondence cannot be due entirely to the fact that the self-presentation of the object in language cannot be fixed in a definite way. The Being of the object is as much present in language as it is disclosed through language.

Thus, the implications of Gadamer's concept of historicity do not entirely confirm traditional metaphysics, but this is because Gadamer does not want to use the concepts and language of metaphysics. Abandoning the concepts of substance, subject, object, perception, etc. may require a different account of the relation between being and truth, even though this relation remains the same on another level.

Unless one denies the finitude of human existence and appeals to a "consciousness as such" or "*intellectus archetypus*" or a "transcendental ego," the question of how this thinking as transcendental is empirically possible can be avoided. Gadamer believes that such a difficulty does not arise in his hermeneutic theory.<sup>536</sup> He writes: "It seems to me that it is essential for taking finitude seriously as the basis of every experience of Being that such experience renounce all dialectical supplementation. To be sure, it is 'obvious' that finitude is privative determination of thought and as such presupposes its opposite, transcendence, or history or (in another way) nature. Who will deny that? I contend, however, that we have learned once and for all from Kant that such 'obvious' ways of thought can mediate no possible knowledge to us finite beings. Dependence on possible experience and demonstration by means of it remains the alpha and omega of all responsible thought."<sup>537</sup> In the demands for a method and criterion for objectivity, Gadamer finds a reflection on modern science's refusal to acknowledge a limit. Precisely in this refusal lies the desire to exclude everything that eludes science's own methodology and procedures. In this way science proves to itself that it is without limits and free from self-justification. Thus, science "gives the appearance of being total in its knowledge." The universality of hermeneutic reflection emerges from the acknowledgement of its "own limitations and situatedness."<sup>538</sup>

To make a choice between absolute knowledge based on the notion of a transcendental subject and finite knowledge is not an option, but a necessity. Reflective thinking is only limited to reflection on the particularity of our own understanding. It is not possible to think "through the end of ourselves as thinking beings."<sup>539</sup> As finite beings this is "an idea of which thinking itself can hardly lay hold." What Gadamer means by understanding as self-understanding is "not the perfect self-transparency of knowledge but the insight that we have to accept the limits posed for finite natures."<sup>540</sup>

Gadamer responds to all critiques that hermeneutics should be applicable to the actual practice of textual interpretation. "The theoretical giving-an-account of the possibilities of understanding is not an objectifying reflection that makes understanding something capable of being mastered by means of science and methodology."<sup>541</sup> The universality of hermeneutics is a claim that "is subject to the indissoluble problematic of its rational application." In this sense, the universality of hermeneutics has the same character of the universality of practical rules. "Like practical philosophy, philosophical hermeneutics stands beyond the alternatives of the transcendental reflection and the empirical pragmatic knowledge."<sup>542</sup>

However, every universal rule is in need of application, but, as we learn from Kant, there is no rule for the application of rules.<sup>543</sup> Absolute knowledge is not relevant. Gadamer asserts that belonging to tradition does not "include becoming partisan for what has already been passed down. Just as much, it grounds the freedom for criticism and for projecting new goals in social life and action."<sup>544</sup>

In addition, it is implicit in the critics' arguments that the historicity thesis must have an application to the actual practice of the historical sciences. For Gadamer, phenomenological description concerns the self-presentation of subject-matter, the way Being presents itself to human understanding. Our description of phenomena is based on this revelation.

But the question is whether the phenomena disclosed in the phenomenological description thus warrant a point of view from which the current practices can be criticized. Even if it is granted that the form of historicism implicit in Gadamer's theory is of a transcendental kind, how can this keep it exempt from effective history?

This issue has to do with the conception of history as a changing process whose unchanging element is expressed by the historicity of human existence. Historicism stresses the change in history, and every change requires something changing. But science or knowledge require something to be the same or identical with itself throughout the change.

To think either that language is part of, and a creation of, history, or that history belongs to the linguistic constitution of the social process determines the way we understand history. In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, both language and history perform significant roles. The evaluation of philosophical hermeneutics is determined by the answer to the question of whether Gadamer's attempt to deal with the historical and linguistic nature of human experience is intended to develop a philosophical theory without appeal to any supra-temporal, absolute, *a priori* foundation, or whether he is committed instead to a certain metaphysical, ontological point of view.

In order to demonstrate that the charges of relativism implied by philosophical hermeneutics cannot be sustained, we must prove that Gadamer maintains a conception of history and language totally contrary to the opinions held by his critics. In other words, their critique depends on a conception of language and history that is not Gadamer's. There are essentially two diverse interpretations of Gadamer's doctrine of the linguisticality of understanding. On the one hand, critical theorists declare that Gadamer's hermeneutics presupposes a linguistic idealism. In critical theory, the status of language is reduced to a social convention which can be formed or dissolved according to the changing material conditions and the increase in the knowledge of nature. In their instrumentalist view of language, critical theorists cannot trust the natural order of the development of language, because they find language to be exploitable by the individual. At the same time, critical theory wants to base itself on the intersubjective and action-oriented function of linguistic communication. In other words, language becomes a tool whose use imposes upon everybody who uses it the acceptance of a defined goal.<sup>545</sup> They consider language a matter of social convention and, even if it is not an instrument that any single individual can exploit, nevertheless, a class or group can.

Take, for instance, Apel's notion that a community of interpreters consists of classes formed according to a division of labor.<sup>546</sup> A class would have to contend with its role, for instance, dealing only with objective research, while another group would be dealing with the normative value of the results of this research. Gadamer's position is close to neither of these views.

Although they are not always clear and not completely free from ambiguities of their own, Gadamer's views on the nature and relation between language and reality, and the relation between language and thought, are embedded in an ontological doctrine of a dialectical relationship of being, language and thinking.

It has become clear that the problem of relativism associated with the historicity thesis presents us with several issues concerning the foundations and validity of hermeneutic theory itself. In the absence of a detailed analysis of the concept of temporality and of language as the medium of historical understanding, the problem of relativism cannot be examined in the context of philosophical hermeneutics.

## **Language as the Ontological Ground of Hermeneutic Experience**

Gadamer's conception of language remains the least explored aspect of his hermeneutic theory. Despite his insistence that hermeneutic phenomena must be viewed in the reverse order of their presentation in *Truth and Method*, the fact remains that this is not pursued in its full implications. The best we can achieve here is to give a sketch of possible ways of altering the common understanding of hermeneutics.

Language, considered as the medium of hermeneutic understanding, constitutes the central theme of Part III of *Truth and Method*. The analysis of the linguistic nature of understanding is concerned with an ontological analysis of language as the ground of the dialectical relationship between the finitude of human experience and the infinitude of Being.

The dynamic relation between finitude and the infinity of Being is given in the speculative character of language. Language has the same structure as history. The conditions of historical life precede the consciousness of being conditioned, as such.<sup>547</sup> Often the reflection on this conditionedness is confused with rising above history. Distancing oneself from historical effects is made possible only by taking a particular situation into reflection. But the totality in which this reflection takes place transcends the capacity of individual reflection. This is the reason why critical theorists have suggested a communicative community, a larger group, as the transcendental subject of historical consciousness.

In the same way that the historical process is not controlled by any single individual consciousness, language is not under the domination of any particular individual. Yet, every individual has a linguistic capacity or competence with different degrees of sophistication. The universality of language is at the same time the universality of reason. However, the relation between reason and language is one of immanence, not transcendence.

The human relation to language has an ambiguity similar to that of human freedom. The conception of freedom includes its opposite, i.e., un-freedom, the lack of freedom which can only be conceived through restoring it into freedom, and vice versa. In the same way, language contains pre-linguistic, non-linguistic or even meta-linguistic phenomena within its confines, without violating either its concrete reality, or its ideality. The non-linguistic can only be understood linguistically. Every cognition, every reflection on a subject matter, takes place in language.

Thus, the universality of language has as its correlative the universality of reason. In this way, Gadamer elevates language to its proper place by formulating the traditional metaphysical notion of the transcendental unity of being, truth and the good according to the speculative relation between language and being. Language itself is speculative, i.e, it reflects objects within the universality of the relation of language to Being. But Being itself is not universal. Corresponding to the universality of language, knowledge or rationality is dialectical. To have knowledge of something is to grasp an object as it is mirrored in the universality of its being.

The universality of knowledge, through the medium of language, is possible because the knowledge of the object is attained neither according to the empirical universality, nor according to the abstract universality of an object, but according to the concrete universality of the word in language. A word presents the thing in the mirror of the universality of the relation between language and reality. Since this reality is not given in its totality, the reality that is represented in the word is the universality of language.

There is here, of course, a danger of falling into a linguistic positivism. Linguistic reality, or the universality of language, seems to be identical with the totality of all there is. Hence, the ineffable, what cannot be expressed, is excluded from the realm of language and of knowledge.<sup>548</sup> Here Gadamer does not commit the mistake of identifying the limits of reality with the limits of

language. Rather, the universality of language is the only infinite that we can experience. Whatever remains ineffable in this sense belongs to the infinity of language, even though such a type of infinity is a "bad infinity,"<sup>549</sup> —i.e., indefinite. This simply means that totality or the infinity is not given to an individual consciousness, but only through language.

As has already been pointed out, the experience of language contains the limits of individual consciousness, as well as the possibility and the orientation toward infinity, totality and the universal. The concrete universality we mentioned earlier finds its genuine reality in language. Every word in a language and every language in its totality, in their reference to reality, have within themselves a potentiality for infinite relationships. Again, every individual has a potentially infinite capacity for the use of a particular language at his disposal. But individuals' linguistic competence can never reach to a point of an absolute dominance over the potentials of language itself. It is significant that Gadamer's thesis takes this situation into account.

Gadamer states that the hermeneutic phenomenon he is describing is "a special case of the general relationship between thinking and speaking, whose enigmatic intimacy conceals the role of language in thought. . . . The linguisticality of understanding is *the concretion of historically effected consciousness.*"<sup>550</sup>

The hermeneutic claim to universality is based on the universality of the relation between language and reason. Language is, for Gadamer, "not just one of man's possessions in the world; but rather, on language depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature."<sup>551</sup>

Now, it is necessary to point out that Gadamer's conception of language is entirely different from those of Habermas and Apel, who always speak of language as the foundation of intersubjective communication and the symbolic givenness of the world. For instance, Apel talks about the revealment of the world in language. What he means by this is not the revealment of the world through language in an ontological sense, but in the naturalistic sense that language reveals our relation to the world. This naturalistic sense is shown in Apel's assertion that language can change according to the possible increase of our scientific knowledge of the world and the consensus on the truth. Apel adheres to a conventionalist conception of language. The regulative ideal of the agreement of a community of interpreters includes an agreement about the linguistic representation of the objects of the world.<sup>552</sup> In other words, consensus includes the agreement about the objective referents of words, and language is to be used to represent the things in the world.

Linguistic change always exists *in* language, it is not a change *of* language. Other theories often take the particular change within language to be a change in the nature of language's capacity to express reality. But from Gadamer's point of view linguistic change belongs to the capacity within language to express reality in a new way. The titles of different sections of Part III of *Truth and Method* provide us with ample evidence for this assessment.

In the context of a discussion concerning the notion of language as reflecting the world view of linguistic communities that was developed by the German linguist, Humboldt, Gadamer tries to save this notion from the apparent danger of linguistic relativism. While others are ready to infer a relativistic world view from Humboldt's concept of "language as *Weltanschauung*" or language as world view, Gadamer draws attention to the fact that the multiplicity of languages and language views presents clear evidence of man's freedom for transcending the natural and social environment surrounding him.<sup>553</sup>

The concept of environment must be noted here. Although it may appear similar to Heidegger's notion of environment, *Umwelt*, Gadamer speaks of environment more in the sense

of the interdependence of language and the world. Specifically it is the human world constituted through this interdependence encompassing both the natural and social life of human beings. The interrelationship between language and the world characterizes the verbal and linguistic nature of hermeneutic experience. Gadamer writes: "Language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originally human means at the same time that man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic."<sup>554</sup>

The primordiality of the linguisticality of human understanding signifies the ontological constitutions of the human experience of the world. From an epistemological point of view the question arises as to how to account for the relation between experience and the world. This question concerns the fundamental capacity of human reason to have a cognitive comportment towards the world. Traditional philosophy dealt with this in terms of self-evident principles of knowledge, and had the sense of Being as the organizing principle of the chaotic nature of human experience. Heidegger's approach is to explain this comportment in terms of the fore-structures of the understanding of Being. Understanding does not take place in a theoretical, distanced attitude towards the world, but in the practical concerns with our immediate surroundings. The world exists for man not primarily as object to gaze at in wonder, but as a world in which one finds one's way around in concerned inspection.

Gadamer seems to retain this practical concern within his concept of the linguistic comportment to the world. Human beings are born into the world with the capability of immediately utilizing things in their environment for their practical needs, which are provided by parents, society, etc. Thus, what we first learn is not how to use them and for what purpose they are used, but rather first we learn to distinguish the objects that present themselves to our visual horizon in a chaotic manner through the way they are articulated in language. Gadamer expresses this fact as a world orientation (*Verhalten*): "To have an orientation toward the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what one encounters of the world that one can present it to oneself as it is. This capacity is at once to have a world and to have language."<sup>555</sup>

Gadamer's conception of the relation between language and reality appropriates Hegel's analysis of the speculative logic of philosophical propositions and Heidegger's treatment of the logic of propositions in *Being and Time*.<sup>556</sup> Gadamer argues that the speculative proposition "does not state something about something, rather it presents the unity of the concept."<sup>557</sup> Truth comes into being in the activity of language. For this reason language has the character of an "event," that is to say, the truth of the object comes into being through the process of articulation. "*Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs.*"<sup>558</sup>

To a certain extent *Truth and Method* depends on and broadens Heidegger's explication of language as an "event," describing the role of language in the dialectical play of Being as concealment and un-concealment. Gadamer applies the notion of "event" or "happening" to historical understanding and defines the role of language as a mediation of the "finite and historical nature of man to himself and to the world."<sup>559</sup>

There are a few questions to be asked concerning Gadamer's view of language. First of all, one might ask, as did Habermas and Pannenberg, whether it is legitimate to draw an ontological significance from the equation of language and understanding.<sup>560</sup> This objection is raised against the hermeneutic doctrine of language on the basis of the assumption that we cannot assimilate pre-linguistic or non-linguistic modes of experience under the universality of language. Gadamer

acknowledges that what can be called non-linguistic experiences do exist. But there is no question of experiencing the content of experience without linguistic mediation.

The linguistic nature of experience refers to the fact that whenever something is experienced, it is always set against something else. Words function in the role of a mirroring of the content of the experience against something else. In the final analysis, the content of non-linguistic experience is conceived in terms of the internal dialogue of the soul with itself. Non-linguistic experience, too, is something which "looks to an ever-possible verbalization."<sup>561</sup>

However, one probably would argue that an ontological universality of understanding is not adequate to account for the universality of language. From the point of view of the universality of understanding, one might question the universality of language. The possibility of verbalization may explain the power and range of language, but this does not prove that language has a universal mode. Furthermore, it is even questionable whether an ontological account of language is adequate for the development of a theory of language.<sup>562</sup>

Only from an absolute position can one raise the criticism that even a theory asserting language as the ontological conditions of understanding is unable to avoid the actual historical situation in which its transcendental conditions are constituted. Such a criticism maintains that every theory requires its own completion in history. Habermas's own thesis demands that we must achieve a historical position in which all communication is free. Pannenberg also has argued that the historicity thesis implies its completion in a universal history.<sup>563</sup> From a different point of view, Pannenberg asserts that Gadamer's attack on the sufficiency of propositional statements to express the truth disregards the methodological fact that hermeneutics "can only begin from an exact grasp of what is stated."<sup>564</sup>

Gadamer avoids following Hegel and Plato all the way to the claim that speculative dialectics conceals reality (Plato's position), or discloses the infinite and absolute.<sup>565</sup> The concept of the speculative nature of language as presenting the dialectic of finite and infinite that lies at the center of the thesis concerning the linguisticality of understanding leads Gadamer beyond even Hegel and Heidegger.

If we remember that the second volume of Heidegger's *Being and Time* was projected to be on the subject of the relationship of Being and beings, one might say that this is taken up in the analysis of language in *Truth and Method* under the title, "language as the determination of the hermeneutic object."<sup>566</sup> The universal function of language as revealed in the phenomenon of understanding shows, according to Gadamer, the solution to the "great dialectical puzzle" of the relationship between unity and multiplicity.<sup>567</sup> "All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is within it an infinity of meaning to be elaborated and interpreted."<sup>568</sup>

We mentioned above the way the interpreter *belongs* to his text and described the close relationship between tradition and history that is expressed in the concept of historically effected consciousness. The interpreter's belonging to tradition can be defined "more exactly as the idea of belonging on the basis of the linguistically constituted experience of the world."<sup>569</sup>

According to Gadamer, language has the speculative dialectical function of leading us "behind itself and behind the facade of overt verbal expression that it first presents." The critical function of hermeneutics is rooted in this. "Language is not coincident, as it were, with that which is expressed in it, with that in it which is formulated in words. The hermeneutic dimension that opens up here makes clear the limit to objectifying anything that is thought and communicated."<sup>570</sup>

Linguistic expressions are not simply inexact, and in need of refinement, but always necessarily fall short of what they evoke and communicate.<sup>571</sup> In speaking, there is always an

implied meaning that is imposed on the medium of expression which will lose its meaning when it is raised to the level of what is actually expressed.<sup>572</sup>

Gadamer distinguishes two forms in which speaking extends behind itself. Speaking presents also something that is unsaid "in that which for all practical purposes is concealed by speaking."<sup>573</sup> The first form in which speaking conceals something belongs to occasionality or the dependence of speech upon a situation. Gadamer claims that "such a dependency upon situation is not itself situational" in the sense of the formal dependency of semantic expressions like "here" and "this." Rather, it is the case that "such occasionality constitutes the essence of speech."<sup>574</sup> Gadamer explains this as the hermeneutic problem of question. All speech is motivated, in the sense that its motivation lies in the question to which the statement is an answer. Therefore "no statement has an unambiguous meaning based on its linguistic and logical construction."<sup>575</sup>

In certain cases, questions cannot be determined solely on the basis of answers, but must be referred to an action as the context of the question to which it is an answer.<sup>576</sup> In the case of a literary text whose meaning is not motivated by a particular occasion, but claims to be understandable 'anytime', this means that it is not only an answer, but raises a question.<sup>577</sup> These are forms of the concealment of language, a concealment inherent in linguisticality itself.

The second form of this kind of concealment is that which Strauss called the relation between persecution and the art of writing.<sup>578</sup> Lie and error are good examples for concealment through language. Although error is not a semantic or hermeneutic phenomena, both are present in it. A correct assertion conceals one way, as indicated, whereas mistake or error is a 'correct' expression of the erroneous opinion. As such, they are not opposed to the expression of correct opinions.<sup>579</sup>

The first form of concealment belongs to the structure of language, while the second belongs to concealment through language. The border phenomena, such as lie and error, belong to linguistic concealment. A lie is a linguistic phenomenon which "presupposes the truth value of speaking," either in the case of intentional deceitfulness, or personal deceitfulness, in which a feeling for what is true and for the truth of any kind has been lost. Deceitfulness and falsity deny their own existence and secure themselves against "exposure through talking *per se* [Reden selbst]."<sup>580</sup> Gadamer claims that idle talk presents the model for self-alienation to which the linguistic consciousness is susceptible and that needs to be resolved by hermeneutic reflection.<sup>581</sup> This is the case in situations in which the other person (in whose speaking the deceitfulness is recognized) excludes himself from the communication, because he does not stand behind his statements.<sup>582</sup> Gadamer asserts that unrecognized prejudices have a similar function, i.e., if one does not take responsibility for one's prejudices, one does not really participate in a dialogue.

Gadamer argues that prejudices represent the most powerful form of concealment through language that determines our relation to the world. He refers to this as the "tacit demands of prejudices."<sup>583</sup> Thus, it belongs to the border position where speaking is guided by these "foreconceptions and fore-understanding" that remain hidden and of which we become conscious only when there is an interruption in meaning of what one intends to say. "This generally comes about in a new experience. Foremeaning becomes untenable."<sup>584</sup> But the conscious form of concealment through language exists in the sense that self-securing prejudices take a form of language as the "unyielding repetitiousness characteristic of all dogmatism."<sup>585</sup> Thus, Gadamer claims that even the claim to presuppositionless freedom from prejudices may take such forms as a language of a self-evident certainty.

"Being that can be understood is language"<sup>586</sup> is an assertion that has created much confusion. Gadamer explains this assertion by appealing to a formula made by Goethe: "Everything is a

symbol."<sup>587</sup> For Gadamer, this does not mean that all reality is only understood through symbols, but rather "*everything* is a symbol" means that totality is always construed symbolically. The totality of something is not given as such.

"Everything" is a symbol" is not an assertion about each being, indicating what it is, but an assertion about how human understanding encounters everything. It means that there is nothing that cannot mean something to human beings. It also means that "nothing comes forth in the one meaning that is simply offered to us. The impossibility of surveying all relations is just as much present" in this concept "as is the vicarious function of the particular for representation of the whole."<sup>588</sup> Despite the finitude and the historicity of human existence, human understanding is not cut away from the infinite and the universality of the relation to the being of reality. For Gadamer this is the meaning of his assertion concerning the universality of language. As he writes: "For only because the universal relatedness of being is concealed from human eyes does it need to be discovered. . . . For the distinctive mark of the language of art is that the individual art work gathers into itself and expresses the symbolic character that, hermeneutically regarded, belongs to all being. In comparison with all linguistic and nonlinguistic tradition, the work of art is the absolute present for each particular present, and at the same time holds its word in readiness for every future."<sup>589</sup>

It is true that language has attained a central position in contemporary philosophy. But where does the importance of language for human studies lie? According to Gadamer, it does not lie in the attempt of old fashioned language studies to derive the world view of a society from its linguistic peculiarities, which must end up in a linguistic relativism. Nor is it a matter of making a comprehensive claim of the general science of language, that is, linguistics in the fashion of linguistic analytics.

Our being in language does not mean being absolutely pre-determined by language to the extent of having no freedom at all. Gadamer takes considerable care to emphasize the freedom of the individual in using language. This is not an absolute freedom over language in the sense that an individual, or even a group for that matter, can have a total control over language. Rather, language allows us this freedom, without being totally controlled by a speaker. Absolute freedom appears abstract in the face of the fact that the contradiction between what is real and what would seem to be rational is "ultimately indissoluble"; even this fact itself testifies to our freedom. In this sense, Gadamer restricts the sense of un-freedom neither to "natural necessities nor to the causal compulsion" determining our thinking. What we intend and hope for moves in the space of freedom, but this free space is not the space of an "abstract joy in construction but a space filled with reality by prior familiarity."<sup>590</sup> Therefore, Gadamer's contribution lies in his effort to find a resolution to the problem that Heidegger has stressed as the question of "truth as comprehended, not from the subject, but from Being."<sup>591</sup>

Since understanding has the structure of dialogical experience, and since the otherness of the object always asserts itself against the experiencing consciousness, this phenomenon needs to be explored in the context of the linguistic nature of experience. Gadamer explains the role of language in the following: "Wherever it [language] is doing what it is supposed to do (which is to actuate its communicative function), it does not work like a technique or an organon for reaching agreement with oneself, but it is itself this process and content of coming to agreement, even to the point of the buildup of a common world in which we can speak an understandable—no, the same—language with one another. This is the linguistic constitution of human life."<sup>592</sup>

The emphasis on the linguistic nature of understanding does not, however, constitute the sole force of Gadamer's arguments. Language is not merely an immutable sign system set aside from

the cognitive capabilities of human beings, but rather language is the embodiment of the movement of the finite and the infinite within the historical dimension of life.

Therefore, the finite nature of understanding does not necessarily coincide exactly with the full potentialities of language. Hence, the universality of hermeneutic experience is derived from the linguistic character of understanding. But this does not depend on a particular spoken language, but rather on the phenomenon of language itself. The real correspondence between understanding and language lies in the interrelatedness of being and thinking, as well as of being and language. Human reason is linguistic in the utmost sense of the word: thinking, in short, is always discursive.

The dialectical character of the mediation of the past and future in the present belongs essentially to the speculative nature of language in which the transmission of tradition and the understanding of it take place. The interpreter's historical existence, his historical conditionedness, is modified by the understanding of tradition precisely because of the linguistic nature of understanding. It is accomplished by the reflective act of historically-effected consciousness. The consciousness effected by history can raise itself above the historical effects of the object, but consciousness cannot overcome the otherness of the being of the object itself. But again, since understanding belongs as much to the object as it belongs to the subject, understanding cannot sublate, in the Hegelian sense, effective history. Actually, this limitation is the condition for the possibility of listening to the voice of the things themselves. Every understanding contributes something to effective history, either by bringing an aspect of the subject matter into a new light, or by confirming a quality in its historical timelessness.

It is precisely in the linguistic structure of understanding that the dialectical tension of history and the historicity of understanding are relieved from their self-referentiality. The hermeneutic experience moves within the primordiality of language as the fundamental element of all human experience. In language there are embedded the infinite potentialities of human understanding while at the same time the particularity belonging to any linguistic expression of reality discloses the limitedness of historical understanding. Being becomes manifest through linguistic expressions that may satisfy the anticipation of the completeness of the meaning of an object, an anticipation that initiates the movement of understanding; yet, it does not exhaust the meaning of the subject matter.

### **Constitution of Historical Continuity and Temporality**

Gadamer contends that the experience of history and especially the experience of art serve as the model of integration and assimilation of the meaning from the past, based on the experience of temporality. The experience of time acquires a new significance here. *Truth and Method* does not provide us with a systematic exposition of the ontological sense of historicity. Yet, in the context of the discussion concerning the experience of art, Gadamer draws attention to the necessity of a different concept of time,<sup>593</sup> not only in order to distinguish the natural sciences from the human sciences, but also in order to explain the historicity belonging to experience and life. In some of his writings Gadamer attempts to deal with the problem of time in order to clarify the hermeneutic problem of transcendence and immanence. Gadamer's starting point is to overcome the Hegelian dialectic of absolute knowledge through the relation of the concept and time.

The experience of time brings out two aspects of the problem of historicity as it relates to the hermeneutic theory of understanding. First, the concept of historicity refers to the temporality of human existence and to the continuity of the experience of life. Second, the historicity of understanding is related to the constitution of objects as historical in the study of history.

For Gadamer, the primary issue concerning historicity involves the experience of the continuity of life.<sup>594</sup> The ontological meaning of historicity signifies "something about the mode of being of man."<sup>595</sup> The experience of time reveals something about human self-understanding and about the being of understanding. How do human beings experience the temporality of their own existence?

Gadamer answers this question through an analysis of the problems involved in the conception of time as a flow of moments. The central point in all discussions concerning the nature of time concerns man's understanding of his own existence.<sup>596</sup> This is an existential issue because the experience of life is multi-dimensional, and this experience takes place in time.

The ordinary conception of time is derived from Aristotle's notion of time as the measurement of spatial motion. However, the other aspects of the experience of time are not totally absent in the traditional discussions. Aristotle, who gave this definition of time as the measure of spatial movement, was also aware of the being of time itself. Aristotle's long neglected concept of time, in which time exists according to the soul measuring it, is of great interest. Aristotle emphasizes the emptiness of time when it is defined in terms of a future expectation; time itself is the empty vessel that is fulfilled by the expected occurrence. Still the essence of time remains problematic, because time is still defined in terms of the things present in time.

Time in the sense of measurement seems to imply that time itself is "empty," because time, as measurement, refers to time only as something which makes temporal measurement possible. Time can be separated from what is measured. Starting with Aristotle, almost all traditional conceptions of time reveal a unique feature: time itself is experienced as "empty time which we fill up."<sup>597</sup> It means that time is primarily the sense for something in the future, not for something in the present.<sup>598</sup> According to Gadamer, "St. Augustine's reflections on the question of time in Book 10 of the *Confessions* represents a concrete example of the problems involved in accounting for such an experience of time. According to Gadamer, St. Augustine believes that the concept of time considered as a one-dimensional flow of moments, is incompatible with the experience of time in the human soul, with the multidimensional experience of time as present, remembered and foreseen time."<sup>599</sup> Human self-understanding moves back and forth through several temporal dimensions. But the traditional concept of time as the movement of 'nows' in a linear flow toward an indeterminate future cannot explain human self-experience, much less the experience of time itself.

The problem of understanding historical continuity is similar to the difficulty of explaining the reality of time according to a flow of moments. The ontological problem that arises from the concept of time as a flow of 'nows' is that the identity that is asserted of the Being of time cannot be explained. The solution Gadamer suggests requires that the problem must be formulated in terms of a metaphysics of becoming. In this perspective, the continuity of history can be explained organically.

Historical process moves in such a way that "in spite of all transitoriness there is no perishing without a simultaneous becoming."<sup>600</sup> So the contents of a tradition fill up the emptiness created by the passing of time that marks disappearance and becoming in the historical process. This is the way hermeneutic consciousness understands the continuity of history. This differs from an explanation of the being of the historical object as arising out of the endless flow of changes.<sup>601</sup> "The temporality of history is also not originally measured time, and where it is as such, it is not an arbitrary co-ordination of events to the periodicity of nature or of heaven."<sup>602</sup> Here lies the root of historicism and its form of relativism.

The historicist assumes the existence of an a-temporal standpoint from which perishing and becoming are observed, from which events are distinguished and articulated. In Gadamer's view this would lead to arbitrary decisions concerning the significance of events, thus reducing the differences of discontinuous events as a relative "fall and rise," "becoming and perishing."<sup>603</sup> Instead Gadamer explains the continuity of history in terms of the temporality of life, while preserving discontinuity in the concept of forgetfulness as a constituent element of the memory of the past.

The historical object acquires its meaning in its mediation through language. Considering language as part of the continuous movement of history resolves the problem of the relation between the infinity of potential world experiences and the finitude of the human understanding. It is this continual process of change that is the essence of the "historical movement of life itself."<sup>604</sup>

Historical continuity is constituted not by the linear movement of ordinary time, but through the unity of those turning points. History is a process of the continuity of the discontinuous moments that are united in being intended in the present as the memory of the past and the projection toward the future. In intending the significance of events, the time of these events is co-intended. The discontinuity of history is as genuine a phenomenon as its continuity, because what makes an event historical is not its occurrence in the flow of history, but its unique character. The real historical event is unique and, as such, it ultimately remains the source of discontinuity. The primary experience of history is a "sort of original experiencing of the time span of an epochal breakpoint (*Epocheneinschnitte*)."<sup>605</sup>

This means that historical events and historical meanings structure their own temporal pattern carved into the continuity of life-time. Therefore, the reality of history lies in our experience of things as changed, which points to discontinuity, and this experience "represents our encounter with the reality of history."<sup>606</sup>

The emphasis on fulfilled time changes the role of the "temporal consciousness of passing time, which conceives both dimensions of future and past as the infinite continuation passing time."<sup>607</sup> For Gadamer, the temporal experience of life has the structure of a change; unlike the changing successive moments of the continuous flow of time, its temporality has a discontinuity of a peculiar kind. The experience of life-time, experienced as the discontinuous experience of change, points back to "non-change, to an undifferentiated union of the 'present' in which that which life 'maintains' itself. This ontological status of the present belongs to the *Aion* in one's life time as such, without detriment to all changes which form one's 'course of life.'"<sup>608</sup> Gadamer describes the concept of *Aion* as the "temporal structure of that which endures as one and the same in every alteration of life's phases, namely liveliness." It is not necessary to presuppose the givenness of a self-identical ego; it is "rather the complete identity of life with itself, which fulfills the Present by the constant virtuality of possibilities."<sup>609</sup>

Life experience moves within the awareness of the end which is not given as such. Is it possible to ground the "temporal character of historical experience" on the temporal character of life-experience?<sup>610</sup> The relation between time and the consciousness that is aware of time should not be decided in favor of one or the other.

By stripping the present of its privilege of being the sole moment of historical experience, the conflict (within the individual) of immediate experience with the mediated tradition is not resolved in favor of the one or the other. Rather, Gadamer argues that both change in the process. The finitude and historicity of understanding mean that the individual is able to "open himself to a more inclusive nature and a more inclusive tradition."<sup>611</sup>

In hermeneutic investigation, history is neither a closed horizon of the past, nor is history the projected end of a process in the future. Rather, hermeneutic experience transforms the historical continuity measured as the continuity of change into a continuity of disjunctive moments united with reference to the totality intended, yet never given. The temporal distance in the sense of the passing of time, considered by historicism as an obstacle for understanding the past, is transformed into an infinite possibility for meaning through the mediation of the past into the present in language.

In conclusion, from these we can infer that the doctrine of historicity developed from being a methodological concept in human studies and then acquired an ontological sense. Gadamer expounds the ontological significance of historicity by applying it to the problem of understanding in the human sciences. Therefore, the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle should not be taken as an epistemological category.

Since understanding has this significant character of belonging to the ontological structure of human existence, human self-understanding takes place only within the continuity of life experience and within the continuity of history. Gadamer's theory dealing with the problem of historical understanding presupposes an ontological notion of the experience of the continuity of life and the experience of the continuity of history. Since the unity of the experiences of life cannot be explained in terms of a reflectively self-conscious subject, Gadamer introduces historicity to account for the ground of the continuity of both the experience of life and of the experience of the continuity of history. Gadamer shows the existence of transcendence within the temporality of life by holding to the universality of hermeneutic experience constituted through language. The transcendental view is also dissolved in the openness of historical process, effective history or *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Gadamer acknowledges that our thinking process does not originate from a self-consciously determined point of view, but rather arises in a manner determined by the otherness of the historical object in a dialogical situation. Gadamer maintains the universality of understanding in the face of the temporality of human existence. He advances this thesis in two senses.

In the first sense, interpretation as the explication of understanding is a linguistic experience which is set in opposition to the universality of understanding. Interpretation must be taken back into the process of understanding as a limiting case. In the second sense, this means that historical understanding cannot be thought of from the point of view of abstract universality.

Despite the fact that the critics of Gadamer have certain valid points, we have shown that the charges of relativism cannot stand, because they are based on an abstract concept of the universality of knowledge. As we have pointed out throughout this investigation, Gadamer's thesis is not free from its own ambiguities, but its strength lies in the transcendental claim of philosophical hermeneutics

## Conclusion

We have shown in the final chapter that in Gadamer's hermeneutics, both language and history perform significant roles. The question guiding our inquiry has been whether Gadamer's attempt to deal with the historical and linguistic nature of human experience is intended to develop a philosophical theory without any appeal to a supra-temporal, absolute, *a priori* foundation or whether he is committed to a certain metaphysical, ontological point of view. In this study, we have argued that history cannot be posited as a formal temporal category of knowledge, but rather must be conceived in terms of its contents mediated in language. Language is intimately related to the reality presenting itself through language.

Gadamer does not present the transcendental and ontological aspects of his theory in order to establish a foundation of knowledge. He does not offer us a system based on *a priori*, absolute foundations. He wants to keep the immanent and external analysis separate, and he wants to distinguish the effort of describing the conditions of understanding from the method of the application of these conditions to particular cases of understanding in human sciences.

This inquiry started with an examination of the problems that arise precisely from the description of understanding as conditioned not only by the pre-given cultural and historical conditions (e.g., tradition, prejudices), but also by language. In the first chapter of this dissertation, we have presented the question of relativism imputed to philosophical hermeneutics because of questions raised by the hermeneutic principle of historicity. However, our analysis also has taken into account Gadamer's claim that his theory offers a solution to the problem of historicism and relativism in the theories concerning the method of historical knowledge.

Philosophical hermeneutics transcends the set of problems involved in understanding the subjective intentions of historical agents or of the author of a text. It transcends these problems by explicating meaning in terms of the text's presentation of its subject matter through language as an autonomous medium of meaning.

The other problem philosophical hermeneutics avoids is the concern with the question of how the text was understood by its author and its original audience. Philosophical hermeneutics' concern, instead, is the question how the meaning of a text can be continually reappropriated and understood by later generations in their own historical conditions by using the standard of the text itself.

Following this, we have demonstrated that Gadamer's arguments against the ideal of method and objectivity are directed against their implications for understanding history. Hermeneutic philosophy raises two objections concerning the relevance of the natural scientific ideal of objectivity and the methodological criteria for knowledge in the human sciences. Understanding in the human sciences is accomplished not from a free and distanced position but arises from immediate life concerns, prejudices and traditions that shape both the interpreting subject and the object of the research. Moreover, not only is the interpretation guided by fore-understanding, but also the objectivity of the result cannot be measured by the yardstick of method according the model of the natural sciences.

Since Gadamer accepts Heidegger's insight that interpretation and understanding are not two distinct activities but rather are separate dimensions of the same activity, Gadamer identifies the common sphere of understanding as the linguistic givenness of the human world. Philosophical hermeneutics is a theory about the condition of interpretation of this world, and not about the applications of these described conditions to specific, regional studies. The notion that

understanding is not only a problem of method and that philosophical hermeneutics concerns the ontological structure of the experience of understanding was the subject of the third chapter.

We examined the claim that philosophical hermeneutics raises the pre-scientific conditions of understanding to reflection, because the natural sciences do not concern themselves with the ultimate ends for which their results are served, nor with the fundamental mode of human relatedness to world. We argued that formulating this universal aspect of hermeneutics does not mean that philosophical hermeneutics should be applicable to all areas of knowledge. We drew attention to the fact that philosophical hermeneutics' concern with the conditions of understanding is not limited to knowledge in the humanities or natural sciences alone but to the experience of understanding in general.

We have analyzed the debates between Gadamer and his critics and have found that the methodological debate centers on the issue of the objective reproduction of the meaning intended by the author. We concluded that even in a theory according to which interpretation is a process of reconstructing the original meaning of a text or an historical event, the issue of the possibility of the objectivity of textual interpretations cannot be easily decided.

Hermeneutics, in the sense of understanding in the human sciences, is itself determined not only by the temporal historical distance of the objects of study, but also by the historical situation of interpretation. There is general agreement on the issue that no single interpretation can be exhaustive and determinative to the extent that it might completely forestall all subsequent interpretations. No matter how approximate an interpretation is to the original, there is always an excess of meaning contained in the text. The incompleteness of interpretation is the result of the possibility that the text may always address different persons at different times. The methodological concern should be the validity of interpretations, not a self-identical meaning to be established once and for all.

In addition, we have examined the arguments made by the critical theorists against the universality of hermeneutics. In their arguments the intersubjective world of communication and social practice is elevated to a contingently absolute position meant to function as the foundation of knowledge and the criterion of truth claims. Habermas and Apel both raise free communication to the status of an ideal for hermeneutic practice itself.

The result of these debates, we have shown, ends in a stalemate because of the competing conceptions held by all sides. When Gadamer speaks of the historicity of understanding and tradition, he does not appeal to the truism that every human being belongs to a tradition. Rather, he means that the contents of tradition are not something objectified within a single consciousness, but are constantly expanding through language and, therefore, involve a community. Historical continuity and the meaning that encompasses this continuity are not experienced by a single individual consciousness, but have a social significance. Philosophical hermeneutics seeks to discover how the meaning intended by an individual author or the meaning understood by an interpreter acquire historical significance.

Hermeneutics deals with the interpretations of texts, as well as the inquiry into the interpretive nature of human self-understanding as a mode of being. The practice of textual interpretation furnishes an exemplary case for revealing the ontological structure of understanding. In this sense, inquiry into the historicity of understanding is distinguished from historical study which attempts to understand the empirical course of history.

From this conflict in the interpretation of philosophical hermeneutics, we drew the conclusion that the best option seems to be recognizing language as the ontological ground of Gadamer's theory. Accepting the dependence of human knowledge on language is not a new feature of

Gadamer's philosophy. Probably our views on how language and reality are related is always the underlying matter. The obvious fact that language is the condition for understanding and communication is affirmed by the additional claim that thinking itself is largely a linguistic process.

The concept of historicity has served as the basis of the distinction between what is permanent and what is transitory in historical life. For Gadamer, historicity signifies the relation between understanding and its object. This relation is neither a subjective nor an objective relation, but precedes the subject-object distinction. The historicity of understanding does not require for itself a reality of history conceived by means of the facts discovered by the positive sciences, as well as by means of the *a priori* constructions of philosophy. The consciousness of historical effects is not a principle to regulate the efforts to comprehend the totality of the historical world, which is only a regulative idea in historical research.

Finally, we have argued that consciousness of historical transitoriness is not shaken by the threats of relativism, because historical life also has its own stability and continuity. The charges of relativism against hermeneutic theory, based on its assertion of the historicity of understanding, can only be anchored in the consciousness of the absolute. This also characterizes one of Gadamer's arguments against relativism.

Without simply repeating or falling into the inertia of permanence, philosophy must do justice to transitoriness by preserving the productivity of life through recognizing the past in its effect on the present. Mediating the past towards the future, philosophy can do more justice to the human search for truth than seeking to be scientific without raising fundamental questions. It is no accident that Gadamer chooses the experience of as the first instance of hermeneutic understanding, as an example of the integration of the meaning or truth of artworks from the past and the present. With this summary, we come to the central conclusion. Despite the fact that Gadamer claims that he describes only the ontological significance of the experience of understanding and takes the practice of textual interpretation as the content of this description, he seems to exaggerate the function of method in interpretation. On this particular issue critics have a valid point, although their own suggestions might be untenable.

The other point we have raised in this study is the following. Gadamer takes the critique of subjectivity to be ultimate and irreversible. This criticism may be valid, as far as the continuity of the products of life is concerned. That is to say, the continuity of historical life and its mediation cannot be attributed to the subjective intentions and reconstruction of historical conditions of meanings intended by individuals. In order to avoid subjectivity, Gadamer tends to de-subjectivize all the objects of knowledge. It is as if everything expressed in language acquires its own independent existence. There is a tendency in Gadamer towards linguistic idealism. His only defense against this accusation is negative, that there is no transcendental subjectivity in which the infinite possibility of language may become completed.

However, Gadamer emphasizes the relevance of the knowledge of the human sciences for human self-understanding that can be spoken of only in terms of an individual subject's self-understanding. Again, it is the subject who is required to engage in self-critique and to test his own prejudices in encountering the truth claims of the contents of tradition. The emphasis on the transcendental conditions of knowledge in language or history cannot de-emphasize the individuality and particularity of subjects. This becomes more clear when Gadamer avoids the attribution of any role to the author for specifying the meaning of a text. It seems that Gadamer is thinking more in terms of the meaning of historical events than the meaning of historical texts. Historical events may acquire meaning that cannot be restricted to the historical agents' plans and

intentions due to limitations of their own self-understanding and the fact that circumstances cannot be under their control. But the same cannot be said with equal certainty about the text as the product of an author.

It seems that those cases concerning anonymous products, such as myths or texts whose authorship cannot be determined, have a strong influence on Gadamer's view. But from this, we cannot infer that in all understandings of texts *mens auctoris* is of minor importance. Probably the intention of an author cannot be established as definite and cannot be taken as normative, but it cannot be left out completely from the procedures of interpretation. Gadamer is right to say that the text acquires its own autonomy and existence as an artwork in presenting a view of reality. This may be true of most of those texts with a poetic quality, texts which are linguistic art in the perfect sense. Language and the being of the text may be harmonized in a linguistic artwork. However, again, if the text is intended to convey something, it may point beyond itself, to its subject matter. It would also mean that we leave the text behind, if understanding concerns the subject matter. We cannot determine the meaning of the subject matter of the text simply through a survey of all possible relations obtaining between language and the presentation of the subject matter in it. In the effort to specify the text's reference to a particular content, the author's intention might be a necessary guide.

Nevertheless, it cannot be demanded from Gadamer's theory that it be applicable to all cases of the interpretation of literary texts. Rather, some cases merely show the limitations of Gadamer's critique of methodological hermeneutics. Gadamer's critique of method is not unreserved. He simply assigns to method a secondary role. He could have been more precise concerning these distinctions, for example, by showing that methodological procedures are secondary, not in the sense of understanding a text, but in the sense of understanding its truth. Methods apply only to specifying external conditions of texts and historical events, while their meaning and truth are not limited to those features identified.

Gadamer is right to insist that claiming that a text has a certain form, for instance, that it is a philosophical text, or a poetic text, does not convey anything about the truth claim of its subject matter. Methodological interpretation has its limits. However, Gadamer does not elaborate these distinctions. He is not always consistent in his claim that philosophical hermeneutics is not intended to propose a new method of interpretation or to interfere with the internal criteria of what is considered knowledge. He has continued to engage in discussions concerning texts and interpretation, not only on the theoretical level, but also on the practical level. His critics have legitimate points on specific issues concerning the requirements of method in the actual practice of interpretation and understanding in the social sciences. However, in the overall structure of Gadamer's theory, the objection of relativism cannot be sustained.

On the more positive side, philosophical hermeneutics opened up the ontological horizon of the problems of interpretation and understanding texts from the past. Historical distance is no longer seen as a gulf to be closed by a methodological abstraction from the value and the truth claims of texts from the past, because this distance is already filled with the continuity of tradition through language. Gadamer's conception of the ontological relation of language, reason and reality provides a position for defending his thesis against the charges of relativism. The knowledge and the truth experience in hermeneutic understanding is the truth of Being through the medium of language.

In addition, the emphasis on the forms of knowledge in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, in terms of concrete results and the universal validity of these results, is an important element of Gadamer's thesis. Furthermore, we can include in our analysis the experience of art which is applied to texts

that take the form of literary art. This also provides evidence that language, rather than mere historical process, is thought to be constitutive of the integration of past meaning into the present. Another strategy in the battle against the problem of relativism consists in examining the concept of time, and proposing an alternative view of time that is more appropriate to historical experience and knowledge. Whether this attempt is successful cannot be decided on the basis of the fact that it occupies a relatively small space in the body of Gadamer's writings. But this can definitely contribute to an attempt to avoid relativism.

Because of his Kantian inclination toward the notion of the limitation of any possible transition from finite understanding to the understanding of the infinite, Gadamer does not follow Hegel's philosophy all the way. Instead, Gadamer appropriates Hegel's philosophy in his analysis of the forms of knowledge in art, history and philosophy. These three forms of knowledge represent the mediation of understanding without presupposing a self-conscious subject, the positive givenness of the object, or historical relativism.

The universality of philosophical hermeneutics as a theory has the same structure as that of a practical theory. It cannot be expected, for instance, that Aristotle's theory of moral practice specify a particular norm for action in a particular situation. Yet this in no way diminishes the value of Aristotle's theory of moral practice. The same can be said of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory. In this sense, the universality of hermeneutics has the same character of universality as that of practical philosophy. Like practical philosophy, philosophical hermeneutics stands beyond the alternatives of transcendental reflection and empirical pragmatic knowledge.

## Notes

1. References to this work in the present essay are to *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989) and to the original German, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965). (Henceforth *TM* and *WM*, respectively.)
2. Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," *Gesammelte Werke*, 10 vol. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986-1995), II, p. 497. (Henceforth *GW*).
3. *TM*, 258/*WM*, 244.
4. Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," trans. by J. L. Close, in *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 110; first printed in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1975): 1-51. (Henceforth, *PHC*).
5. *TM*, 262/*WM*, 248.
6. Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung, *GW*, II, p. 481. Gadamer reports how the second part of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* "evoked" in him "sympathy for ... historical continuity." See *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 5.
7. *TM*, 258/*WM*, 244; Gadamer maintains that "overcoming the aporias of historicism" was not one of the aims of Heidegger's "hermeneutic phenomenology." *TM*, 258/*WM*, 244. Gadamer reminds us that the significance of "Heidegger's fundamental ontology was not that it was the solution to the problem of historicism." *TM*, 256/*WM*, 242.
8. Nietzsche refers to historicism as the "malady of history." He states that the "excess of history has attacked the plastic power of life that no more understands how to use the past as a means of strength and nourishment." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), p. 69.
9. For Gadamer's evaluation of Nietzsche's skepticism concerning the value of historical knowledge, see his "Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften," in *GW*, II, pp. 37-53; English translation "Truth in the Human Sciences," trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. by Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), p. 27; "Was ist Wahrheit?" *GW*, II, p. 45; English translation "What is Truth?" trans. Brice R. Wachterhauser, in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, p. 34; and, *TM*, 304/*WM*, 287.
10. Gadamer, "Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften," in *GW*, II, pp. 37-43; "Truth in the Human Sciences," pp. 25-32.
11. *PHC*, 110.
12. *TM*, xxiii, 290/*WM*, xxvii, 275; Also see Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 125. (Henceforth referred to as *PH*).
13. *TM*, 265-307/*WM*, 250-290.
14. *TM*, 266/*WM*, 251.
15. *TM*, 277-284/*WM*, 261-269.
16. *TM*, 268/*WM*, 253-254.
17. *TM*, 284/*WM*, 269.
18. *TM*, 283/*WM*, 267.
19. *TM*, 280/*WM*, 264-265.

20. Gadamer uses *Überlieferung* and *Tradition*, (*TM*, xxi, xxii, 264ff./*WM*, xv, xxvii, 250ff.) both of which are translated as "tradition." He uses the former term more often. *Überlieferung* refers to contents of a distinction made by Droysen between written and documentary sources [*Quellen*] and other historical vestiges [*Überresten*]. For Droysen sources belong to a linguistic world, which help to constitute the linguistically interpreted world, while remnants are only fragments of the past that helps us to reconstruct the past world. Gadamer treats both under the concept of tradition. Gadamer asks: "where does an archaic image of a god belong, for instance? Is it a vestige like a tool? Or is it a piece of world-interpretation, like everything that is handed down linguistically?" Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 99.

21. *TM*, 279/*WM*, 263.
22. *TM*, 301/*WM*, 285.
23. *TM*, 302/*WM*, 286.
24. *TM*, 304/*WM*, 288.
25. Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences," p. 26.
26. *TM*, 294/*WM*, 278.
27. *TM*, 298/*WM*, 282.
28. *TM*, 364/*WM*, 346.
29. Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences," p. 26.
30. *TM*, 475/*WM*, 451.
31. *TM*, 282-283/*WM*, 267.
32. *TM*, 284/*WM*, 268.
33. *TM*, 285/*WM*, 269.
34. *TM*, 294/*WM*, 278.
35. *TM*, 284/*WM*, 269.
36. *TM*, 300/*WM*, 284.
37. Gadamer writes: "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author." *TM*, 296/*WM*, 280.
38. *TM*, 296/*WM*, 280.
39. *TM*, 373/*WM*, 355.
40. *TM*, 474/*WM*, 450.
41. Frithjof Rodi, "Hermeneutics and the Meaning of Life: A Critique of Gadamer's Interpretation of Dilthey," trans. K. H. Heiges, in *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, eds. Hugh J. Silverman and Don Idhe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 84.
42. *TM*, 552; Cf. "Nachwort zur 3. Auflage," *GW*, II, p. 450.
43. *TM*, xxiii/*WM*, xxvii.
44. *TM*, xxi/*WM*, xv.
45. Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 143-170; E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 245-264; Emilio Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962); English translation, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," trans. Josef Bleicher, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition From Ast To Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 177-188; Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). For Gadamer's response, see "Hermeneutik und Historismus," *Philosophische Rundschau* 9 (1962), pp. 241-276; English translation as

"Supplement I" in *Truth and Method*, pp. 505-541; "Replik" in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, ed. Karl-Otto Apel, et. al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 283-317; reprinted in *GW*, II; English translation "Reply to my Critics," trans. George H. Lenier, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

46. Betti, for instance, argues against Gadamer: "it can be agreed that any view of history depends on the historian's perspective and that each historical phenomenon can be looked at from different points of view; but it is impossible to derive a conclusive objection to the objectivity of historical interpretation from the historicity of the standpoint of the historian." See, Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 172.

47. Charles Larmore argues that because Gadamer wrongly follows Hegel "in assuming that the important differences among beliefs . . . lie always *between* different historical epochs rather than *within* them, the kind of relativism he embraces is a historical relativism." See his "Tradition, Objectivity and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 154.

48. Maurice Mandelbaum, *Problems of Historical Knowledge*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 20.

49. *TM*, 280/*WM*, 265.

50. *TM*, 280-281/*WM*, 264-265.

51. Richard Bernstein, "From Hermeneutics to Praxis," in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Notre Dame; Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 287; first printed in *The Review of Metaphysics* 35, no. 4 (1982), pp. 823-45. Also see his, "What is the Difference That Makes a Difference," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 350.

52. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 36.

53. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 215.

54. *TM*, 513/*WM*, 484-485.

55. *TM*, 329/*WM*, 312.

56. *TM*, 302-306/*WM*, 286-290.

57. *TM*, 341/*WM*, 324.

58. E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 49.

59. *TM*, 361/*WM*, 343-344.

60. *TM*, 361-362/*WM*, 344.

61. *TM*, 373/*WM*, 355; cf. *TM*, 183/*WM*, 171.

62. The term "historical consciousness," is a translation of Gadamer's term "*historisches Bewusstsein*" (*WM*, 162ff.) and the term "historically effected consciousness" translates "*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*" (*WM*, 324-360).

63. *TM*, 197, 204/*WM*, 85, 205.

64. Karl Mannheim, "Historismus," *Archive für Sozialwissenschaft und Socialpolitik* 52, no. 1 (1924); translated and reprinted in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kerskemeti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 84-133; see especially p. 86.

65. *TM*, 200/*WM*, 188.

66. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), pp. 26-34; Also see Leo Strauss and Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Correspondence concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 (1978), pp. 5-12; cf. *TM*, 533/*WM*, 504.

67. *TM*, 285/WM, 269.
68. *TM*, 341/WM, 324.
69. *TM*, 344/WM, 327.
70. *TM*, 344-345/WM, 327-328.
71. David Couzens Hoy, *Critical Circle: Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 69.
72. Hoy, *Critical Circle*, 69.
73. Hoy, *Critical Circle*, 69.
74. Jean Grondin, "Hermeneutics and Relativism," in *Festival of Interpretations: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work*, ed. Kathleen Wright (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), pp. 42-62.
75. *TM*, 534/WM, 505.
76. Gadamer, "The Nature of the Things and the Language of Things," *PH*, 80.
77. *TM*, 477/WM, 452.
78. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic reflection," *PH*, 36.
79. Gadamer, "On the Natural Inclination of Human Beings Toward Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 144. (Henceforth *RAS*).
80. *TM*, 238/WM, 238.
81. "Natural Inclination Toward Philosophy," *RAS*, 146.
82. *TM*, 265-379/WM, 250-360.
83. Dilthey, *GS*, V (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1957); quoted by George Misch in his introduction to this volume, "Vorbericht des Herausgebers," p. Liii; also see *GS*, I, p. 116; VII, pp. 117, 191, 358; cf. Gadamer, *PHC*, 119.
84. *TM*, 186/WM, 174.
85. *TM*, 182-183/WM, 170-171.
86. *TM*, 182/WM, 170.
87. *TM*, 182/WM, 171.
88. *TM*, 183/WM, 171.
89. *TM*, 184/WM, 173.
90. *TM*, 185/WM, 173. Cf. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: Hand Written Manuscripts*, trans. J. Duke and J. Forstmann (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); partially reprinted in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. and trans. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1988), p. 81.
91. According to Gadamer, explication and application are not different functions of interpretation but rather they constitute a unity. See, *TM*, 308/WM, 291.
92. *TM*, 183/WM, 172.
93. *TM*, 184/WM, 172; cf. *TM*, 269/WM, 253.
94. *TM*, 186/WM, 174.
95. *TM*, 185/WM, 174.
96. *TM*, 191/WM, 179; Habermas too starts from a similar position when he writes: "The task of universal pragmatics is to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding." See his "What is Universal Pragmatics?" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), p. 1
97. *TM*, 185/WM, 173.

98. Compare Betti's statement: "Whenever something from the mind of an Other approaches us there is a call on our ability to understand." Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 160.
99. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, p. 78.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
101. *TM*, 185/*WM*, 173.
102. *TM*, 192/*WM*, 180.
103. *TM*, 189/*WM*, 177.
104. *TM*, 192/*WM*, 180.
105. *TM*, 192/*WM*, 180; cf. Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 141.
106. *TM*, 193/*WM*, 181.
107. *TM*, 194/*WM*, 182.
108. *TM*, 187/*WM*, 175.
109. *TM*, 188/*WM*, 176.
110. *TM*, 190/*WM*, 178.
111. *TM*, 191/*WM*, 179.
112. *TM*, 191/*WM*, 179.
113. *TM*, 191/*WM*, 179.
114. *TM*, 197/*WM*, 195.
115. "Because myths cannot be traced to a single person as author there is no technical interpretation for myths." Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, p. 79.
116. *TM*, 197/*WM*, 185.
117. *TM*, 198/*WM*, 185.
118. *TM*, 197/*WM*, 185.
119. *TM*, 198/*WM*, 186.
120. *TM*, 199/*WM*, 187.
121. *TM*, 199/*WM*, 186.
122. *TM*, 201/*WM*, 189.
123. *TM*, 256/*WM*, 242.
124. *TM*, 201/*WM*, 189.
125. *TM*, 201/*WM*, 189.
126. *TM*, 202/*WM*, 189.
127. *TM*, 202/*WM*, 190.
128. Gadamer makes a similar presentation of aesthetic consciousness leading to aesthetic differentiation in which the uniqueness and individual value of the work of art is flattened in the very search for this as an instance of artistic creative genius. See *TM*, 42-80/*WM*, 39-77.
129. *TM*, 202/*WM*, 190.
130. *TM*, 207/*WM*, 195.
131. *TM*, 208/*WM*, 195-196.
132. *TM*, 209/*WM*, 197.
133. *TM*, 209/*WM*, 197.
134. *TM*, 165/*WM*, 158.
135. *TM*, 198/*WM*, 186.
136. *TM*, 199/*WM*, 187.
137. *TM*, 224/*WM*, 210. (Italics in the original).
138. *TM*, 222/*WM*, 209.

139. *TM*, 223/*WM*, 210.
140. *Ibid.*
141. *TM*, 225/*WM*, 212.
142. *TM*, 225/*WM*, 212.
143. *TM*, 234/*WM*, 221.
144. *TM*, 236/*WM*, 222; Dilthey *GS*, VII, p. 347.
145. *TM*, 199/*WM*, 187.
146. *TM*, 235/*WM*, 222.
147. *TM*, 237/*WM*, 223-224.
148. *TM*, 237/*WM*, 224.
149. *TM*, 237/*WM*, 225.
150. *TM*, 237/*WM*, 224.
151. *TM*, 198/*WM*, 185.
152. *TM*, 238/*WM*, 225.
153. *TM*, 239/*WM*, 225-226.
154. *TM*, 238-239/*WM*, 225.
155. *TM*, 238-239/*WM*, 225.
156. *TM*, 242/*WM*, 229.
157. *TM*, 242/*WM*, 229.
158. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 72. (Henceforth *BT*.) All subsequent references will be to the translation (*BT*) and to the original German (*SZ*).
159. *BT*, 25/*SZ*, 5.
160. Gadamer writes: "this burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy" and the traditional metaphysical account of being as "what is present." *TM*, 257/*WM*, 243.
161. *BT*, 182/*SZ*, 143.
162. *BT*, 188/*SZ*, 148.
163. *BT*, 201/*SZ*, 158. For a more comprehensive analysis of Heidegger's concept of the "as-structure of understanding" in terms of propositional truth and its implications for logic, see Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Das Logische Vorurteil: Untersuchungen zur Wahrheitstheorie des frühen Heidegger* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1994), especially, pp. 129-163.
164. Although Heidegger does not use "Vor-verständnis," *Vorverstehen* appears once in *Being and Time* (*BT*, 344/*SZ*, 297). Emerich Coreth traces the use of the term "Vor-verständnis" to Bultmann's discussion about hermeneutics. See his *Grundfragen der Hermeneutik: ein philosophischer Beitrag* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), p. 99.
165. *BT*, 191-192/*SZ*, 150-151.
166. *BT*, 195/*SZ*, 153.
167. *BT*, 195/*SZ*, 153.
168. *BT*, 195/*SZ*, 153.
169. *BT*, 434/*SZ*, 382. "Historicity" here translates Heidegger's *Gesichichtlichkeit* in preference to the later commentators' usage. Macquarrie and Robinson render it as "historicality." They translate *Historizität* as historicity. See *BT*, p. 31, note 2.
170. *BT*, 425-427/*SZ*, 373-375.
171. *BT*, 427/*SZ*, 375.
172. *BT*, 378/*SZ*, 329.

173. *BT*, 429/SZ, 377; See also Otto Pöggeler, *Heidegger und die hermeneutische Philosophie* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1983), p. 102.
174. *BT*, 429/SZ, 377.
175. *BT*, 449/SZ, 397.
176. *BT*, 41/SZ, 20.
177. Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," *GW*, II, p. 487.
178. Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," *GW*, II, p. 492.
179. *TM*, 275/WM, 259.
180. *TM*, 273/WM, 258.
181. *TM*, 275/WM, 259.
182. *TM*, 275/WM, 260.
183. *TM*, 290/WM, 274.
184. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 5th ed., 1. vol. of *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), p. 316, note 240, Gadamer has inserted a footnote indicating that historical distance is not the only problem, he discusses distance and otherness in the third Part in the light of language. Cf. *TM*, 311, note 240.
185. *TM*, 292/WM, 276.
186. *TM*, 293/WM, 277.
187. *TM*, 293/WM, 277.
188. *TM*, 293/WM, 277.
189. *TM*, 472-473/WM, 447-448.
190. *TM*, 473/WM, 449.
191. *TM*, 297/WM, 280.
192. *TM*, 341/WM, 324. We prefer to use "consciousness of the history of effects" for Gadamer's phrase *wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein*. It must be pointed out that none of the English translations of this phrase is universally accepted. In the English translation of *Truth and Method* it is rendered as "historically effected consciousness" which gives the impression that consciousness is historically effected, or is consciousness of the effects of history. Another suggestion is to use consciousness of "the history of influences" which draws attention to the history of influences of a text. See John M. Connelly and Thomas Keutner, introduction to *Hermeneutics versus Sciences? Three German Views: Essays by H.-G. Gadamer, E.K. Specht, W. Stegmüller*, ed. and trans. John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 33. It seems that Gadamer's purpose is to draw attention to the fact that the interpretations of a text belong to its meaning, and the necessity of the consciousness that we take a text to mean would become part of it. Therefore Gadamer gives a critical role to this term.
193. *TM*, 272/WM, 257.
194. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," *RAS*, 98.
195. Gadamer, "Zur Zirkel der Verstehens," *GW* II, p. 60; English translation, "On the Circle of Understanding," in *Hermeneuticsversus Sciences? Three German Views: Essays by H.-G. Gadamer, E.K. Specht, W. Stegmüller*, ed. and trans. John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 72.
196. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," *RAS*, 98.
197. *TM*, 294/WM, 278.
198. *TM*, 291, 311/WM, 275, 295.

199. "Zur Zirkel der Verstehens", *GW* II, p. 62; "On the Circle of Understanding," p. 75; Cf. *TM*, 260/ *WM*, 246: "*all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding.*" (Italics in the original).
200. *TM*, 180, 260/*WM*, 168, 246.
201. Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding," p. 74.
202. *TM*, 293-294/ *WM*, 277-278.
203. Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding," p. 75.
204. "On the Circle of Understanding," p. 77; Also see *TM*, 374-375/*WM*, 356-357.
205. "On the Circle of Understanding," p. 78.
206. *Ibid.*
207. *TM*, 300-307/*WM*, 284-290.
208. *TM*, 275/*WM*, 260.
209. *TM*, 211/*WM*, 198.
210. *TM*, 306/*WM*, 289.
211. *TM*, 306/*WM*, 290.
212. *TM*, xxxi/*WM*, xvii.
213. *TM*, 307-312/*WM*, 290-295.
214. *TM*, 324-341/*WM*, 307-323
215. *TM*, 308/*WM*, 291.
216. *TM*, 328/*WM*, 311.
217. *TM*, 309/*WM*, 292.
218. Gadamer mentions experiences of alienation in aesthetic and historical consciousness. He explains why he has chosen these forms of experience of alienation in the *Truth and Method*. See "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," *PH*, 3-17.
219. *TM*, 295/*WM*, 279.
220. Fred Lawrence, review of "Truth and Method, Hegel's Dialectic and Philosophical Hermeneutics" by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Religious Studies Review* 3 (Jan. 1977), p. 36.
221. *Ibid.* This phrase is not in Gadamer's text, but Lawrence is not wrong in using it, because it is implied there. See *TM*, xxxvi/*WM*, xxi.
222. *TM*, xxiv/*WM*, xxvii.
223. Gadamer, "Die Universalität des hermeneutischen Problems," *GW*, II, p. 120; "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," *PH*, 4.
224. Gadamer, "On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy," *RAS*, 3.
225. Gadamer, "Die Stellung der Philosophie in der heutigen Gesellschaft," in *Das Problem der Sprache*, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1967), p. 12.
226. *TM*, 350/*WM*, 333.
227. *TM*, 350/*WM*, 333. Gadamer is describing Aristotle's analysis of induction in *Posterior Analytics*, II, 19.
228. *TM*, 352/*WM*, 334; see also Gadamer, "Man and Language," *PH*, 63-64.
229. *TM*, 352/*WM*, 334-335.
230. *TM*, 352/*WM*, 335.
231. *Ibid.*
232. *TM*, 353/*WM*, 335.
233. *TM*, 353/*WM*, 336.
234. *TM*, 350/*WM*, 332-333.

235. *TM*, 354/*WM*, 337.
236. *TM*, 355/*WM*, 338.
237. *TM*, 353/*WM*, 336.
238. Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 73
239. *TM*, 354-355/*WM*, 337-338.
240. *TM*, 355/*WM*, 338.
241. *TM*, xxix/*WM*, xv.
242. *PHC*, 112.
243. *PHC*, 111.
244. Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," trans. Dennis J. Schmidt and Richard Palmer, in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Richard Palmer and Diane P. Michelfelder (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 25
245. Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p. 58.
246. *Ibid.*
247. Gadamer, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," p. 59.
248. *Ibid.*, p. 62
249. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
250. *TM*, 112/*WM*, 107.
251. *TM*, 113/*WM*, 108.
252. *TM*, 97/*WM*, 92.
253. Gadamer, "Theory, Technology, Practice: The Task of the Science of Man," trans. H. Brotz, *Social Research* 44, no. 3 (1977), p. 540.
254. Gadamer, "The Task of the Science," p. 540.
255. *PHC*, 111.
256. *PHC*, 111.
257. *PHC*, 112.
258. *PHC*, 112.
259. Gadamer, "Selbstdarstellung," *GW*, II, p. 497.
260. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Stuttgart: G. B. Teubner; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1957), vol. 5, p. 437. (Henceforth *GS*).
261. Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," *PH*, 15.
262. *Ibid.*
263. *TM*, xxiv/*WM*, xxvii.
264. *TM*, 475-476/*WM*, 451.
265. *TM*, 457/*WM*, 433.
266. *TM*, 347/*WM*, 329.
267. *TM*, xxix/*WM*, xiv.
268. *TM*, xxix/*WM*, xiv.
269. Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik," *GW*, II, 232; "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 19.
270. Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik," *GW*, II, 233.
271. *TM*, xxii/*WM*, xxvii.
272. *TM*, xxii1/*WM*, xxvii.

273. *TM*, 59/WM, 56.
274. The title of Part I is: "Freilegung der Wahrheitsfrage an der Erfahrung der Kunst," WM, 1-161; *TM*, 1-169.
275. *TM*, 85/WM, 81.
276. *TM*, 92/WM, 87. Meaning as *a priori* is the central premise of Gadamer's theory. As Apel comments: "hermeneutic analysis commences from the fact that intelligible human behavioral reactions as linguistically-related intentional forms, themselves possess the quality of understanding." Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 55.
277. *TM*, 91/WM, 87.
278. Gadamer recognizes it as Heidegger's insight to have shown that pure perception is an abstraction from the concreteness of life as it is lived, and is the fundamental presupposition of the "objectivity" of scientific research and the "ontological prejudice" behind it. See Gadamer, "Philosophie und Literatur" in *Was ist Literatur? Phänomenologische Forschungen II*, ed. E. W. Ort (Freiburg: Alber, 1981), p. 19; English translation, "Philosophy and Literature," trans. Anthony J. Steinbeck, *Man and World* 18 (1985), p. 242.
279. *TM*, 92/WM, 88.
280. *TM*, 94/WM, 90.
281. *TM*, 95/WM, 90. The discussion of aesthetic nihilism here anticipates the similar discussion of historicism in Part II of *Truth and Method*. Of historicism Gadamer writes that its "epistemological culmination is relativism and its consequent nihilism." Gadamer, "Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften" GW, II, p. 38; "Truth in the Human Sciences," p. 27.
282. Concerning the self-identity and difference involved in being expressed and understood, Gadamer's analysis of the concepts in their relation to what is expressed is an example: ". . . the logos is of such a nature that whenever anything is meant by it, that thing is meant as identical to itself and, at the same time, is different from other things. Thus Selfsameness and Difference are always present in anything which is and is recognized as what it is. Only the interweaving of Selfsameness and Difference makes an assertion (logos) possible. In any assertion something which, in *being* what it is, is *identical* to itself, is linked to something different from itself. But it does not thereby lose its selfsameness." Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Heaven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 143.
283. *TM*, 95/WM, 90.
284. *TM*, 96/WM, 91.
285. *TM*, 97/WM, 92.
286. *TM*, xxii-xxiii/WM, xxvi.
287. *TM*, 3/WM, 1.
288. *TM*, 5/WM, 3.
289. *TM*, 5/WM, 3.
290. *TM*, 9/WM, 7.
291. *TM*, 18/WM, 15.
292. *TM*, 10/WM, 7.
293. *TM*, 11/WM, 9.
294. *Ibid.*
295. *TM*, 12/WM, 9.
296. *TM*, 12/WM, 9.
297. *TM*, 12/WM, 10.
298. *TM*, 108/WM, 103.

299. *Ibid.*
300. *TM*, 113/*WM*, 108.
301. *TM*, 159/*WM*, 152.
302. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row 1977), p. 178
303. *TM*, 162/*WM*, 155.
304. *TM*, 160/*WM*, 153.
305. *TM*, 161/*WM*, 153.
306. *TM*, 164/*WM*, 157.
307. Richard E.
- Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston; Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 167.
308. Daniel O Dahlstrom, "The Religion of Art," in *Philosophy of Art*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, vol. 23 of *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 253.
309. *TM*, 69/*WM*, 65.
310. *TM*, 90-91/*WM*, 86.
311. *TM*, xxxi/*WM*, xvii.
312. *TM*, 285-300/*WM*, 269-284.
313. *TM*, 287/*WM*, 271.
314. Gadamer, "A Classical Text—A Hermeneutic Challenge," trans. Fred Lawrence, *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 50 (1980), p. 637.
315. *Ibid.*
316. Gadamer's analysis of the classical here has led to the critique that Gadamer makes a normative requirement for a text to be considered classical, therefore proposes a normative criterion for the correct understanding of what those classical texts express. From this, it was easy to draw the conclusion that because every tradition contains such normative texts, for Gadamer tradition has a normative value for understanding the past. For such an approach to Gadamer's concept of the classical, see Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Shurkamp, 1973), pp. 385ff.
317. *TM*, 290/*WM*, 274.
318. *TM*, 287/*WM*, 271.
319. *Ibid.*
320. *TM*, 288/*WM*, 272.
321. Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 94.
322. *TM*, 295/*WM*, 279.
323. For an analysis of Gadamer's concept of application as the mediation of universal with individual, see Francis J. Ambrosio, "Gadamer and Aristotle: Hermeneutics as Participation in Tradition," in *Hermeneutics and the Tradition*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Vol. 72 of *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (Washington, D. C.: The American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1988), pp. 174-182.
324. PHC, 107.
325. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975), p. 316.
326. *TM*, 4/*WM*, 1.

327. *TM*, 26-27/*WM*, 23-24.
328. *TM*, 27/*WM*, 24.
329. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 117, 151.
330. *TM*, 32/*WM*, 29.
331. *TM*, 33/*WM*, 30.
332. *TM*, 22/*WM*, 19.
333. *TM*, 23-24/*WM*, 21.
334. *TM*, 24/*WM*, 21.
335. Gadamer, "The Task of the Science," pp. 544-545.
336. *TM*, 346/*WM*, 329.
337. *Ibid.*
338. *TM*, xxxv/*WM*, xxi.
339. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 38; *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967) I, p. 127.
340. *TM*, 341/*WM*, 324.
341. Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding," *PH*, 49.
342. *TM*, 341/*WM*, 324.
343. *TM*, 465/*WM*, 441.
344. *TM*, 466/*WM*, 441-42; See Hegel on speculative thinking: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 36
345. G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), 6th ed., edited by Friedhelm Nicolin and Otto Pöggeler (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1959), Parag. 60.
346. *TM*, 342/*WM*, 325.
347. *TM*, 342/*WM*, 325.
348. *TM*, xxxvi/*WM*, xxii.
349. *TM*, 475/*WM*, 451.
350. PHC, 108.
351. PHC, 108.
352. Emilio Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1962); English translation, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," trans. Josef Bleicher, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition From Ast To Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 164.
353. For Betti, the hermeneutic circle applies only to the internal relation of the text, not to the relation between the interpreter and the texts. "The meaning of the whole has to be derived from its individual elements, and an individual element has to be understood by reference to the comprehensive, penetrating whole of which it is a part." Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 165.
354. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 188.
355. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 187.
356. Betti argues that "the texts which are approached with a meaning-inferring 'pre-understanding' [*Vorverständis*] are not to be used to confirm already held opinions. . . . It is here that the questionable character of the subjectivist position comes to light." "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 177.

357. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 177-178.
358. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 182-183.
359. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 180.
360. Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik des Geisteswissenschaften*, p. 34; "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 177.
361. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 172.
362. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 168.
363. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 181.
364. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 177-178.
365. "...die historische Bedingtheit jedes Auslegungsprozesses." *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik des Geisteswissenschaften*, p. 39; "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 180.
366. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 181.
367. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 183.
368. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 173, 180.
369. Emilio Betti, *Allgemeine Auslegungslehre als Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967), p. 731.
370. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 186.
371. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 187.
372. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 177.
373. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 187. Cf. *TM*, 512/WM, 484.
374. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, p. 59.
375. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 162.
376. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 168.
377. Betti, "The Epistemological Problem of Understanding As an Aspect of the General Problem of Knowing," trans. Susan Noakes, in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, eds. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 36.
378. Betti, "The Epistemological Problem of Understanding," p. 32
379. Betti, "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 173.
380. *Ibid.*
381. E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 8. For Betti's distinction, see "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 173-174.
382. E. D. Hirsch, "Truth and Method in Interpretation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 18, no. 3 (1965), pp. 488-507; reprinted as "Appendix II" to *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 251.
383. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 47.
384. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 147. See also, Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik des Geisteswissenschaften*, p. 41; "Hermeneutics as Methodology," p. 187.
385. E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 49.
386. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 250.
387. Betti makes the same distinction between meaning and significance, *Bedeutung* and *Bedeutsamkeit, Relevanz*. See Betti, *Die Hermeneutik als Allgemeine Methodik des Geisteswissenschaften*, pp. 28-29; "Hermeneutics as Methodology," pp. 173-174.
388. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 44.
389. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
390. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

391. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
392. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
393. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
394. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
395. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
396. *Ibid.*
397. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
398. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
399. *Ibid.*
400. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.
401. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
402. *Ibid.*, p. 75; cf. p. 40.
403. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
404. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
405. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Heidelberg: Karl Winter Universitatverlag, 1959), p. 90; quoted in Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*, p. 76.
406. Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*, pp. 45-46.
407. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
408. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
409. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
410. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
411. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
412. *Ibid.*
413. *BT*, 195/SZ 153; See *TM*, 266/WM, 251; Gadamer, "On the Circle of Understanding," pp. 71-72; and also PHC, 148-149.
414. *TM*, 267/WM, 252.
415. Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*, p. 33.
416. Hirsch admits that certain points in his early critique were incorrect. "In 1967, I went almost that far when I suggested that we need to put the focus of hermeneutics on the process of validation, since we do not really understand the process of verbal understanding." I have come to think that such caution is misplaced. The process of validation is not easily separated from the process of understanding in either theory or in practice. The universality of making-matching process and of corrigible schemata in all domains of language and thought suggest that the *process of understanding is itself a process of validation.*" Hirsch, *Aims of Interpretation*, p. 33 (Italics in the original). Later in his article "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (Dec. 1984), pp. 202-225, Hirsch seems to withdraw from his position that the application of the meaning of a text to different situations belongs to the sphere of significance. Instead, he now considers some applications as belonging to the meaning of the text. By acknowledging this he realizes that this shift in his approach brings him closer to Gadamer.
417. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, introduction to *Hermeneutic Tradition* ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 21.
418. Jrgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 172.
419. Dieter Misgeld, "Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: The Debate Between Habermas and Gadamer," in *On Critical Theory*, ed. J. O'Neill (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 169.

420. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 176.
421. Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," trans. Josef Bleicher, in *Hermeneutic Tradition*, p. 256; *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 174.
422. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 168; Cf. Gadamer, "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik: Metakritische Erörterungen zu 'Wahrheit und Methode,'" *GW*, II, p. 244; "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 34.
423. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 174.
424. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
425. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 135.
426. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
427. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 174.
428. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
429. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
430. *TM*, Introduction, xxii; the Second English edition of *Truth and Method* omits the word 'control' that appears in the first edition of 1975. The word also appears in the German original: *WM*, xxv.
431. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 167.
432. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, pp. 162-163.
433. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
434. Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," p. 251.
435. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 174.
436. *Ibid.*, p. 174.
437. Habermas, "Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," p. 257.
438. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
439. Habermas, *Logic of the Social Sciences*, p. 172.
440. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action* I, pp. 95-96.
441. Habermas also has the intention of developing a critique of Gadamer's ontology. His project, he assumes, can be established on such a critique. "The insight that the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life can be preserved today only on the ruins of ontology." Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 317.
442. Habermas, "Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," p. 268.
443. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, I, p. 138.
444. Habermas, "Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," pp. 186-88; Also see Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 195.
445. Karl-Otto Apel, "Regulative Ideas or Sense-Event? An Attempt to Determine the Logos of Hermeneutics," trans. Dale Snow, in *The Question of Hermeneutics: Essays in Honor of Joseph J. Kockelmans*, ed. Timothy J. Stapleton (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), p. 54.
446. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 44.
447. Apel, "Analytic Philosophy of Language and the *Geisteswissenschaften*," in *Selected Essays*, vol. 1, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), p. 2.
448. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. xiv.
449. Eduardo Mendieta, introduction to *Selected Essays* by Karl-Otto Apel, p. xiv

450. Mendieta, intorducton to *Selected Essays*, p. xiv; cf. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," pp. 45, 57.
451. Apel, *Selected Essays*, Preface, p. ix
452. Karl-Otto Apel, *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, trans. Glyn Adey and Davis Frisby (London: Routlegde and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 62.
453. *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.
454. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 63.
455. *Ibid.*
456. *Ibid.*
457. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 62
458. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 38.
459. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
460. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
461. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
462. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 63.
463. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. 65.
464. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 47.
465. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. 56; the original translation is "melting of horizon."
466. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. 56.
467. *Ibid.*
468. *Ibid.*
469. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 41.
470. *Ibid.*
471. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
472. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 42; cf. Gail Soffer, "Gadamer, Hermeneutics and Objectivity in Interpretation," *Praxis International* 12, no. 3 (1992), p. 235.
473. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," pp. 42-43.
474. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
475. Apel quotes Gadamer's argument that skepticism and relativism can be raised against his position only as formal arguments in *Truth and Method* (TM, 344/WM, 327). Cf. "Regulative Ideas," p. 43.
476. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 43.
477. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
478. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
479. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
480. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. 60.
481. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 134, note 79.
482. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
483. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
484. Apel, *Selected Essays*, p. 60.
485. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
486. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 63
487. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 47.
488. Jean Grondin, *Hermeneutische Wahrheit? Zum Wahrheitsbegriff Hans-Georg Gadamers* (Königstein: Forum Academicum, 1982), p. 176. Cf. also Grondin, "Hermeneutic Truth and its Historical Presuppositions: A Possible Bridge between Analysis and Hermeneutics,"

in *Anti-Foundationalism and Practical Reasoning*, ed. Evan Simpson (Edmonton, Alberta: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1987), pp. 45-58.

489. Grondin, *Hermeneutische Wahrheit*, 176
490. *Ibid.*, p. 178
491. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
492. *Ibid.*, *Hermeneutische Wahrheit*, p. 192.
493. David Hoy, *Critical Circle*, pp. 69-70.
494. Hoy, *Critical Circle*, p. 115.
495. Rüdiger Bubner, "On the Role of Hermeneutics in Philosophy of Science: A Contribution to a Discussion," in *Essays in Hermeneutics and Critical Theory*, trans. Eric Matthews (New York: Colombia University Press, 1988), p. 111.
496. Bubner, "Hermeneutics in Philosophy of Science?" p. 100.
497. *Ibid.*
498. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action I*, p. 135.
499. Bubner, "Hermeneutics in Philosophy of Science?" p. 100.
500. Emerich Coreth, "From Metaphysics to Hermeneutics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1971), p. 250.
501. Coreth, "From Metaphysics to Hermeneutics," p. 254.
502. Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," *PH*, 11.
503. *TM*, xxxi/*WM*, xvii.
504. *TM*, 512/*WM*, 483-484.
505. Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger's 'Being and Time'* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 34-35.
506. Theodore Kisiel, "Happening of Tradition: The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger," in *Hermeneutics and Praxis*, ed. Robert Hollinger (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1985), p. 4.
507. *TM*, 511/*WM*, 482.
508. *TM*, 511-512/*WM*, 483.
509. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Hermeneutic I: Wahrheit und Methode* (5th ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), p. 304, note 228; cf. *TM*, 298, note 228.
510. PHC, 105.
511. Gadamer, "Replik," in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, ed. Karl-Otto Apel et. al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 299; reprinted in *GW*, II; English translation "Reply to my Critics," trans. George H. Lenier in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 283
512. Gadamer, "Replik," p. 300: "Die hermeneutische Reflexion ist darauf beschränkt, Erkenntnischancen offenzulegen, die ohne sie nicht wahrgenommen würden. Sie vermittelt nicht selbst ein Wahrheitskriterium." Cf. "Reply to my Critics," p. 284
513. Gadamer, "Replik," p. 299; "Reply to my Critics," p. 283.
514. Gadamer, "Replik," p. 311; "Reply to My Critics," p. 293.
515. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of the Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 25.
516. *Ibid.*, *PH*, 35.
517. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics and Social Sciences," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975), p. 315.
518. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of the Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 34.
519. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of the Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 36.
520. PHC, 106.

521. PHC, 107.
522. PHC, 108.
523. PHC, 108.
524. PHC, 109.
525. Gadamer, "Replik," p. 300; "Reply to my Critics," p. 284.
526. *TM*, 279/WM, 263-264.
527. Gadamer, "Reply to My Critics," p. 290.
528. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of the Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 19.
529. *TM*, 530/WM, 501.
530. *TM*, 533-534/WM, 504-505.
531. *TM*, 535/WM, 505.
532. *TM*, 530/WM, 501.
533. *TM*, xxiii/WM, xxvii.
534. *TM*, 250-254/WM, 236-240.
535. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of the Hermeneutic Reflection," *PH*, 26.
536. *Ibid.*, *PH*, 36.
537. Gadamer, "Phenomenological Movement," *PH*, 172.
538. Gadamer, "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 93.
539. Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," *RAS*, 52.
540. *Ibid.*, *RAS*, 52.
541. *Ibid.*, *RAS*, 48.
542. *Ibid.*, *RAS*, 49.
543. *Ibid.*
544. *Ibid.*, *RAS*, 51.
545. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 55.
546. Apel, *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 64.
547. *TM*, 448/WM, 424.
548. *TM*, xxxiv/WM, xx.
549. Gadamer, "The Heritage of Hegel," *RAS*, 49.
550. *TM*, 389/WM, 366-367.
551. *TM*, 443/WM, 419.
552. Apel, "Regulative Ideas," p. 56-57; *Transformation of Philosophy*, p. 110.
553. *TM*, 442-443/WM, 419.
554. *TM*, 443/WM, 419.
555. *TM*, 443/WM, 419.
556. *BT*, 194/SZ, 153ff.
557. *TM*, 467/WM, 442.
558. *TM*, 389/WM, 367.
559. *TM*, 457/WM, 433.
560. James Bradley, "Gadamer's '*Truth and Method*': Some Questions and English Applications," *The Heythrop Journal* 18, no. (1977), p. 443.
561. Gadamer, "To What Extend Does Language Perform Thought," in *TM*, 547.
562. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, p. 131. Cf. Bradley, "Gadamer's '*Truth and Method*,'" pp. 433-434.
563. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," pp. 128-129.
564. Pannenberg, "Hermeneutics and Universal History," p. 123.

565. *TM*, 468/*WM*, 443-444.
566. *TM*, 389-395/*WM*, 367-374.
567. *TM*, 457/*WM*, 433.
568. *TM*, 458/*WM*, 434.
569. *TM*, 458/*WM*, 434.
570. Gadamer, "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 88.
571. *Ibid.*
572. *Ibid.*
573. *Ibid.*
574. "Die hermeneutische Analyse aber vermag zu zeigen, das solche Gelegenlichkeit das Wesen des Sprechens selbst ausmacht." See, Gadamer, "Semantik und Hermeneutik," *GW*, II, p. 179; cf. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, p. 88, where the key phrase "Gelegenlichkeit" is translated as "relativity to situation."
575. Gadamer, "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 88-89.
576. *Ibid.*, *PH*, 90.
577. *Ibid.*, *PH*, 90.
578. *TM*, 294, note 224/*WM*, 278-279, note 2; Gadamer, "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 90.
579. Gadamer, "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 91.
580. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 91; "Semantik und Hermeneutik," *GW*, II, p. 181.
581. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 91; "Semantik und Hermeneutik," *GW*, II, p. 181.
582. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 91-92.
583. "Die eine ist die stillschweigende Inanspruchnahme von vorurteilen." See, "Semantik und Hermeneutik" *GW*, II, p. 181. Again, the English translation of this sentence is misleading. "One is an unstated reliance on prejudices." See "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 92. We have seen the difference between concealment in language and concealment through language. The concealment through language can be conscious or unconscious. Prejudices considered in this sense do not belong to subjective consciousness, but it is the duty of the interpreter to bring them to consciousness, and to put them in risk.
584. "Semantik und Hermeneutik," *GW*, II, p. 181; "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 92.
585. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 92.
586. *TM*, 474/*WM*, 450.
- 587.. "Semantics and Hermeneutics," *PH*, 103.
588. *Ibid.*
589. *Ibid.*, *PH*, 103-104.
590. "The Heritage of Hegel," *RAS*, 51.
591. Grondin, *Hermeneutische Wahrheit*, p. 94.
592. Gadamer, "Theory or Philosophy of Science," *RAS*, 166. Also "Sprache und Verstehen," *Zeitwende* 41 (1970), pp. 349-57; "Wieweit schreibt Sprache das Denken vor?" *Zeitwende* 44 (1973), pp. 289-96. These articles are shorter versions of the theme of language developed in *TM*, 383-491/*WM*, pp. 361-465.
593. *TM*, 68, 99/*WM*, 64, 95.
594. Gadamer, "The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment," *Philosophy Today* 16 (Fall 1971), p. 232.
595. *Ibid.*

596. Gadamer, "The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time and the Limits of Thought" in *Time and Philosophies* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), p. 33.
597. Gadamer, "Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (Winter 1970), p. 343.
598. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-344.
599. Gadamer, "The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time," p. 41.
600. "The Continuity of History," p. 233.
601. *Ibid.*
602. "Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time," p. 349.
603. "The Continuity of History," p. 233.
604. *TM*, 284-285/*WM*, 269.
605. "The Continuity of History," p. 233.
606. *Ibid.*, p. 236. Cf. "Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time," p. 348.
607. "Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time," p. 348.
608. *Ibid.*
609. *Ibid.*
610. *Ibid.*, p. 349.
611. Goethe, *Geschichte der Farbenlehre*, xxxix, 4, 61; quoted in Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, trans. David Green (New York: Colombia University Press, 1964), p. 230.

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