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Hermeneutics, Tradition and Contemporary Change

Lectures in Chennai/Madras, India

By
George F. McLean

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Preface

George F. McLean

The twenty first century presents us with both a special challenge and a unique opportunity. It challenges us to take a longer look at ourselves and our society than we do annually in terms of New Year resolutions or did quinquennially in terms of five year plans. These are tactical adjustments in response to specific short range problems. The arrival of the new century and millennium has challenged us to look further and deeper, to ask what we want to become as a people, what we want the overall sense of our history to be, and what we want to contribute to humankind.

The dimensions of this challenge constitute also a special opportunity, for they enable us to turn to our fundamental life project and task where we stand in this as a people. What resources has our culture developed, what transformations are taking place in our social life, and how we can draw out of our tradition and creative responses which will give new life to the new era?

When in 1969 I first came to the Radhakrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy at the University of Madras for the inaugural semester of its MA program in Indian philosophy, I was highly impressed by two primary characteristics of Indian philosophy. The first is the foundational epistemological importance of the sacred texts or *sruti* for philosophical reflection. Thus, Shankara explains the very first two words of the Brahma-Sutras, "Hence thereafter," as conditioning the enquiry into Brahman upon "an ascertainment of the meaning of the texts of the Upanishads with the help of reasoning for the purpose of leading to emancipation (through knowledge)."¹ The second characteristic bases this reading of sacred texts, in turn, upon the lived experience of the enlightened sage or wise man. If philosophy is the love of wisdom then philosophers need to draw upon tradition as lived and applied by the sage in order truly to be open to the plenitude of being and meaning.

In this, however, one faces a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, by looking to the past we could cut ourselves off from the human progress required to respond to the expanding needs of advancing peoples. On the other hand, were the horizons of the sage to be replaced by those of experts in particular fields, we could find ourselves limited to specialized categories, reflecting experience that is intentionally restricted to the order of physical power and pleasure. This would reduce social interaction between persons and nations to a competition of self-gratification. There is need then to investigate the way in which the wisdom of the tradition can work with the human and social sciences in order to contribute to authentic emancipation or to the full creative life of consciousness and freedom in our day.

Today there are two ways in which this presents a special challenge. First we appear to be transiting beyond the modern period itself into what as yet can be termed only "postmodern." We need then not only to unite modernity with the vision of classical times, but to relate both of these to an horizon which is only now beginning to dawn. This challenge will require a creative response.

The second challenge is the global context into which we are transiting. The poor and disadvantaged are no longer remote and unattainable; they truly live with us and rise or decline by our actions.

¹ *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya of Sri Shankaracharya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1972), 13.

Hence, I would like to follow a clue from the concluding phrase of my 1978 lectures, *Plenitude and Participation*.² There I made note of a new test by which we can judge our work in philosophy. It is our concern, not only to understand emancipation or realize it in our lives, but to bring the good news to the poor.” In the present work I should like to explore the implications of that phrase, not only for the effect of philosophy upon society, but for overcoming reductionism in the work of philosophy itself.

The first chapter will study the radical importance of our heritages or traditions of wisdom. This calls for a positive hermeneutics. The second chapter will concern the need to free the creative power of our heritage from the reductive force of some social and psychological structures. This suggests a critical hermeneutics in which those dispossessed by our systems stand as a liberating sign of contradiction to all attempts to delimit the scope or power of the values in our heritage. As no philosophical vision composed of two uncoordinated elements enables either to function, however, the third chapter will search for a positive theoretical or ideal relation between the efforts of these two types of hermeneutics. The fourth chapter will examine the practical dialectic of Paul Tillich for liberation through the very contradictions encountered in this point of concrete historical transition.

² George F. McLean, *Plenitude and Participation: The Unity of Man in God* (Madras: University of Madras, 1978), 103.

Chapter I

Tradition as Living Vision: Hans-Georg Gadamer

If life as an ongoing process is neither the useless repetition of a broken record nor the random confusion of the proverbial “tale told by an idiot,” then it must have unity, continuity and cohesion, as well as novelty, direction and meaning. This implies having a heritage or tradition, but it implies as well that it be possible to bring forth from that heritage things both old and new. The understanding of how this can be is the task of hermeneutics. I should like to begin by considering this etymologically in order to draw up an agenda of the problems which will need to be addressed.

Problems

The term “hermeneutics” is derived from the son of Zeus, Hermes, who served as the messenger of the Olympian gods. Each of its three components, namely, (a) a messenger between (b) gods and (c) men, suggests a dimension of our problem.

The Whole of Meaning and the Freedom of the Person

As messenger, the figure of Hermes suggests in at least three ways the classic dilemma called the hermeneutic circle, namely, that a grasp of the whole is needed in order to understand the parts, while a grasp of the parts is required for an understanding of the whole. This is suggested, first, by the fact that a Greek messenger or herald did not merely pass on a written text; he had to speak or proclaim the word. This could be done only by reading each part of the message in sequence. To do this intelligibly, however, he needed to grasp the whole message. Secondly, as any proclamation must take place in a particular historical time and place, and with a specific intonation and inflection, it draws out one particular sense from the full potential of the words. Further, the messenger not only expresses, but also explains the message; to do so he must understand and convey both its content and its ramifications or meaning. For all this he requires an awareness of the still broader contexts of the problematic of the message and even of the language as the repository of culture within which the message was composed. Thirdly, the messenger must also translate or bear the meaning of the text from its source and its context to those to whom the message is being proclaimed in their set of circumstances and with their projects or concerns. This calls for transcending the parts to some knowledge of the human family in order to communicate rightly with any part.

This is reflected also in the etymological root of the term “interpret,” namely, “*praesto*,” to show, manifest or exhibit; with the prefix “*inter*” indicating the difference between the persons from whom and to whom the message is passed.¹ This difference could be between past and present, as when an ancient text is being reread today; between one culture and another, as when a text in a language other than one’s own is being interpreted; or indeed, whenever there is communication even between persons in the same culture and time. In each case some whole of vision or meaning which encompasses both the interlocuters is required.

Values and the Divine

¹ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 12-29.

The reference to the god Hermes, within the term “hermeneutics” points to the ultimate character of the kind of understanding which is sought. For the messages borne by the god, Hermes, are not abstract, mathematical formulae or methodological prescriptions devoid of content, meaning and values. They concern rather the limitless theoretical or speculative wisdom regarding the eternal source, and hence regarding the reality and meaning of all that is.

This was the petition of Hesiod in the introduction to his *Theogony*: “Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever. Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be.” Aristotle showed this wisdom to be not only theoretical, but practical as well, for it knows “to what end each thing must be done...,”² and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature. Such a science is then most divine, “for (1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better.”³ He would agree with the Sutras that perennial wisdom must then undertake “a deliberation on Brahman.” Hermeneutics is concerned at its core with the mediation to men of the eternal foundation of all meaning and value. To omit this, to consider things simply in a temporal or totally changing perspective, would deprive human life of both meaning and value.

Historicity

Nevertheless, the need for messengers underlines the distinctive character of the human being as living in time and hence the way in which historicity is essential to the hermeneutic enterprise. One must attend not only to the eternal sources from which meaning is derived, but to those to whom it is expressed, namely, to human beings in their concrete temporal circumstances. These, in turn, have developed through interaction with nature, with other human beings, and with God. Thus, human history constitutes the context in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and mobilizes one’s own and others’ projects toward the future.

This must be done with full attention to the uniqueness of each person within a culture as is required of any adequate sense of freedom and emancipation. Further, given the admixture of good and evil in human action, the realization of the good in human history has always been compromised with evil. Consequently, the past as well as the present must always be deciphered or interpreted in order to distinguish the value content from its contradiction. Plans for the realization of values in the future must also provide for encountering evil and for a way in which evil can be overcome.

In sum, we are confronted with a threefold problematic: how can we achieve that whole of meaning required in order to the parts to be intelligible; how can we achieve the depth of insight required in order to appreciate the meaning and value of the parts; and if both of these are borne in the tradition, how can it leave place for, and promote, the freedom and emancipation of the person in time? In a word, how can it be a living tradition? This places us at the center of some the metaphysics’ deepest mysteries: unity and plurality, good and evil, and eternity and time. It is the right place at which to philosophize.

² Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 85.

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. I, 2.

To do so let us turn, first, to tradition as the locus and summation of human awareness of the most important truths and hence to the normative character of its content; second, to application as the progressive revelation of the meaning of the content of tradition in, and through, the concrete circumstances of history; and third, to hermeneutics as a method for making positive use of the distinctiveness of our own point in history in order to appreciate better the unfolding of meaning and value through historical experience. In this we shall attend especially to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (in a sense the successor to Martin Heidegger) whose *Truth and Method*⁴ has become *locus classicus* for the strongest defense and most dynamic vision of the tradition in recent time. Subsequent lectures will look also with Jürgen Habermas at how the antitheses or contradictions of meaning, which are also integral to human history, function in a hermeneutics of value-discovery and projection. With Paul Ricoeur we shall consider how these two can be mutually reinforcing, and with Paul Tillich how as thesis and antithesis they are related in the elaboration of a project of emancipation as authentic liberation.

Tradition

In modern times the notion of tradition has been looked upon with great suspicion. It has been seen as out of date and hence unenlightened, as imposed by will rather than as stating truth, and hence as oppressive of those who have not played a significant role in the social, economic and political life of society. It tends to be appealed to by those who are satisfied and to be appealed against by those who are not. Tradition in this sense would be rightly rejected. Hence, Gadamer's first task is to refound the notions of tradition and heritage, to rediscover its real nature and foundation, in a word, to revive the sense of tradition. He does this in a series of investigations to rediscover: the roots of leaning in community, the positive importance of time, and the sense in which these two can give a certain authority to tradition. We shall follow these steps.

Community and Discovery

There could be no tradition if men were but a solitary being. Hence we must begin from a sense of community. But what has this to do with knowledge or discovery? To answer this, John Caputo traces back his phenomenological description of the actual experience of the person before birth when one's life was lived in, and with, the biological rhythms of the mother.⁵ From birth this expands into an ever broader sharing in the life of one's parents, siblings and neighbors. It is in this context that one is at peace, the condition for growth and discovery. From its beginning then, one's life has been social and historical; it has always been lived with other persons. This is particularly true of our learning process. While it is true that it is the individual who sees lightening and thunder, anthropological studies show that peoples react to the same phenomena with either fear or joy or sadness according to the tribe to which they belong: their representations have a collective character.⁶ Further, our interpretation and understanding of data draws for its development and orientation upon the experience and insight of our predecessors, often elaborated

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975).

⁵ John Caputo, "A Knowledge of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in *Act and Agent: Philosophical Foundations of Moral Education*, eds. David Schindler, Jesse A Mann, and Frederick F. Ellrod (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1985).

⁶ Lucien Levy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lilian Clare (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), chap. I.

over centuries of controlled scientific investigation and deduction. Above all, this holds true for metaphysical knowledge which is not available to the senses as these are specialized in registering only physical differences. Metaphysics concerns the common characteristics of all reality and the particular characteristics of the ultimate source of being, meaning and value.

The strict bond of the knowledge had by animals to the conditions of space and time enables them to live in safe harmony with their physical world; human knowledge is not so bound, but can understand, question and create. There is an homology with the animal, nonetheless, for just as the animal's knowledge is synchronized to nature, human understanding is synchronized with that of other human beings. One's life is with others in a society marked by the culture which that society has developed. From this Gadamer concludes that absolute knowledge simply and without condition, whether regarding oneself or others, is not possible: the knower is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space. But then neither would absolute knowledge be of ultimate interest for one's life develops with others in this culture, time and place.⁷

Time and Social Learning

If it were merely a matter of community, however, this might still be dimensional or concerned only with the present; there would still be no place for tradition. The wisdom with which we are concerned, however, is a matter, not of mere tactical adjustments to temporary threats, but of the meaning of life which we desire to achieve through any and all such adjustments. Hence, as a learning process, contemporary interchange needs to be complemented by historical depth. If the vision we seek must be good enough to improve all ages it must reflect an accumulation of human insight predicated upon the wealth, not only of empirical observation, but of full human experience. In this process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition, history constitutes a type of leaning and testing laboratory in which the strengths of various insights can be identified and reinforced, while their deficiencies are corrected or eliminated. The cumulative result of the extended process of learning and testing constitutes tradition;⁸ e.g., the historical and prophetic books of the Bible are an extended concrete account of the process of one people's discovery of wisdom in interaction with the divine. This convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by the gradual elaboration of ritual and music imaginatively configured in epics such as the Mahabharata and in dance. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, intensifies and extends the range of our personal sensitivity.

Tradition is, then not simply everything that ever happened; it is rather what appears significant. It does not subsist in itself, but must be described properly and by different voices in order to draw out its different aspects. It is not an object in itself, but a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn according to the motivation and interest of the inquirer. It needs to be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated. This places considerable emphasis upon the relation of the present inquirer to tradition, a theme which will be taken up below.

For now it should be clear that the content of tradition serves as model and exemplar, not because of personal inertia, but because of both the corporate character of the learning by which it is constituted from experience and the cumulative free and wise acts of preserving and passing on what has been learned. We rightly stand on the shoulders of our forebears, without whom we could not begin to choose topics to be investigated or even awaken within us the desire to investigate

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305-310.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 245-253.

problems. It is the sensitivity which they have developed and communicated that enables us to draw anew from our heritage, to evaluate our times, and to project for the future.⁹

Authority

These communitary and temporal characteristics of human learning enable us now to respond to the major modern objections against tradition, namely, that it undermines both our freedom and our objectivity, by clarifying the real basis and nature of its authority. Given the corporate character of human learning, dependence upon others is not unnatural; quite the contrary. We come to exist by the gracious power of our creator; we are conceived in dependence upon the mutual love of our parents, and we are nurtured with continual care and concern by our family and peers, school and community. Within and beyond our social group we depend upon other persons according as they are in some way our superior.

This dependence is not primarily one of obedience to their will, but is based rather upon their comparative excellence in some dimension, whether that of the fireman for leading an elderly person down a ladder, of the doctor for his professional skill in healing his or her patient, or of the wise person for his or her insight and judgment in matters where profound understanding is required. The preeminence or authority of wise persons in the community is not something they usurp or with which they are arbitrarily endowed; it is based rather upon their capabilities as these are reasonably and freely acknowledged by others.¹⁰

It was an unfortunate byproduct of Descartes' disincarnation of clear and distinct ideas, especially as intensified by Enlightenment egalitarianism, that authority came to be seen as based not upon understanding, but upon strength of will and hence as potentially subservient to a narrowness of vision. The effect has been to orient people toward anarchy as the sole response to the aberrations of arbitrary authority in modern totalitarian societies. One of Gadamer's major steps in the development of his hermeneutics has been to react against this and to identify the proper basis for authority in competency, and for the authority of tradition in the understanding upon which it is based. This, indeed, was the perspective of Plato's *Republic*: for future leaders education is the prerequisite for their exercise of authority. While the leader who is wise but indecisive may be ineffective, the one who is decisive but foolish is bound upon not only his own destruction but that of his community as well.

A Classical Tradition

What has been seen thus far has progressively broadened the horizons of the modern rationalist context which envisaged an isolated mind dealing with sets of abstract concepts. We have added successively the role of the community in learning, the need for extended time, and the basis of authority in competency. Could these combine in such wise that the wisdom developed over time would constitute a tradition with a certain guiding and even normative authority for subsequent ages? To respond to this question we should note first that there are reasons to believe that tradition is not simply a passive storehouse of materials depending entirely upon the inquirer, but that its content of authentic wisdom plays a normative role for life in subsequent ages. On the one hand, without such a normative referent or law prudence (or phronesis) would be as relativistic and ineffective as muscular action without a skeletal substructure. On the other hand, were the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

normative factor to reside simply in a transcendental or abstract vision, without attention to historicity or the living of human life in time, the result would be an idealism devoid of existential relevance. Hence, there is need to look into history to find a vision which both transcends its own time and stands as directive for the time that follows.

This would consist of a set of values and goals which each person ought to seek to realize, for its harmony of measure and its fullness would point the way to mature and perfect human formation.¹¹ Such a vision would be historical because it would both arise in time and present an appropriate way of preserving life through time; it would be also normative because it provides a basis upon which past historical ages, present options and future possibilities are judged. The fact of human striving manifests that every humanism is committed to the realization of some classical model of perfection.

It would be erroneous to conclude that this is merely a matter of knowledge, for that would engage not the many but the few, and would divide these between different and opposed schools. The project of a tradition is much broader and must be described in terms of love as well as knowledge, and of body as well as spirit. Indeed, it is the entire pattern of our life as we search out others in striving toward ever more complete realization in understanding and love, and thereby in justice and peace.

Such a classical model is not chronologically distant from us in the past so that it would need to be drawn forward artificially. Rather it lives and acts now in our lives which it inspires and judges. Through time it is the timeless dimension of history. Hence, rather than reconstructing it, we belong to it just as it belongs to us, for the continuity of such a tradition consists in its being nothing less than the ultimate community of human striving. Seen in this light, human understanding is implemented less by individual acts of subjectivity than by our situatedness in a tradition that fuses both past and present.¹²

This sense of the good or of value which constitute tradition enables us in turn to appreciate the real impact of the achievements and deformations of the present. Without tradition, present events become simply the facts of the moment to be succeeded by counter facts in what constitutes a definition of violence. Subsequent waves of counter-counter facts would constitute a history written in terms of violence. Without tradition the only hope, though it is itself the archetypal modern nightmare of reducing such violence, would be a utopian abstraction which eliminates all areas of freedom of expression. This is a kind of 1984 designed on the basis of the reductive limitations of a modern rationalism

All of this stands in brutal contrast to tradition as the cumulative richness of vision acquired by humans through the ages. It is exemplified architecturally in a Parthenon or a Taj Mahal; it is embodied personally in a Gandhi, a Lincoln, a sage or a saint. Superseding mere historical facts, as concrete universals they express that harmony of measure and fullness which is at once classical and historical, ideal and personal, uplifting and dynamizing, in a word, liberating.

Application and Historicity

There is a second set of problems regarding tradition. These concern not its content but rather its relation to the present, for if our present life is simply a deadening repetition of what has already been then life loses its challenge, progress is rejected in principle, and hope dies. Let us turn then from tradition as a whole to its application in our days.

¹¹ Ibid., 254.

¹² Ibid., 258.

Novelty

To understand this we must, first of all, take time seriously, that is, we must recognize that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is idea or form which transcends matter and time; these, in turn, are real only to the degree that they imitate or mirror the ideal. It also goes beyond the perspective of rationalism in its search for simple natures which are clear, distinct and eternal in themselves and in their relations. *A fortiori*, it goes beyond simply following a method as such without attention to content.

In contrast to all these, to recognize novelty implies that tradition with its authority (or *nomos*) achieves its perfection not in opposition to, but in the very temporal unfolding of, reality, for the human person is both determined by, and determinative of, his changing physical and social universe. Hence, to appreciate moral values, one must attend to human action, to the striving of persons to realize their lives, and to the formation of this striving into a fixed attitude (*hexis*). In distinction from physics then, *ethos* as the application of tradition consists neither of law nor of lawlessness, but concerns human institutions and attitudes which change. Ethical rules do not determine, but regulate action by providing certain broad guidelines for historical practice.¹³

What is important here is to protect the concrete and unique reality of human life – its novelty and hence the historicity of one's encounter with others. As our response to the good is made only in concrete circumstances, the general principles of ethics as a philosophical science must be neither purely theoretical knowledge nor a simple historical accounting from the past. Rather they must provide help toward moral consciousness in concrete circumstances.

Application in Technê vs Ethics

Here an important distinction must be made between *technê* and ethics. In *technê* action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause which is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistême*). Skill consists in knowing how to act according to a well understood idea or plan. When this cannot be carried out some parts of it are simply omitted in the execution.

In ethics the situation, though similar in being an application of a practical guide to a particular task, differs in important ways. First, in moral action the subject makes him/herself as much as it makes the object: the agent is differentiated by the action itself. Hence, moral knowledge as an understanding of the appropriateness of one's actions is not fully determined independently of the situation.

Secondly, the adaptations by the moral agent in applying the law do not diminish the law, but rather correct and perfect it. In itself the law is imperfect for, inasmuch as it relates to a world which is less ordered, it cannot contain in any explicit manner the response to the concrete possibilities which arise in history. It is precisely here that human freedom and creativity are located. This does not consist in the response being arbitrary, for Kant is right that freedom without law has no meaning. Nor does it consist in a simply automatic response determined by the historical situation, for relativism too would undermine the notion of human freedom. Human freedom consists rather in shaping the present according to a sense of what is just and good and in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what justice and goodness means.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 278-279.

That the law is perfected by its application in the circumstances appears also from the way it is not diminished, but perfected by epoché and equity. Without them, by simple mechanical replication the law would work injustice rather than justice. Ethics, therefore, is not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right in the situation. This is a question, not of mere expediency, but of the perfection of the law; it completes moral knowledge.¹⁴

Prudence and Concern for Others

The question of what the situation is asking of us is answered, of course, not by sense knowledge which simply registers a set of concrete facts. It is answered rather in the light of what is right, that is in the light of what has been discovered about appropriate human action and exists normatively in the tradition. Only in these terms can moral consciousness go about its major job of choosing means which are truly appropriate to the circumstances. This is properly the work of intellect (nous) with the virtue of prudence (phronesis), that is, thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means in the circumstances.

This assessment of what is truly appropriate requires also the virtue of sagacity (sunesis), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as one in a sense undergoes the situation with the affected parties. Aristotle rightly describes as truly terrible the one who can make the most of the situation, but without orientation toward moral ends or concern for the good of others in the situation. Hence, there is need for knowledge which takes account of the agent as united with the other in mutual interest or love.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of understanding, but rather co-determines this understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand the good, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather by and in relating this to oneself as sharing the concerns of others. In this light our sense of unity with others begins to appear as a condition for applying our tradition, that is, for enabling it to live in our day.

We must turn now to hermeneutics for a better understanding of the structure of communication between periods and especially between peoples. In the subsequent chapter we shall look also at the dynamisms which separate us, make sagacity difficult, impede our moral judgement and thus inhibit living our tradition.¹⁵

Hermeneutics

Thus far we have treated, first, the character and importance of tradition as the bearer of the long experience of interacting with one's world, with other persons and with God. It is constituted not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection which have been forged in the human person's concrete striving to live with dignity, e.g., the Indian ideal of peace, the Greek notion of democracy, the enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value each stands as normative in relation to the aspirations of those who live within that culture.

Secondly, we have studied the implications for the content of tradition of the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development. These do not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the dynamic character of the classical vision articulated in the epics, in law and in political movements.

¹⁴ Ibid., 281-286.

¹⁵ Ibid., 289.

It remains for us now to treat the third element in this first chapter, namely, hermeneutics. How can one actually draw upon the tradition as the sum of the great achievements of our heritage in a way that is relevant, indicative, and directive for action in our present circumstances? In a word, how can the tradition be understood in its significance for present action?

A Dialectic of Whole and Part

We might begin with a simple example of reading a text, say a paragraph from today's newspaper. To begin with, we approach this as a whole, e.g., as being about rice farming, because only a unity of meaning is intelligible.¹⁶ Just as it is not possible to understand a number three if we include but two units, so it is not possible to realize an act of understanding if we do not direct it to an identity or whole of meaning. This, of course, does not mean that we could not later come to suspect that, in fact, there are not three units present and come upon reasons to change our supposition from a three to a two. What it does mean is that we cannot make an act of understanding which does not treat its object as a whole, for only then does it have its identity or constitute something to consider. We work always in terms of complete notions. This is true also for the text, culture or tradition to which we turn.

In the example of the paragraph then, before grasping all its individual parts we construe its general area of meaning on the basis of its first words, the prior context, or more likely from a combination of the two. This expectation or construal of meaning, in turn, is adjusted according to the requirement of the text in its various parts. As we proceed to read all the parts of the paragraph we reassess our preconception of the whole in terms of the parts (e.g., clarifying that it is about irrigation in general, rather than only for rice farming), and the parts in terms of the whole, in a basically circular movement until all appears to fit and be clear.

A Dialectic of Horizons

Something similar obtains on the macro level of tradition or culture which forms an identity or whole. As the totality of all that can be seen from the vantage point of that culture it is called an horizon. The application of a living tradition involves a dialectic of horizons. As we begin to look into our tradition we construe for ourselves a prior conception or horizon (which Gadamer terms a prejudgement or prejudice, in a non-pejorative sense) regarding the sense of that tradition. Our anticipation of this meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective, fixed content to which we come, however, it is rather what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition and thereby further determine ourselves. Our horizon is a creative stance which reflects the content not only of the past, but of the time in which one stands and the life project in which one is engaged. It is a creative unveiling of the content of the tradition as this comes progressively and historically into the present and passes through the present into the future.¹⁷ In this light time is not a barrier, a separation or an abyss, but rather a bridge and opportunity for the process of understanding; it is a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of historical distance in enabling a more complete meaning of the tradition to appear is then not that the passing of time enables subjective factors to disappear and the objectivity of the situation to emerge. Rather than removing falsifying factors, the contribution of time lies in opening new sources of understanding

¹⁶ Ibid., 262.

¹⁷ Ibid., 261-264.

which reveal unsuspected elements and even whole new dimensions of meaning in the tradition. How does this take place?

A Dialectic of Question and Answer

Not all of our pre-understandings are correct whether they be about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, a set of goals, or a plan of action for the future. Hence, it is particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others. When our initial projection of the meaning of another's words (or of a text or of the content of tradition) will not bear up under progressive questioning we are justified in making needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning and often of the prior understanding or broader horizon from which we were thinking.

It would be erroneous then to consider oneself trapped in one's own horizon. Horizons are vantage points of a mind which is in principle open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own horizon and of transcending this in the acknowledgement of the horizons of others. Indeed, historic movement implies precisely that we not be bound by one horizon, but move in and out of horizons. By making one aware of one's own horizon historical consciousness liberates one from its limitation.¹⁸

In this process it is important then we retain a questioning attitude. Rather than simply following through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, true openness or sensitivity to new meanings is required, a willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning, our horizon. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concern regarding action toward the future. To be ware of our own biases or prejudices and to adjust them in dialogue with others is to free ourselves to understand the meaning of texts or of others, of tradition. Rather than ignoring or denying our horizon and prejudice, by recognizing these to be inevitable but assuming a questioning attitude, we can make them work for us. Such a process has a number of characteristics.

First of all its object is not the subjective meaning of the author, but the objective meaning which the text has for the present. Thus, in questioning I serve as midwife promoting the historicity or life of the text or tradition.¹⁹

Secondly, the logical structure of this process is to be found in the dialectic of question and answer. The question of whether it is this or that is required in order to give direction to our attention, without which no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or determined. Progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simply indeterminacy, but that of a question with a specific direction such that we can direct our attention and consider significant evidence.²⁰

Thirdly, as discovery depends upon the question, the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, whether working alone or in conjunction with others, our effort at finding the answers should be less toward suppressing a question than toward reinforcing and unfolding it, for to the degree that its probabilities are intensified it can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of opinion which tends to suppress questions and of arguing which searches out the weakness of the others' argument. In conversation as dialogue one enters a mutual search for the object by

¹⁸ Ibid., 267-271, 235, 240.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Note that we can proceed, not only by means of positive evidence for one of two possible responses, but through the dissolving of the counter arguments.

seeking to maximize the possibilities of the question by speaking at cross purposes. By mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning truth is discovered.²¹

Finally, and most important, it cannot be expected that the text or tradition will answer but one question, for the sense of the text reaches beyond what even its author intended. Because of dynamic character of being emerging into time, the horizon is never fixed. At each step a new dimension of the potentialities of the text is opened to understanding, for the meaning of the text lives with the consciousness, not of its author, but of people living in history and with others. The fusion of one's horizon with that of others, whether of a text or of a partner in dialogue, enables one to receive answers that are ever new.²²

Conclusion

In all of this our attitude requires close attention. If my goal is simply to develop new horizons for the emergence of my mind, my search could be to achieve an absolute knowledge in advance and thereby an absolute domination over the other. This would lock one into a prejudice that is fixed, closed in the past, and unable to allow for the horizons of others or for life in the present. In this way powerful new insights become with time deadening prejudgements which suppress freedom and cooperation.

In contrast, an authentic attitude of openness appreciates the nature of my finiteness and on this basis is both respectful of the past and open to others; it is thereby able to discern the future. This openness consists not merely in receptivity to new information, but in a recognition of our historical, situated and hence limited vision. Real escape from what has deceived us and held us captive is to be found not through those who are well integrated into our culture, horizon and social structure. Dialogue with them will open our horizons only to a limited degree. Real liberation from our more basic limitations and deceptions comes only with a conscious effort to take account of the horizons of those who differ notably, whether as another society in a quite different place, or as a distinct culture intermingled with our own, or still more definitively, those who live on the margins of all of these societies and are integrated into none.

This type of openness is directed, not primarily to others, surveying them objectively or obeying them unquestioningly, but to ourselves by opening our horizons, extending our ability to listen to others, and assimilating the implications of their answer for changes in our own position. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that tradition(s) has something new to say to me. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is not then methodological sureness, but openness or readiness for experience.²³ In this sense tradition is not closed, but the basis for a life that is ever new, more inclusive, and more rich.

²¹ Ibid., 325-332.

²² Ibid., 335-340.

²³ Ibid., 324-325.

Chapter II

Tradition and Social Critique: Jürgen Habermas

If, like Descartes,¹ we were to summarize our feeling at the end of the previous lecture's "meditation," it could be one of encouragement at the recognition of the resources of our traditions, and of their possibilities for facing up to the new millennium. There are, of course, ways in which these can be contradicted and constitute a veritable antithesis as well be discussed in Chapter IV with Paul Tillich. However, one major fear was noted regarding the hermeneutic project described by Hans-Georg Gadamer, namely, that any such recognition of authority on the part of tradition might undermine the freedom and creativity of those in the present to whom this tradition is mediated. It is time to confront this fear. We must begin by locating the threats to which it corresponds.

In the pendulum shifts of cultural attitudes the threats have recurred with the periodic upsurge of the romantic attitude. This sees the past as having an integral grasp of the meaning of human life. The truth in this is attractive. One sees the repetition of the past through ancient rituals as the preservation in our day of a vision of life and of values which has been tested by human life through the ages; one is united in solidarity with the countless millions who have lived this vision and is strengthened by the power, the dignity and the beauty of the communities they have formed; one is opened thereby to that transcendent reality which perdures through all times and bases all lives. This is the power that continually draws us to the temple and makes liturgy, e.g., at the ancient monastery of St. Catherine in the Sinai, an occasion of true communion with the saints in their approach to enlightenment and pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain.

Unfortunately, for Romanticism the past had an integral grasp of meaning. It was complete in the sense of exhausting meaning; its values or cultural forms became closed dogma. It also dictated the structures of its realization through time: the past ruled the present. Novelty as significant historical development or personal creativity was rejected.

This, of course, is not the position of Gadamer whose attention focused rather upon new and unique applications in the present of what he refers to as the text, whether this be written, oral, or simply the worldview and set of values which define a culture. It is neither desirable, nor even possible in the present, simply to reconstruct the text in the form it had in the past. Instead, from its perspective the text challenges us to live up to its insights and values in our circumstances, while we from our perspective question it in order to draw from it new implications for our life.

Yet Gadamer's position remains distinct from some others for whom also historicity and novelty are important. He sees questioning the tradition to be a matter of the mind or of understanding; "prejudice" is a type of fore- or pre-understanding, an essentially contemplative act. The correction of any misunderstanding belongs then to such sciences of the spirit (*geisteswissenschaften*) as philosophy and literature which focus upon the spirit in its amplitude of both knowledge and freedom.

In contrast, the critical hermeneutics of Jürgen Habermas² focuses upon the (material) conditions which causally shape our awareness. Hence, he speaks not of prejudices as it is not

¹ R. Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. E. Haldane and C.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

² Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971); *Towards a Rational Society* (London: Heinemann, 1971); *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973).

simply a matter of making up our mind, but of interests regarding our life and well-being, and of ideologies which mediate these to action. These can be corrected by means of the social sciences which identify structural causes and enable us to implement action to remove those structural factors which impede the proper flow of dialogue and communication and thereby generate misunderstanding. In order to allow tradition to bear creative fruit rather than to stifle freedom and new initiative, critique is concerned to assure appropriate social structures.³ It is to this critical hermeneutics that we shall turn in the present chapter.

In so doing, however, we should note immediately the real continuity of these two hermeneutic efforts. Ultimately, both are directed towards understanding, both search for theoretical truth, and both are against dogmatic acceptance of the “text.” It is true that where Gadamer seeks these goals in terms of an examination of understanding, critical hermeneutics seeks them through an examination of the conditions for this understanding. Yet, even here, the positions are not as far apart as they might seem at first sight. For today real wealth and the keys to power which condition understanding lie not so much in material possessions, but in knowledge and its implementation; hence, critical attention is directed less to the materials for production and its distribution than to techniques and their implementation. Thus, in the third chapter we shall look not only for the contrast, but for the complementary possibilities of the hermeneutic approaches of Gadamer and Habermas when understood in dialectic continuity and critique.

The Critical Effort

Classical Realism

To begin then let us attempt to situate this critical dimension of the hermeneutic enterprise, for it is important to know whether this be an arbitrary and optional accessory or an essential element for the well-formed modern mind. In fact, the roots of critical concern lie deeply, not only within the development of the modern vision, but within the nature of knowledge precisely as intellectual. As reflective, the human mind classically has been understood to be self-aware and hence capable of reasoning, of language and of responsibility. At the same time, a distinction was made in knowledge between subject and object, knower and known. In Aristotle’s vision this did not undermine self-consciousness, for in the act of knowledge the subject became intentionally the object and whatever was received was understood to be received according to the mode of the receiver.⁴

The unity of the two assured the objectivity of the knowledge, while opening a wide range of modalities or conditions of knowledge according to the self-consciousness and social consciousness of the knower. In Christian Aristotelianism this was a matter of the influence upon the knower, not only of passions such as anger or impatience, but of the transformation of the mind by faith in God and of the heart by a love which saw all humans in principle as children of God and hence more as brothers and sisters than as others.

This understanding of knowledge as unity with object reflects themes central to the Advaita tradition, namely, that as selves we are open and positively related to others rather than being closed in upon ourselves and mutually opposed one to another; that as selves we ultimately are

³ Josef Blucher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics of Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 143-151.

⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 8.431b20.

one with the Absolute Self; and that enlightenment, overcoming the illusions of false consciousness, is the full awareness of this unity.

Modern Criticism

With Descartes, however, the object of knowledge became ideas rather than beings. The conditions of knowledge, which previously had been within consciousness though not distinctly attended to, were not included in Descartes' clear and distinct ideas or mathematically related natures. In this situation it eventually became necessary clearly to identify and hence to codify and schematize these conditions of knowledge. What had been actually but only implicitly present in awareness now became explicit; the result was elaborate critical knowledge not only of the object, but of the conditions of its knowledge. Kant thematized these conditions of knowledge as categories virtually present in the mind and actualized in every act of knowledge. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* added a dynamic or developmental dimension by relating these in an unfolding sequence. He saw this as taking place through neither pure theoretical nor pure practical reason acting in separation, but as the lived process of the socialization of the individual and the universal history of humankind.

As Hegel's dialectic was constructed in an idealistic manner based upon an absolute idea another step was required to regain – now in critical terms – Aristotle's original realism. Though it was Aristotle himself who originated the concept of abstraction and hence the sciences, he had related all such knowledge to things existing in themselves independently of the knower. Thus, his famous dictum that "there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses" was not intended to assert a greater truth or meaning for sense knowledge over intellectual knowledge, but to assert that our knowledge was grounded in the independent reality of the world and its action upon us. As a result in the act of knowledge the knower intentionally becomes all things. To regain that existential content for critical knowledge while protecting contingency and freedom, it would be necessary to base the developmental pattern, not upon the absoluteness of the idea, but upon the concrete historical engagement of human with human, and in nature.

At this point the scorecard of benefits and deficits implicit in Descartes' approach via mathematically related clear and distinct ideas becomes apparent. On the one hand, the intervening two centuries of work with the schematizing of Kant and the dialectic of Hegel provided an amazingly detailed knowledge of the types of conditions of knowledge or categories and of the interrelations between them. With this understanding of the factors operative in our knowledge, immense new possibilities were opened for detailed scientific analysis of everything from mechanics to politics. When Bacon equated knowledge and power, he little imagined the extent to which knowledge would develop with the evolution of the modern critical consciousness and hence the power it would imply for controlling our physical and social environment.

On the other hand, the very abstract and idealist characteristics which enabled Cartesian knowledge to achieve the strengths of clarity and rigor robbed it of concrete and real content. This appears in a number of ways, but above all in a lack of ability to provide room for human freedom. It had been the common foible of philosophers from Plotinus through Spinoza to attempt to provide necessary knowledge, not only where this was possible, namely, regarding essences, but of all reality. In so doing they left no room for freedom. This was demonstrated by Leibnitz's lack of success in restoring in rationalist terms the freedom which Spinoza had omitted. To do this required a more fundamental philosophical reorientation than a simple return to Aristotle's view of the object of knowledge being the thing in itself critical hermeneutics remained modern by keeping

attention upon the subject, but shifted attention from the process of categorizing, schematizing and dialectically unfolding abstract meaning, to the dynamic interaction with the world in which we live. Habermas, in his work *Knowledge and Human Interests*, locates this shift in the development of attention to interest.⁵

Interest

Interest and Liberation

To grasp what Habermas means by “interest” it is important to distinguish two types of science. The first is empirical and analytic inquiry where one proceeds behaviorally by specifically designed scientific experiments. These are carried out by instrumental action, that is, action designed to manifest one or another point of reality. These attain objectivity by the use of measurements and aim at knowledge that gives control over objectified or specifically determined processes of nature. Unfortunately, such activity is generally thought of without its more inclusive and indeed indispensable context of communicative action. There the grammar of ordinary language links even the nonverbal elements of life with symbols, actions and expressions to provide schemata for interpreting the world and acting therein, namely, for a hermeneutics. This context includes not only the particular knowledge derived from the experiments I construct, but the entire range of experience, past and present, as this is preserved in my culture.

In further contrast to empirical inquiry, hermeneutic sciences are not neutral; they have an interest structure which consists of the basic orientations of work and interaction as “specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species.”⁶ These are not a mere matter of instrumental adaptation to the environment, but are located in a cultural milieu as a self-formative process of the species, and first of all of the subjects of that species. Wilhelm Dilthey and Charles Sanders Peirce suggested something of this in tracing the roots of science to interest in the conditions of life, but they considered this to be external to scientific knowledge and merely a matter of the psychology of the investigator. Habermas is concerned rather with interest in autonomy and responsibility which are understood to be achieved through the power of reflection in which the subject becomes transparent to him- or herself and hence freed from domination by external factors.⁷

Johann Fichte had pointed to interest as a constitutive, indeed, as the basic element of reason itself. He reacted against the realism of those who saw knowledge as concerned with things for their own sakes. Inasmuch as one’s interest is in successful action, it directs us toward what is known to work. Thus, we expand our knowledge to “cumulative learning processes and permanent interpretations transmitted by tradition.” Such “interpretations” depend, in turn, upon the values and the interests of the past which have given shape to our culture. Hence, interests not only depend upon, but constitute knowledge. Cognitive processes are embedded in, and reflect, life structures. As these express in turn our interest in preserving life through knowledge and action, interest is internal to knowledge.

Reason can grasp itself as self-interested, however, only by critically, dissolving the objectivistic self-understanding of the sciences and entering into self-reflection. Such self-reflection is liberative for it enables us to break beyond the set structures we find about us in order

⁵ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, chap. X.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 196-197.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

to look at the interests from which these derive. In these terms it enables us to make responsible and more fundamental choices regarding our life and our society. Thus, self-reflection constitutes a new stage of the self-formative process of the species.

Epistemology

This focus upon interest can be taken in a number of ways. Often it is taken as a matter of epistemology, a theory of truth. In that case it opens up the whole series of issues involved in the effort to elaborate an adequate method for the sciences. Habermas is concerned about all of these and his attempt to work out an overall theory has made him either a central figure or an expert integrator of the debates ranging from scientific realism, through hermeneutics, to developmental learning theory. The work by Thomas A. McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*,⁸ has excellently reconstructed both the history and a systematic integration of this awesome accomplishment.

In this light Habermas' work is an effort to elaborate a consensus rather than a correspondence theory of truth. He does not focus upon the correspondence of one's knowledge to a reality that is distinct and even to some degree unknowable. After the model of Peirce he focuses instead upon the community of investigators. This is not to proceed arbitrarily or ignore empirical data achieved via controlled sense observation, comparison and calibration. But it gives greater importance to the corrective adjustments which are made in our global understanding on the basis of this data. This global understanding with its symbolic elements is the distinctive and central creation of every culture, the basis and bearer of its values and outlook on life. In relation to this the sciences take on their importance as the methods which people agree to use in processing data by a type of feedback loop in order to make appropriate adjustments in the overall understanding.

In view of this the quantity and especially the quality of communication between investigators or searchers takes on a greater importance than objects in themselves. For the test of any truth is not correspondence to an outside world, but the consensus of untrammelled investigators; and the test of any social system or structure is the degree of openness in communication which it makes possible.

In this a not too subtle shift taken place, and it is one that cannot be appreciated if the focus remains upon epistemology or the mere validity of knowledge. This becomes manifest if one reflects that while, with Carnap, Gadamer and Habermas direct their attention to the community of investigators, they reject Carnap's foundation of this community in the employment of a reductionist method of tracing all meaning to sense data.⁹ Habermas' real concern is elsewhere; his community of investigators is built upon another basis and has another goal.

Ontology

For Habermas, as for Gadamer, the fundamental issue is not one of method, but of being. This drew his attention to Fichte's notion of interest as the fundamental self-realizing thrust of being. It is, in fact, being in its dynamism, the point of identity of both conscious reflection and dynamic expression, of theory and practice, of consciousness and bliss within the limiting confines of

⁸ Thomas A. McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

⁹ Rudolf Carnap, *Vienna Manifesto*, in G. Kreyche and J. Mann, eds., *Perspectives on Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 482-482.

multiple beings. It is the dynamic presence of the Absolute as it emerges ever more consciously and creatively in all the acts of our lives.

In acts of knowledge interest is the essential intentional thrust of self-affirmation and proclamation. This core of inner truth and light by which even small discoveries share in the plenitude of meaning is also the inner goodness and joy which enables the convergence of small things into moments of transcending happiness. It is the power of being in which we share.

In this light we can also appreciate Fichte's other concern, namely, that in their plurality such beings not become impediments one of another in the free affirmation of this interest of power of being. His solution was, of course, to reduce all plurality to unity. If being were fundamentally matter, extended and thus impervious his way of protecting freedom by eliminating plurality might be inevitable. But if being is existence, which in turn is consciousness, and which even further is bliss – as it is for the classical traditions both East and West – then being is essentially open and realized in knowing and being known. Interest affirms itself by reaching out to others with whom it shares its bliss. Individuals, which had been seen as dispersed, are now seen as united; what existed in limitation now advances in the direction of plenitude. This advance is the real sense of Habermas' project; its strategy is now clear. What must be attended to are the tactical tools he devises to analyze and overcome the impediments to the full expression of interest.

Openness

Openness and the Means of Liberation

Let us attempt to be more clear on this point. While his intent might be to relate to others in a world of distinct things, Habermas does not resolve the issue of the truth of statements by their correspondence to these as objects. Rather his basis for truth lies in the mind and its assent. "Truth belongs categorically to the world of thought (*Gedanken* in Frege's sense) and not to that of perceptions."¹⁰ This said, however, it is not merely the fact of having assented on whatever basis; that would confuse the arbitrary with the arbitrary, the true with the willed, even the arbitrarily willed. On the contrary, if the truth of the statement is not defended by correspondence to what is beyond the act of the assent it must depend upon some characteristic of that assent itself.

Habermas locates this in the requirement that the assent be the result of at least potentially open rational argumentation. All issues of direct and indirect relevance, including those of the actual conceptual context, metatheory and epistemology must be at least potentially open to rational argument. All conclusions should be delayed until this has been attended to; and all conclusions are automatically suspect when this openness has been suppressed. Implicit here is the operational claim that all would come to the same conclusion if it were possible to think through all the evidence and be guided by the better argument. This is what is meant by saying that the conclusion is fully rational when this claim is grounded in the process of reasoning itself.

This has direct implications for the situation of discourse. It must be such as to enable and promote an open search for truth. The fact that all issues must be open, when taken in the light of the difference in interests between various persons and groups, means: (a) that issues on all levels must be able to be raised and attended to in discussions of the matter, and (b) that everyone must be able to assume any role in the dialogue, able to present his or her questions and concerns of whatever type, and able to assent or to oppose on any issue. There must be a symmetrical

¹⁰ Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," in *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (Pfulligen, Neske, 1973), 232. See McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 307.

distribution of chances for anyone to speak, that is, equal opportunity to assume the diverse roles in the dialogue.

As this notion of pure communicative interaction is central to the issue of truth as characteristically human, requirements of openness and symmetry apply not merely to the closed environments of a laboratory or seminar, but to all social life. This reflects a number of important transformations in the total outlook. Where Aristotle's classical ideal of science looked for abstract content that was universally true, here universality is attached to interests and hence to the inclusion of all peoples as bearers of the many dimensions of both question and answer. Kant's solitary fidelity to formal Platonic laws is substituted here by universal agreement on what the law should be.¹¹

What is more, as real dialogue and agreement cannot be had where oppression and injustice reign, truth can be obtained only with justice and freedom. "The truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life."¹² Unfortunately, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that such an ideal situation is and always has been counterfactual, that it has never existed historically, and, given human weakness, never will. Be that as it may, the ideal remains crucial even, and perhaps especially in our relation to our heritage. It provides both the basis for a critical attitude as regards the past through an assessment of the circumstances in which elements of the tradition were formulated, and the orientation for present constructive efforts toward the establishment of structures which provide the justice and freedom required for authentic dialogue leading to a well founded consensus.

In contrast, where people are not able to enter into the discussion freely, whether from external or internal reasons, conclusions are open to the charge of being, not reasonable, but the effect of either external social manipulation or of some forms of internal self-delusion. Any hermeneutic effort of cultural transmission to reappropriate the heritage, especially if this is to have normative value, must guard itself against these dangers. For help in identifying what these dangers are and how they operate Habermas turns to Marx and Freud, for there are two facets to this critical liberative reflection. One regards our life as integrally related to our physical context, to treat which Habermas turns to Marx. The other regards the internal dynamics of our psyche, for which he turns to Freud. In both cases Habermas searches for the light which these thinkers can shed upon the way in which our interests can be stifled; he finds much that will be helpful, even essential, to our project. In both cases, however, he concludes that ultimately they lose sight of the reflective dimension in which alone authentic interest and hence real liberation can take place.

Marx

In order to identify and correct all that impedes the dialogical process in which the tradition is received and unpacked, Habermas draws upon the thought of Marx for its critical understanding of the external structures which condition the expression of human interest. While Hegel also integrated the material dimension of being into his notion of human, society, and ethics, he lacks Marx's sense of the concrete reality of human beings. Especially, his dialectic lacked the ability to appreciate the way in which the antithesis might be, not merely a further complementary expression of the thesis, but its contradiction. Both of these will be important to Habermas' effort to provide a way for identifying and removing conditions which impede liberating dialogue.

¹¹ Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 150-151.

¹² McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 307.

For Marx and Lenin the real is the material which, in turn, is that which can be observed by the senses. This is taken, however, not from the point of view of intuition and hence of ideal content, but rather as sensuous human activity or praxis.

What is distinctive of humans is that they do not merely find, but produce the material factors needed to support his life. In this activity humans center into active interchange not only with their physical environment, but between themselves in the development of methods and tool for production. Social labor and its characteristics are the conditions, not only of action, but of apprehending the world and for the evolution of the human species.¹³ “As individuals express their life, so they are.. What they are therefore coincides with their production: both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”¹⁴ The same should be said for the history of humans because labor changes the laboring subject.

In turn the conditions of production are worked out by the division of labor which in effect is the different forms of ownership. Social subjects are changed with the scope of their power of technical control which changes their relation to their environment. This, in turn, determines their conditions for apprehending the world and hence the epistemological dimensions fundamental to any liberating dialogue. Hence, the place to look for understanding is the system of labor. This derives from the political economy or decisions regarding the ownership and the division of labor. It is manifest in social life as the process of material production and appropriation.¹⁵

It is important to note that Marx has added here, not only the forces of production, but he relations of production which are developed between persons and which base the structure of social life. This opens a number of crucial possibilities for critical hermeneutics as liberating dialogue because it makes it possible in principle to consider, not only the physical productive activity, but the ideologies that undergird the social decisions regarding the division of labor; not only the instrumental action involved in the productive process, but changes in the relationships between the agents in this process, i.e., communicative action and revolutionary practice; not only the nature of the work, but the nature of the reflection which sets the conditions of this work. Were this to have taken place in Marx, and it is the project of Habermas, his system would have contributed, not only to an understanding of some of the structures and relationships involved in our life, but to the process of liberating reflection itself.

Habermas' assessment is that this did not really take place, that as the years passed Marx failed to follow up on the important possibilities he had opened initially by including not only the activity of production, but the social relations these involved. This is reflected in Marx's resolutions of the problem of repression. He sees repression of personal gratification as an objective necessity in a period of paucity. Society articulates both the extent to which this is needed and the mode of its implementation. This should be reduced, but seldom is, with the development of human control over the natural process objectified in work. In the short run this provides an explanation of revolution when a disproportion arises between the diminishing socially necessary repression and continued repression which reflects only the interests of the dominant class. In the long run Marx looks to the same development of abundance, by eliminating all social need for suppression, to provide the basis for atrophication of the state and the development of the perfect community.

For Habermas this direction in the development of Marx's thought is a disappointment, an opportunity lost. In fact, Marx had remarked two levels of reality, that of physical production of

¹³ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 26-29.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, “Feuerbach,” in *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publisher, 1947), 2-27.

¹⁵ Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 31-35.

instrumental action and that of social or communicative interaction. To the former, knowledge as technê is appropriate; to the latter, the consideration of symbolic interaction. In the end Marx turned to the former as the final articulation of both problem and solution. In so doing he missed the opportunity to pursue the latter where the issue of interests and of human freedom is centered. While his system points to the level of reflection, Marx himself remained with issues regarding structure and omitted attention to what is central, the issue of freedom, liberation and emancipation itself.

Undoubtedly, this reflects Marx's situation reacting against the idealism of Hegel and Marx's important attempt to avoid a separation of spirit from matter in which the reality of the latter would be lost. At a more fundamental level it could even be a repetition of the inability of Spinoza and Leibniz to stretch modern rationalism so that adequate place might be made for freedom. In either case, it suggests that the problems of freedom in our day are not rooted simply in instrumental productive action, but lie at a deeper level of human meaning and call for new means of analysis and response.

Marx's attention became focused upon issues of the means of production as these are direction toward survival. In these terms he considered the related factors of cooperative organization, division of labor, and distribution of the product. In contrast Habermas, noting that production was organized in purely economic terms only in modern capitalism, considers such factors in any case to be too low on the evolutionary ladder to take account of the reality of the human person. The basic institutional nucleus in terms of which production was organized is rather knowledge and its language community. Its social roles, its rules and norms community action, and hence the political and economic orders, all are properly intersubjective in meaning.

Thus the place to look for evolutionary progress toward a new form of social integration is not instrumental or strategic action, although these may serve a catalytic function. Social evolution is rather a learning process in the order of cognitive developmental psychology. Habermas understands the organizational principles of society, as institutionalizing these developmental levels of learning and establishing the structural conditions for technical and practical learning processes at particular stages of development. These principles determine the range within which institutional systems can vary, productive forces can increase or be utilized, and system complexity can be intensified. They are embodied in institutional nuclei which function as forms of social integration, whether kinship for primitive societies, political order for traditional societies, or the economic system in liberal capitalist societies. In this light social evolution is a bidimensional, both cognitive/technical and moral practical, learning process whose stages are structurally ordered according to a developmental logic.¹⁶

While such structures of symbolic interaction and the role of cultural traditions were not eliminated by Marx, neither were they part of his philosophical frame of reference, for they did not coincide with instrumental action. Yet only in these terms can power and ideology be comprehended and resolved by critical reflection.¹⁷ The instrumental action of production can respond only to external constraints. Liberation from the suppression of humans by the institution framework of labor and rewards requires communicative action because only by reflection can we become conscious of the disruption of the moral totality by repressive institutional determination that serves, not the common good, but only the private interests of the class in power.

¹⁶ Habermas, "Thesen zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus," unpublished remarks at Hegel Conference, Stuttgart, 1976. Cf. McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 244-247.

¹⁷ Habermas, *Knowledge and Interests*, 193-195.

For this we must call upon the highest level of vision in the heritage of our culture, its most exalted aspirations, its most perfect sense of justice and love. In our religious traditions this is the Absolute in which conflict is resolved in the harmony of justice, the search for knowledge finds fulfillment in contemplation and truth, and the striving of interest is quieted in the peace of self-realization. All of this is not merely future: it is the present force which in the midst of our greatest difficulties inspires and informs, moderates and guides all to its proper fulfillment.

Freud

The importance both of this reflection and of the material process of production raises the question of how one can understand the link between these two, between the ideological “superstructure” and its socio-economic “base.” The theory of psychoanalysis, which would seem an apparent place to look, was shunned by classical Marxism in its materialist fear of leaving any opening for idealism. Further, Freud’s own original materialist or physicalist bias led him to reduce his notion of instinct to the biological and ahistorical. As a result what was needed was a way of articulating the social dimension of the dynamic deformation of instincts. This was the work of the Frankfurt school which freed the notion of instinct from individual psychology by relating it to the historical development of the various economic, political and social structures.¹⁸

In their interpretation of Freud the human is torn between two dimensions: one is self-preservation through collective efforts in response to the constraints of the physical environment, the other is the internal libidinal and aggressive power. It is the work of the super-ego, namely of the parents and society, to keep these two from self-destructive confrontation.

Here the crucial factor for Freud is the amount of resources available. When these are restricted it is necessary for society as super-ego to shift the energies of its members from the libidinal and sexual to productive work. Thus the weaker the control over external physical nature the greater the need for social institutions to compel relatively rigid uniform behavior and to remove this from criticism in these circumstances libidinal energies are channeled into cultural traditions whose wishes in the subliminal form of suspended gratification, express the libidinal intentions which have been socially repressed. Similarly, social institutions provide interaction structures for directing rational action in a way that serves, not only the functional needs cited by Marx, but for stabilizing and protecting the social motives which transcend these and for handling the needs which cannot be satisfied by redirecting transforming or suppressing them.¹⁹

From thus notion of substitute gratification there follows, according to Freud, a theory of illustrations. These are not private contradictions of reality, as are delusions. Rather they are the conscious and public fixed forms which legitimate prevailing social norms deriving from the unconscious processes of substitute gratification. Such forms are the assets of a civilization and include religious worldviews and rites, ideas and value systems. These illusions harbor utopias and when technical progress makes it possible to reduce or dispense with socially necessary institutional repression this utopian content can be freed from the ideological legitimation of authority and become a critique of historically absolute power structures. This becomes an important lever in the struggle against the injustice which arises when those who do not share in social power are burdened by those who do with a disproportionate share of privations and denials.

¹⁸ McCarchy, *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 193-195.

¹⁹ Habermas, *Knowledge and Interests*, 275-279.

It is they who tend to be the first to invoke the utopian elements of a culture, its ideals, value system and religion against the established order.²⁰ They must be heard.

Habermas feels that, as with Marx, this analysis is a crucially important step toward the development of an adequate, that is, a critical hermeneutics, but that it has a basic metaphysical flaw. Its effort to direct attention to the realm of reflection through which human liberation or emancipation must take place is undermined by an initial, basically materialist presupposition. This derives from Freud's early days as a neurophysiological researcher, when he hoped that in time all problems could be resolved in physical terms. His psychoanalysis, as a temporary attempt to address these same problems, shared the supposition that all the analytic structural elements it identified were basically of a material nature, of which private reflective and public cultural factors were ultimately derivative. Emancipation could not be the central reality of life itself, but only a propitious state of physical survival. Habermas not only disagrees with the arbitrariness of this presupposition, but proceeds to show how the structural elements Freud cites are essentially analytic dimensions of a situation of interpersonal – if deformed – communication between psychoanalyst and patient. Their meaning is derivative not of physical forces, but of the reality of symbolic communication and its disruptions.

Nevertheless, Freud's analysis like Marx's does provide important insight into the dynamics of public life. Habermas draws upon this for scientific causal explanations of the dynamics of interpretation theory, namely, one that enables us to attend to the latent content of symbolic expression which otherwise is inaccessible to conscious reflection. This he terms an internal foreign territory. Indeed, we might even call it an internal foreign power. For in reality the problem is not only that the basic strivings of the person toward self-realization (that is, interests) are suppressed in society, perhaps for legitimate and acceptable social reasons. The danger is that even after these reasons have ceased to exist this force might insist on remaining suppressed and hence positively disrupt the normal pattern of social observation and response.²¹ This is the disorder in the expression of interests which must be identified, brought to light and properly ordered in relation to new and evolving human situations if the search for freedom itself is ever to be internally (i.e., intrapersonally) responsible and free.

To help others interpersonally, on the other hand, it is important not to destroy the freedom of the one who suffers these inhibitions. This requires great discretion regarding the hermeneutic process in order to avoid an elitist attitude in their regard, which is but a new repression. For this, symmetrical relations will be necessary when attempting to determine the proper theory; asymmetrical relations in assisting those who, due to their social circumstances, do not have the necessary conditions of dialogue to comprehend their interests and real situation; and prudent discussion in any effort to change these conditions.²²

Conclusion

We seem now to have proceeded in two divergent directions. With Gadamer we have seen the foundational importance and vitality of tradition as a key to emancipation. With Habermas we have seen something of the ways in which tradition itself can be transformed from a key to social peace into a dangerously manipulated tool for enslavement. In such a situation it becomes an urgent task of philosophers concerned about the foundational importance of tradition and involved in its

²⁰ Ibid., 280-281.

²¹ Ibid., 196-201.

²² Ibid., 208-209.

preservation and promotion to consider the relation between these two in order to assure that tradition be able to make its indispensable contribution to contemporary life. This is a matter of relating the hermeneutics of perennial wisdom to social change.

Chapter III

The Relation of Continuity and Critique: Paul Ricoeur

The work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, considered in the first chapter, was a veritable celebration of tradition. He protected it from the negative connotation by which prejudice had come to mean arbitrariness, breathed life into it through the notion of application and historicity, and elaborated the dialogical relationship within which it can be read anew by each generation. He made of tradition a truly living vision for our times.

In the second chapter we saw the development of a related effort by Jurgen Habermas who shares deeply many of Gadamer's concerns regarding the dialogical situation. He attempted to strengthen this and protect the assimilation of tradition by adding a critical dimension to our attention to the tradition. For this he assimilated much from the thought of Marx and Freud, while at the same time pointing out that at the most fundamental level of ontology and metaphysics, their basic materialism had kept them from taking account of what was most essential to the emancipative process central to our life.

Nevertheless, there remain a number of disconcerting elements regarding the philosophy of both Gadamer and Habermas. The first is the more obvious fact that the two have differed notably with each other regarding the basis and fundamental thrust of the hermeneutic project. If this be the case then it is not possible to suppose that by simply juxtaposing the two insights we can arrive at consistent understanding. Consequently, as can be expected in any metaphysical enquiry, a second reflective phase is required in order to assess the types of knowledge involved so that the various elements of insight be properly related among themselves. This is the task proper to epistemological reflection and the one to which we will now turn – not without the hope that it might direct our attention back to further metaphysical insight regarding the bases of a hermeneutics of perennial wisdom in a time of social change.

The direction of such a reflection appears from a number of factors particular to the thought of Gadamer and Habermas. For one, the title of Gadamer's major work, *Truth and Method*, would seem to suggest that the burden of the work would be the importance of method and its contribution to the achievement of truth. In retrospect the opposite seems to have been true, for it presented method as the key to the development of modern technical and social sciences and emphasized precisely the necessity of going beyond these in order to achieve truth. One is left with the disconcerting and difficult impression that truth and the social sciences lie in opposite directions. If so how could Habermas' effort to perfect hermeneutics through an employment of the social sciences be a positive complement to the thought of Gadamer?

This question becomes the more concrete if one considers a second concern which has persistently been objected against the position of Gadamer. Does the normative and authoritative character which he attributes to tradition delimit the freedom of the contemporary person? Even if one agrees with the position of Gadamer that authority is built not only will, but on competence and insight, could the insights of the past be adequate to support human strivings toward freedom? This question becomes particularly disconcerting when one considers the circumstances of unfreedom, oligarchy and even despotism which have characterized much of human social life. This concern can be made only stronger by Gadamer's insistence upon the importance of past horizons in the application of the hermeneutic method. But if one is to search for a discriminating relation between horizons in a manner that is liberative, some such tool of careful observation and analysis as the social and psychological sciences seems required in order to uncover and overcome

the structures of oppression operative not only in other times, but upon, and even from within, ourselves and our horizons. The project of Habermas has been directed toward this goal and is certainly most rich. But he would be the first to insist on the import of the cultural context for the sciences. It becomes difficult then to hope that the sciences can in any simply manner correct the tradition or even enable one to evaluate it.

For these reasons it will be important now to turn to epistemological issues. The vastness of the combined concerns of Gadamer and Habermas in this area preempt any attempt at a systematic view. But we might attempt to identify some of their epistemological concerns regarding society and scientific method in a way that points up their need for each other's insights, even for the proper realization of their own projects. This will bring out ways in which the two efforts are not only mutually complementary, but mutually indispensable.

Epistemology

In order to establish the roots of the problems in contemporary social and scientific theory to which Gadamer and Habermas respond, I would like to begin by contrasting the classical Aristotelian division of the sciences with the major thrust of the modern amid contemporary rationalization of life.

Aristotle

For Aristotle an important distinction is to be made between unqualified scientific knowledge or *episteme* and practical wisdom or politics, of which ethics is a part. For the former the goal is certain and universal knowledge which explains why things are so and could not be otherwise. It knows "the cause on which that fact depends, as the cause of that fact and no other, and, further, that the fact could not be other than it is."¹ This is knowledge, not of the contingencies of human social life, but of the essences of changing things. Ultimately, it is subordinate to wisdom or *Sophia* which includes knowledge of the Absolute. Indeed, Aristotle called wisdom a theology both because it is the sole type of knowledge which has God among its object and because it is appropriate to God above all other types of knowledge.²

To *episteme* Aristotle contrasts politics, and hence ethics. This is concerned with the practical order which is constituted, not of the necessary, but of the contingent. Hence, politics is concerned with the variable and seeks understanding which enables men to live well. This implies understanding the elements that enter into free and responsible decision-making including the formation of character and the appropriate relation between persons and the polis. Thus, while *theoria* attends to what is necessary and unchanging, politics as ethics and practical knowledge studies rather the development of virtue and character and the exercise of prudential judgement (*phronesis*). Finally, productive knowledge which is based upon required skills is distinct from practical knowledge which is based upon prudence.

Like *episteme* such knowledge, though distinct from wisdom, is related to it. *Episteme* is subordinate to wisdom as the knowledge of what is unchanging among the changing is subordinate to the knowledge of the absolute. Similarly, in the practical order the consideration of goals is related to happiness and ultimately to contemplation. It is the task of wisdom to now "to what end a thing must be done and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature for the good, i.e., the

¹ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I, 2, 71b 8-11.

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 2, 98 2b 28-983a li.

end, is one of the cause...The science which knows to what end each thing must be done is the most authoritative of the sciences."³

The relation between these types of knowledge is well illustrated by Plato's famous allegory of the cave, in which the person is progressively liberated from the chains of ignorance and proceeds, through the various levels of theoretical knowledge or episteme to wisdom. Having attained wisdom he is then needed as a leader in the cave. This does not mean that the practical sciences are deduced from wisdom. Rather in the light of wisdom (and contemplation) the person can realize a life of true value because he knows the good and goal of each of its aspects.

Thus, Aristotle both distinguished and integrated the types of knowledge. Each had its degree of certainty according to the nature of its object and each was related to the other through the overarching sphere of wisdom. This made possible a varied and adaptive search for truth.

Rationalism

With the Renaissance fascination with mathematics gave rise to a new standard for truth, namely, that of a unified science in which all would have the same certainty as obtained in mathematics. The implementation of this project was primarily through the quantitative or quantifiable statements which could function as scientific laws. With these it would be possible to predict future states on the basis of a description of initial conditions. Where these conditions could be manipulated the scientific law would also enable one to achieve the goals one had set. This potential for rigorous knowledge in the physical order came to supplant the element of skill in *techne*, for which it substituted the productive power of technology.

This application of scientific theory, predicated upon the mathematical clarity and distinctiveness of ideas, has been most visible in transforming our physical environment. This remains relatively secondary, however, when compared to the impact of rationalization in the area of practical knowledge, i.e., the ethico-political field. Here attention is no longer upon the development of character and prudence, but upon the identification of the laws of human nature and their use to achieve the desired behavior through arranging the corresponding circumstances. With time these laws became in fact quantified relations predicated upon operative definitions, whereas considerations of values were excluded as not admitting of truth or falsity.

Problems in Social and Scientific Theory

Social Problematics

In a series of steps described by Habermas in "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision: On Theory and Practice in Our Scientific Civilization,"⁴ the conception of practical life was changed radically. First, since values are not able to figure in the mathematized rationalization of life they cannot be the subject of rational consultation and consensus, but only the basis for competition between rival interest groups. Here decision theory can provide the form according to which the choice between alternate means is made according to proper preference rules and decision procedures. But this is merely formal; it leaves at the root of the preference an area of values which is beyond rational justification and control. This means that practical life is radically decisionistic and that irrationality lies at the very heart of the decision process.

³ Ibid., 982 c 4-10.

⁴ Theory and Practice (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1973).

Second, the political process becomes increasingly technocratic as scientific competency is directed toward clarifying applications of the available resources and possible techniques.

Third, for lack of a rational basis for values, attention shifts entirely to the formal element of control as strategies are developed for succeeding in situations of competing interests. In other words, the political process itself has generated its own supreme value of self-assertion and requires an understanding of the way in which such a system can be self-maintaining and self-regulating. The system has stability as its goal and requires capabilities for its maintenance. All is manipulated in function of such stability and maintenance, rather than according to the traditional values and goals of the political process or even the enlightenment value of emancipation.

Technocratic consciousness is the final step in the rationalization of modern life into a cybernetically self-stabilizing system, devoid of any understanding of society as a cooperative unity of persons who freely, fairly and cooperatively organize their practice. In this circumstance the political development of the person becomes, not merely superfluous, but destructive. One's involvement in the political process becomes simply that of choosing a leader for the system, for major decisions must be made by a technocracy.⁵ As a result of this political disenfranchisement, interests begin to turn inward towards family and personal gain, thereby substituting individual and socially disintegrative self-interest for social concerns.

At this point a new situation begins to arise. The set of social values which were prescinded from in order to promote the rationalization of life, is now substituted by antisocial values pitting the private against the social. As the mechanisms of social stabilization react to suppress these anti-social elements all inexorably develops in the direction of increasing domination and oppression rather than of emancipation and freedom.⁶ If this process of privatization simply directed one's attention to one's own family, where they might draw from family traditions, the value pattern for legitimate social action would not be bankrupt. Unfortunately, the opposite is the case. For the pattern of rationalization in the public sphere suggests a model of rationalization in the private sphere as well. This results in a sense of question and contingency for the contents and even techniques of tradition. Respect for authority and the habit of cooperation are undermined by the very pervasiveness of state activity which depends upon the intensification of these attitude.⁷

In sum, the supremacy of the technocratic over the political consciousness produces a technocratic elite and suppresses the emancipatory interests, not only of one or another class, but of the human race as a whole.⁸

Scientific Problematic

It is interesting to note that John Locke initiated this fundamentally empiricist bent in response to a period of intense cultural change and conflict. Observing that the different parties in the England of his day were proceeding on a basis of very different principles and visions of meaning and values, he had proposed wiping the slate of the mind clean, as it were, and beginning with an

⁵ See Niklos Luhman's argument for nonparticipatory social planning: *Theoria der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie was Leistet die Systemforschung* (Frankfurt, 1971). See McCarthy, *The Critical Theory*, 222-231.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1-11 and 383.

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1975), 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 369-382.

analysis of ideas on the basis of the way in which they entered the mind, namely, through the senses. By treating these as the basic, unquestionable and evident materials with which the mind thinks, and assuring that nothing else was added beyond reflection upon these, he hoped to avoid cultural conflict and establish a basis for social reconstruction.

The operation may have been a success; indeed, Carnap concluded his "Vienna Manifesto" with the statement that the radical application of this approach and the new scientific mentality was being accepted because the "scientific worldview serves life, and is being accepted by life."⁹ But if the operation was a success, the patient seems to have died, for it left no depth or mystery, no whole or person; all was surface. While Carnap yet spoke of his and other minds, Mach, with perhaps greater consistency, reduced the ego simply to a construct from sensations. Without consciousness, however, how can there be sense or empirical certainty? Correlatively, science the object of science is a totality, can sensation constitute science? We are then delimited to a realm of facts and to the processing of these facts without either a knowing subject or a world beyond.

Popper, Kuhn and others have reacted to this evermore radical, but not illogical, devolution of Locke's original project by pointing to the importance of the subject. For Popper, what is decisive is not mere perception but observation. The latter "is always preceded by particular interest, question, or problem -- in short, by something theoretical."¹⁰ Scientific observations are made in the horizon of expectations, concerning which we noted Gadamer's observations in the previous chapter: "Only their setting in this frame confers meaning or significance on our experiences, actions and observations."¹¹ Facts are not given but constituted, inasmuch as they are shaped by physiology and are anticipated in the light of previous experience and tradition.

There is a second dimension to this work of science in the positivist tradition which also leads beyond the notion of truth as a simple correspondence between the content of mind and world to the special importance of the subject. This is traceable to the basic aim of Locke to establish the possibility for political dialogue and cooperation by establishing a basis for a commonly agreed content of knowledge. This is manifested as well in Carnap's call for a unified science, where the unity consists, not in the content, but in the cooperation between scientific investigators.¹² It is found, but not developed, in Kuhn's sensibility to "conventions," "frames of reference," "dispositions," and "traditions," to models, values and symbolic generalizations. Though these subject-centered factors are not constitutive of science, it is nonetheless the shifts in the constellations of these commitments that constitute the paradigm shifts or changes fundamental to the evolution of scientific knowledge.

Though these insights of Popper and Kuhn underline the importance of the subject, they are not carried through to their logical conclusions. Instead, the notion of an objective content of science independent of the subject, which echoes in turn the long lasting theory of truth as correspondence between the subject and the object, kept Popper from recognizing the full role of the subject in constituting the object. It resulted also in Kuhn's relegation of these factors to a sociology of science, rather than to the elaboration of its content. For Habermas in contrast, to be responsive to these insights and their full implications is to move from a correspondence to a consensus theory of truth. In moving from an objectivism, however, he is concerned not to fall into a relativism and looks for inter-subjectivity without subjectivism.

⁹ Carnap, op.cit, 283-487, 492.

¹⁰ Karl Popper, *Object of Knowledge* (New York: Oxford, 1972), 342.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹² Carnap, op.cit, 43.

A Dialectic of Tradition and Critique

This brings one in an inductive process from the epistemological requirements of both social and scientific thought to another, metaphysical, level of insight regarding the nature of reality itself.¹³ For whether one employs a correspondence or a consensus model of truth, the requirement of subjectivity without subjectivism means that our needs and our interests cannot be self-enclosed, but by nature, are open to others in a unity of mutual sharing marked by intelligibility, by truth or consciousness, and by goodness, love or bliss.

If we are not to abort personal and social life through a process of privatization under a merciless state; if we are not to lose our heritage, values and culture in a process of abstract "scientific" objectification, it will be the result of acknowledging that consciousness and bliss are the characteristics of existence itself, and that whatever exists on this basis and in these terms. Our culture and values, in their richness and their poverty, are our efforts to be; they are the reality of our life.

The Need for Critique

The work of Gadamer and Habermas manifests something of the dialectic of this life as lived in our limiting circumstances of place, and especially of time as historicity. On the one hand, the dynamism of our existence and consciousness, which is expressed in the pattern of our interests, can be evaluated only in the context of a tradition. On the other hand, tradition must continually be critically examined in order to avoid, by mechanical repetition, becoming an instrument of repression rather than of liberation. Both are required and both are interrelated. A closer look at this dialectic might uncover, not only the originating presence of the absolute, but something of the way in which it lives, not only beyond, but in time.¹⁴ Hence, we shall attempt to draw upon some ways in which each of these philosophers has contributed to the other. Indeed, in the course of their exchanges, each has notably modified his position in the direction of accommodating and integrating the insights of the other, without, however, achieving full agreement.

First, we should note two ways in which tradition must draw upon critique if it is to respond to what Habermas refers to as interest which surpasses the technical or instrumental and the practical orders, and to engage the deeper and more abiding interest in emancipation.

The hermeneutics of Gadamer applies our cultural heritage to the present by a renewal and reinterpretation of tradition. It attends to the new implications of tradition, but with attention to the way in which this is a legitimate flowering of the life of the tradition. Its means are especially the humanities in which this tradition, both in its literary form and in the form of shared values and ideals, is articulated. The emphasis here is upon appropriating the tradition, identifying with it, and acknowledging its pre-presence as fore-understanding in our every question. From this there follows Gadamer's reservations regarding the objectivizing distance native to the social sciences.

¹³ John B. Chethimatham, *Consciousness and Reality: An Indian Approach to Metaphysics* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1967).

¹⁴ See Chapters I and II. See also Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John B. Thompson, ed., *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *Critical Debates*, John B. Thompson and David Held, eds. (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1982); Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

Habermas, in contrast, stresses that as distinct from merely empirical sciences these must not only describe regularities, but identify at a deeper level the controlling relations of dependence which have become fixed ideologically. By subjecting these to critique self-reflection as governed by an interest in emancipation can enable the real implication of the tradition to emerge.

Paul Ricoeur points out that there are roots in Gadamer's thought for the recognition of the importance of this critique element, for he sees historical distance and a consequent new horizon questioning as a prerequisite for drawing out new implications and dimensions of meaning in the text. This, in turn, reflects the importance of distinguishing the text from the intention of the author, for only the former transcends the author's psychological and sociological context. This emancipation of the text -- its psycho-cultural and socio-cultural decontextualization -- is a fundamental condition for hermeneutic interpretation: "Distanciation now belongs to the mediation itself."¹⁵

This is reflected first on the essential or structural level and secondly on the existential level. In the former, it becomes necessary to go beyond Gadamer's description of discourse as spontaneous conversation of question and answer, and to take account also of discourse as a work. As the product of work it is crafted by praxis from the smaller units of words, phrases and sentences. As a result, meaning takes place in structures which mediate understanding "the matter of the text is not what naive reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediates."¹⁶ Hence, structural analysis is required in order to understand the depth semantics of the text as a condition for grasping its matter. Thus the sciences can help and, in fact, even be essential to the task of hermeneutics. This becomes even more true at present when the minds which construct the texts are themselves ordered by scientific structures and by controlling relations of social dependence which need to be made manifest in order that reflection on the tradition be truly free. Hence the critical consciousness made possible by the linguistic, social and psychological sciences is required in order for the hermeneutic project of Gadamer to be effectively implemented.

If the sense of the work is internal organization on the existential level the reference of the text is the way in which being unfolds in front, as it were, of the text. This is the existential reality of being emerging as temporal and historical -- as the power to be. In sharp contrast to a deadening repetition of the past frozen in a fixed ideology, distanciation in terms of the power to be is an essential element in the critique of ideology.

This implies not merely a liberation of the structures of our environment, but a liberation of the self as well. For hermeneutic understanding is not an imposition of the reader upon the text. On the contrary, the text constitutes an interlocutor in the dialogue, and thereby enables the reader consciously to examine his or her own subjectivity. By opening new horizons the text makes possible imaginative variations of one's ego. These enable the reader to achieve the distance required for a first critique of one's own illusions and false consciousness, and of the ideology in which one has been reared.¹⁷

Critical distance is then an essential element for hermeneutics. It must include an analysis of the actual historical social structures by the social sciences as a requirement for liberation from internal determination by dependence upon unjust interests. In addition critical distance has also

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 82, 90-91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-95.

an existential dimension opened by the temporality of being and human projection toward the historical future. Together these make possible the liberation of the subject itself.

The Need for Tradition

The relation between hermeneutics and social critique is a dialectical one. Just as distancing by the critical social sciences can provide an essential element of awareness and emancipation in a world of structure which are increasingly technical and convoluted, so also tradition provides an essential context for the critique to which these sciences contribute. Ricoeur has attempted to codify some of its contributions.¹⁸

First, a critique must recognize that it is carried out in the context of interests which establish a frame of meaning. The sequence of technical, practical and emancipating interests reflect the emergence of human beings out of nature and corresponds to the developmental phases of moral sensitivity. Habermas studies Kohlberg closely on this and employs his work.¹⁹ To the question of the basis of these interests, however, no adequate answer is provided. They are not empirically justifiable or they would be found at the level of technical interests. Neither do they constitute a theory as a network of working hypotheses for then they would be regional and justified at most by the interest in emancipation. But this would leave them entrapped in a vicious circle.

The only proper description of these interests as truly all-embracing must be found in the direction of the classical transcendental properties of being: unity, truth and goodness, Heidegger's existentials, or the Hindu's existence (sat), consciousness (cit) and bliss (ananda) as characteristics of Brahman and hence of being itself. These are hidden only in being so present that they are in need of unveiling by hermentuci method. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutic project on the clarification of prejudices and Habermas' critical work on interests by the social sciences, though not identical, share common ground.

Secondly, in the end, critiques of ideologies appear to share characteristics common to those of the historical hermeneutic science. Both focus upon the ability to develop the communicative action of free persons. Their common effort is to avoid a reduction of all human communication to instrumental action and institutionalization, for it is here that manipulation takes place. The success or failure in extending the critique of interests beyond instrumental action determines whether the community will be promotive or destructive of its members.

Regarding this general horizon of social critique Ricoeur observes that such critique is unlikely ever to be successful if we have no experience of communication with our own cultural heritage. For in a dialogue distortions can be identified as such only if there is a basis of consensus, not only around an empty ideal or regulative idea, but one that has been experienced, lived and shared. "He who is unable to interpret his past may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest in emancipation."²⁰

This raises a new type of question, namely, how the interest in emancipation can be kept alive. Undoubtedly, for this communicative action must be reawakened and made to live if we are not to be simply subjects -- indeed "slaves" -- of the technological machine. But how is this to be done; whence can this life be derived if the present situation is pervasively occupied and shaped by

¹⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), 72-73.

¹⁹ Lawrence Kohlberg, "From is to Ought," in T. Mischel, ed., *Cognitive Development and Epistemology* (New York: Academic Press, 1971), 151-236.

²⁰ Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 97.

science and technology as a new, and this time all-encompassing, "master"? Ricoeur answers that this can be done only by drawing upon our heritage. In this he repeats a theme of Heidegger, suggesting that we need to retrieve or reach back into our heritage now as never before in order to find the radically new resources needed for emancipation in an increasingly dominated world.

Finally, there is a still more fundamental sense in which critique, rather than standing opposed to tradition or taking a questioning attitude thereto, is itself an appeal to tradition. If Gadamer's position might retain some affinities to the Romanticism it eschews, criticism appeals unabashedly to the heritage of emancipation it has received from the Enlightenment. But this tradition has longer roots for it reaches back to the liberating acts of the Exodus and the Resurrection. "Perhaps," writes Ricoeur, "there would be no more interest in emancipation no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and Resurrection were affected from the memory of humankind."²¹

Undoubtedly, according to the proper norms of communicative action, these historical acts should be taken in their symbolic sense in which liberation and emancipation express the interests basic to traditional cultures. In this manner they point even more fundamentally to the Absolute: as the unique existence (sat) in whom the alienated can be reunited; as consciousness (cit) which founds subjectivity without subjectivism and which is expressed through human freedom that generates historicity without historicism; and as bliss (ananda) by whom the indifferent can reach out in mutual comprehension and concern which transform the remembrance of the tradition into hope of emancipation.

²¹ Ibid., 99-100.

Chapter IV

A Dialectic of Liberation through History: Paul Tillich

In the course of the previous chapters we have investigated a major modern effort to understand the nature and role of tradition in social life. The first chapter studied the importance of the tradition, not only as a reality of the past, but as a leaven that is both living and life-giving in our times. It is characterized by the Gospel image of the Scribe, who, like a householder, "can draw out of his storeroom things new as well as old." The second chapter reviewed this from a critical perspective in order better to understand the conditions under which this tradition was lived. Here the emphasis was less on confidence in tradition as the archetypal insights of experience than on the elements which prevent that insight, impede its flowering and even render it an instrument not of liberty but of oppression, not of life but of death. The third chapter was an effort to understand these two attitudes to tradition, not as antithetic one to another, but as mutually required by each other in the proper realization of their tasks.

But is this all that needs to be said? If each requires the other, then what is the nature of the reality that includes the two? What is the nature of our life -- personal and social -- as a living synthesis of the two? What is the nature and sense of our history if social critique is required because of the reality of the contradiction of our values? If tradition can hinder as well as promote, can bring death as well as life, then how, through time marked by their contradiction, do we live the values of our traditions?

It is a question that we must make neither too big, nor too small. On the one hand, if we give too much to the contradictions too much we lose the foundational truth in the *Upanisads*, the Bible and the Koran that Being is One, Blissful and True. It was, I believe, this all-important truth that inspired Shankara's choice of illusion as his prime interpretative tool in the Introduction to his *Commentary on the Sutras*. On the other hand, were we to miss the significance of these contradictions we might fail to appreciate the profound truth of karma, namely, not only that we must live according to our present conditions, but that our advancement toward enlightenment is through our response to the contradictions at all levels of our lives. Gandhi would have been merely a great political leader if his campaign against oppression had been only against other peoples, he is truly a saint for our times because his campaign was as well against oppression within his own people and disruption within his own self.

This chapter then turns to the thought of Paul Tillich who faced this sense of contradiction in his own life and reflected it in the deep systematic structure of his philosophy. Tillich began his study of philosophy by reading the complete works of Schelling, a contemporary of Fichte and Hegel. Drawing thus on the Idealist tradition with many in the pre- and post-world war I period, he developed a dialectical philosophy of history in which each stage was a complementary and more perfect manifestation of the potentialities, not only of human beings, but of the Absolute. This led him to expect the rise of National Socialism to be a new step in the realization of the divine in time. Hence its eventual demonic character was not simply a fact, a disappointment, or, as Tillich courageously spoke out against it, a personal danger. It imposed as well a fundamental revision in Tillich's dialectic to reflect the reality of contradiction and tragedy, and its place in the unfolding of the three steps of his existential dialectic: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

One would miss the force of this dialectic, if one were to see it simply as a theoretical structure. Martin Luther King wrote his doctoral thesis on the thought of Paul Tillich and in the process

created what was to that point the best analysis of Tillich's dialectic. Yet, he was to write after his later discovery of Gandhi's concept of satyagraha (or love-force) that

the notion was profoundly significant to me. As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi, my scepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time that the Christian doctrine of love, operating through the Gandhian method of non-violence, is one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom. At that time, however, I acquired only an intellectual understanding and appreciation of the position, and I had no firm determination to organize it in a socially effective situation.

The experience in Montgomery (the bus boycott) did more to clarify my thinking in regard to the question of nonviolence than all the books I had read. As the days unfolded, I became more and more convinced of the power of nonviolence. Nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life. Many issues I had not cleared up intellectually concerning nonviolence were now resolved within the sphere of practical action. My privilege of travelling in India had a great impact on me personally, for it was invigorating to see firsthand the amazing results of a nonviolent struggle to achieve independence. The aftermath of hatred and bitterness that usually follows a violent campaign was found nowhere in India, and a mutual friendship, based on complete equality, existed between the Indian, and British people within the Commonwealth.¹

It is interesting to note that during the darkest days of his struggles in Montgomery and later, Dr. King kept in regular telephone conversation with the mentor of his work on Tillich's dialectic. De. DeWolf. As the practice of nonviolence progressively clarified the theory, the theory of Tillich progressively guided the practice. This combination enabled Martin Luther King to provide providential leadership to his people in their darkest hours. Here we shall analyze the dialectical of Tillich, but attempt to do this through the experience of Dr. King.

Thesis: The Ground of Being

To begin his description of the first and basic dimension of reality as thesis, Tillich uses a correspondence, rather than a consensus model of truth, and proceeds ingressively to the Absolute as word or consciousness. He takes as his point of departure the polarity of subject and object, because both members are presupposed for the ontological question. But if they provide his point of departure, he leaves no doubt that he shares the modern concern to proceed to a point of identity where both subject and object are overcome. This recent concern is the result of the observation that the human being has been reduced to the status of a thing by allowing oneself to be subjected to the objects one produces. The strongest statement of this was made by Nietzsche, but the best known is Marx's description of the reduction of the worker to a commodity. Reality then must not be simply identified with objective being, for the human being must participate in some deeper principles or lose one's value and individuality. However, to identify reality with subjective being or consciousness would be equally insufficient, for the subject is determined by its contrast with the object. Consequently, what is sought is a level of reality which is beyond this dichotomy of subject and object, grounding the value of both.

¹ Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love* (London: Holder and Stoughton, 1964), 149-150.

Logos

The need for a point of identity and its function is better appreciated as one goes beyond the subject-object relationship to the investigation first of knowledge and then of being. The point of procedure in every analysis of experience and of tradition must be "the point where subject and object are at one and the same place,"² namely, the logos as the element of form, of meaning and of structure. In the knowing subject or self the logos is called subjective reason and makes self a centered structure. Correspondingly, the known object or world is called objective reason and makes the world a structured whole. There is nothing beyond the logos, structure of being. It is, of course, possible to conceive the relation between the rational structures of mind and of reality in a number of ways. Four of these possibilities are represented by realism, idealism, pluralism and monism. But Tillich notes that all philosophers have held at least an analogy to exist between the logos of the mind and the logos of the world.³ Successful scientific planning and prediction provide a continual pragmatic proof of this identity, while the difference between cultures and their progressive unfolding manifests its analogous character.

The philosophical mind, however, is not satisfied with the mere affirmation, or even the confirmation of the fact. There arises the problem of why there should be this correspondence of the logos in the subject with the logos of reality as a whole. This can be solved only if the logos is primarily the structure of the Absolute as the principle of its expression or self-manifestation, mediating "between the silent abyss of being and the fullness of concrete individualized, self-related beings."⁴ The identity or analogy of the rational structures of mind and of reality follow from both having been mediated through the same identical divine logos.

In this way reason in both its objective and subjective structures points to something which appears in these structures but which transcends them in power and meaning.⁵ Logos becomes the point of identity between God, self, and world. Of these three, the word of the Absolute is central and is participated in by self and world as they acquire their being. Thus the logos of reason gives us a first introduction to the concept Tillich has of the Absolute overcoming the separation of subject and object to provide a deeper synthesis of the reality of both.

This conclusion of the analysis of experience has definite implications for an analysis of being. For the identity is not merely an external similarity of two things to a third without a basis in the divine, and this is within beings. The only nonsymbolic expression is the term "being itself."⁶ In phenomenological terms which reflect our deep conscious life, this is our "ultimate concern." It is within beings as their power of being, as an analytic dimension in the structure of reality. As such it is the "substance" appearing in every rational structure; the "ground" creative in every rational creation; the "abyss" unable to be exhausted by any creation or totality of creation; the "infinite

² Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 91-94; Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. Part I, N.A. Rasetzki and Parts II-IV, Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1936), 60.

³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, 23, 75-76, 156, 172-173, 279.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 238-239. Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, vol. I of *The Library of Living Theology*, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan Co., 1956), 335. To this single nonsymbolic expression of the divine he has added severe limitation.

potentiality of being and meaning" pouring itself into the rational structures of mind and reality to actualize and transform them.⁷ God is then the ground not only of truth, but of being as well. In fact, he can be the ground of truth precisely because he is the ground of being.

These ideas have had a long history in the mind of the human being. In the distant past the *Upanishads* viewed the Brahman both cosmically as the all-inclusive, unconditioned ground of the universe from which conditioned beings emanate, and acosmically as the reality of which the universe is but an appearance. The absolute is the "not this, not that (neti neti) "the Real of the real" (satyasya satyam).⁸ This line of thought can be traced through Plato and Augustine to the medieval Franciscans and Nicholas of Cusa. Tillich is fond of relating his thought to these classical traditions. The proximate determinant of his thought in positing this ontological principle of identity beyond the subject and object is Schelling. At the very first Schelling agreed with Fichte in making the "Absolute Ego" of consciousness the ultimate principle and reality. It is this consciousness which dialectically becomes the world of nature. But on further consideration Schelling failed to see the particular connection between the infinite Ego and the finite object. For this reason he moved the Absolute Ego from the conscious side of the dichotomy to a central, neutral position between the prior to both objectivity and subjectivity.⁹ Thus the Absolute is now called not Ego but the "unconditional" and "identity"; the idealism is no longer subjective, but ontological. This is the insight of the early Schelling which Tillich readily accepts and which may be still better stated in the Hindu Brahman as Consciousness or Cit. Thus he traces the line of his thought in between, but distinct from, both the subjective idealism of Fichte and the objective realism of Hobbes. Both sides of the polarity must be maintained: the Unconditional will be equally the ground of both subject and object.¹⁰

The Depth and Power of Being

Two important specifications must be added to this notion of a divine depth dimension beyond both subject and object. One regards the incapacity of limited beings to exhaust or adequately represent the divine. This indicates the radical individualization of the divine. The other concerns the way in which the Absolute is manifested in the essence of finite beings. This points to the way they participate in it.

The first of these specifications which Tillich is careful to make concerning the point of identity of subject and object is that it is gnostically incomprehensible and ontologically inexhaustible, the former reflecting the latter. "This power of being is the prius which proceeds all special contents logically and ontological."¹¹ It is not even identified with the totality of things. For this reason the divine is termed the "abyss" because it cannot be exhausted in any creation or totality or creations.¹²

⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 79, 207.

⁸ *Brahadaranyaka Upanisad*, II, i.20 and IV, ii.4, cited by T.M.P. Mahadevan, "The Upanisads," in *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), I, 62-63.

⁹ Tillich, *Theory of Culture*, 92.

¹⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 171.

¹¹ Tillich, *Theory of Culture*, 25.

¹² Paul Tillich, "Symbol and Knowledge: A Response," *Journal of Liberal Religion* II (Spring 1941): 203. Cf. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, 6.

Human intuition of the divine always has distinguished between the abyss of the divine (the element of power) and the fullness of its content (the element of meaning), between the divine depth and the divine logos. The first principle is the basis of Godhead, that which makes God, God. It is the root of his majesty, the unapproachable intensity of his being, the inexhaustible ground of being in which everything has its origin. It is the power of being infinitely resisting nonbeing, giving the power of being to every thing that is.¹³

This position of the divine as the inexhaustible depth dimension of reality is the basis of the distinction of God from creatures.

In the order of knowledge this implies that, if the human being is to proceed beyond finite realities to an awareness of what is truly divine, one must leave behind the rational categories of technical reason. Such categories limit the infinite which they make an object, "a" being among others, rather than being itself. For this reason God cannot be conceptualized.¹⁴ To say that God is the depth of reason is to make him another field of reason. In fact, he precedes the structures of reason and gives them their inexhaustible quality simply because he can never be adequately contained in them. Schelling has termed the divine the *Unvordenliche* because it is "that before which thinking cannot penetrate."¹⁵ It was the error of idealism to think that this could ever be completely reduced to rational forms. Tillich is protected from this error by his basic ontological observation of the various levels of reality. "There are levels of reality of great difference, and...these different levels demand different approaches and different languages."¹⁶ The divine is assigned to the deepest of these levels, and consequently, must be known and expressed in a manner quite different from that of ordinary knowledge and discourse. It is this same fact to which Tillich is referring when he introduces the dialectical relationship between these levels and speaks of the divine as "the prius." Here too it will be necessary to proceed beyond conceptualization to an intuitive, personal awareness of the divine. This will be described below, but one thing is already clear. Since the categories are the basis for the objective element in knowledge and the means by which it is made common, the intuitive awareness will have to be personal and marked by subjectivity.

In this context it is possible to locate the realm of culture and of its traditions for in its human realization the word or logos as expressive consciousness is not merely a reflection or map of the physical world, but an expression of the truth of absolute Consciousness or of truth itself. Indeed, as has become increasingly evident in recent debates in the philosophy of science, even the mapping of the physical environment is carried out according to the symbol systems and the overall view of a culture. Thus the culture of a people stands between technical reason and the Absolute Consciousness in which it participates as a partial expression. For this reason it has a classical character which transcends the particular moments of the human in time, but plays for all of them an authoritative or normative role.

The other specification made by Tillich concerning "the depth dimension" concerns its manifestation in the essence of finite beings. The notion of essence is found in some form in

¹³ Ibid., I, 250-251.

¹⁴ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be: Terry Lectures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951), 184-185.

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 76.

¹⁶ Paul Tillich, "Religious Symbols and Our Knowledge of God," *The Christian Scholar* XXXVIII (September 1955): 192.

practically all philosophers, but classically in Plato and Aristotle. Plato attempted to solve the problem of unity and separation in knowledge by the myth of the original union of the soul with the essences or ideas. Recollection and reunion take place later and in varying degrees. Tillich stresses that in Plato the unity of soul and ideas is never completely destroyed. Although the particular object is strange as such, it contains essential structures “with which the cognitive subject is essentially united and which it can remember.”¹⁷

In Aristotle there is a retention of the notion of essence as providing the power of being. Essence is the quality and structure in which being participate. But this is still potential; it is the actual which is real. Tillich accepts the Aristotelian position in these general terms and then uses it in order to develop his conception of creation. The Absolute was described above as the inexhaustible, creative abyss. In order that this might, in fact, be creative, an element of structure must be added. This is the second divine principle, or richness of the Absolute. The third principle is the Spirit of love or bliss (Ananda) in whom God “goes out from” himself or “gives actuality to that which is potential in the divine ground...The finite is posited as finite within the process of the divine life, but it is reunited with the infinite within the process of the divine life, but it is reunited with the infinite within the same process.”¹⁸

In these terms Tillich expresses the positive side of the dialectical relationship of the essences of finite beings to the divine. He attempts to show how these essences can contain, without exhausting, the power of being, while the Absolute remains this power itself. As exclusively positive it might be said to express only the first element of creation. This leaves the essences of finite beings, as it were, in a state of dreaming innocence within the divine life from which they must awaken to actualize and realize themselves.¹⁹ Creation is fulfilled in the self realization by which the limited beings leave the ground of being to “stand upon” it. Whatever be said of antithesis as separation, the element of essence is never completely lost for “if it were lost mind as well as reality would have been destroyed in the very moment of their coming into existence.”²⁰ It is the retention of this positive element of essence which provides the radical foundation for participation by limited beings in the divine and their capacity of pointing to the infinite power of being and depth of reason. As mentioned in the first section, such participation in the absolute and some awareness of it is a necessary prerequisite for any religion.

In sum, this first or positive stage of Tillich’s dialectic, by placing the divine as the point of identity beyond both subject and object, has introduced both the element of participation necessary for any religion and the element of differentiation. We must now investigate Tillich’s attempt to give both of these a context which can be called truly contemporary. The second or negative stage of his dialectic provides this for differentiation. It will remain for the third phase of the dialectic, the synthesis, to present a contemporary understanding of participation in the divine.

Antithesis

Paul Tillich turns to the second phase his dialectic in order to specify the basis infinite-finite structure of the thesis by a contemporary form of differentiation or individualization. Its contemporary nature lies in its particular relation to nonbeing. Tillich speaks of nonbeing in the

¹⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 94-99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 238, 255.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83. Cf. Paul Tillich, “A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of Incarnation,” *Church Quarterly Review* CXLVII (January 1949): 141.

Absolute. But it is there as dialectically driving being out of its seclusion to make it living. It is also in the Absolute as dialectically overcome, thus placing being itself beyond the polarity of the finite and the infinite negation of the finite.²¹ In beings less than the divine the nonbeing is not overcome. The classical statement “creator ex nihilo” means that the creature “must take over what might be called ‘the heritage of nonbeing’. It has this along with its participation in being, its heritage of being. Everything which participates in the power of being is ‘mixed’ with nonbeing. It is being in the process of coming from and going toward nonbeing.”²² This is finite being.

Fall

To understand this more completely one must integrate what has been stated theologically as the Fall of man. This implies the necessity of avoiding an Hegelian understanding of the dialectical expression of being by nonbeing. Hegel would make existence simply a step in the expression of essence. However, profound observation of the modern world, especially of the cataclysm of the First World War, forced home the point that reality is also the contradiction of essence.²³ This has been expressed by the concept of estrangement taken from Hegel’s earlier philosophy and applied to the individual by Kierkegaard, to society by Marx and to life as such by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. It is the reason for the need to critique the uses of tradition, which of itself would be unquestionable. In fact, since the later period of Schelling it has been commonplace for a whole series of philosophers and artists to describe the world as one of fragments, as a disrupted unity. As a result individualization has become excessive and led to a loneliness of the human beings before one’s fellow beings and before God. This, in turn, drives the human toward one’s inner experience so that one becomes still further isolated from one’s world. The presupposition of this tragic nature of the human being is human transcendent fall.²⁴

How is this Fall with its existential estrangement to be understood? First, its possibility is traced to finite human freedom. As seen above, the finite person is excluded from the infinity to which one belongs. In this state freedom gives one the capacity to contradict oneself and one’s essential nature. Furthermore one is aware of this finitude, of the threat from nonbeing. This adds the note of anxiety to freedom, producing a drive toward transition into existence. But once this freedom is aroused the human finds a double threat rooted in one’s finitude and expressed in one’s anxiety. It is the threat either of not actualizing one’s potencies and thus not fulfilling oneself, or of actualizing them, knowing that one will not choose according to the norms and values in which one’s essential nature expresses itself. In either case one is bound to lose oneself and one’s freedom.

The finite nature of human freedom implies an opposite pole, called destiny. This applies even to the freedom of self-contradiction. “It is possible only within the context of the universal transition from essence to existence and every isolated act is embedded in the universal destiny of

²¹ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 179-180, 188-191. Boehme’s *Urgrund* and Schelling’s “first potency” are examples of dialectical nonbeing in God.

²² *Ibid.*, 189, 253.

²³ *Ibid.*, 202-203. Some such distinction of essence and existence is presupposed by any philosophy which considers the ideal as against the real, truth against error or good against evil.

²⁴ Tillich, *Theory of Culture*, 104-105; *Systematic Theology*, II, 24-25, 45. Cf. Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, 60-65.

existence.”²⁵ This means that the estrangement of the human being from one essential nature has two characteristics, the one tragic coming from destiny, the other moral (guilt) coming from freedom. Destiny of itself connotes universality. Since the Fall is the presupposition of existence, there is no existence before or without it.²⁶ Everything, then, that exists participates in the Fall with its twin character of tragedy and guilt. This applies to every person, every act of the human being, and every part of nature as well.

Tillich finds his extension to nature of a share in guilt justified by recent evolutionary theories and depth psychology. But how the inevitability and the freedom for estrangement are to be conciliated remains an enigma. In one place he affirms the necessity of something in finite freedom for which we are responsible and which makes the Fall unavoidable. In another work he considers estrangement to be an original fact with “the character of a leap and not of structural necessity.”²⁷ Despite these difficulties in explaining how human estrangement is free, Tillich is definite in presenting it as the ontological realization of the Fall of humankind.

Anxiety

This negative phase in the dialectic is mediated to the level of consciousness by the general and presently acute phenomenon of anxiety; this arises from the nonbeing in finite reality. “The first statement about the nature of anxiety is this: anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing.”²⁸ It is, in fact, the expression of finitude from the inside. As such it is not a mere psychological quality, but an ontological one, present wherever finite and its threat of nonbeing are found. Anxiety is then simply inescapable for the finite being. Were it a particular object it might be directly feared, attacked and overcome. But nothingness is not an object. There is no way for the finite to overcome nonbeing. Thus anxiety lies within the human being at all times. This omnipresent ontological anxiety can be aroused at any time even without a particular threat or external situation of fear. The emotional element by the threat of absolute separation from its positive element of infinite, that is, by the threat of annihilating nothingness.²⁹

The nonbeing of finitude and estrangement is present on each level of being and is there in three ways: ontic, spiritual and moral. This produces three corresponding types or characteristics of anxiety. Ontic anxiety is the awareness that our basic self-affirmation as being is threatened proximately by fate, the decisive contingency of our position, and ultimately by death. Spiritual anxiety is the awareness of the emptiness of the concrete content of our particular beliefs. It is, even more, the awareness of the loss of a spiritual center of meaning resulting in ultimate meaninglessness in which “not even the meaningfulness of a serious question of meaning is left.”³⁰ Moral anxiety is the awareness that, in virtue of that very freedom which makes one human, one continually chooses against the fulfillment of one’s destiny and the actualization of one’s essential nature, thus adding the element of guilt.³¹

²⁵ Paul Tillich, “The Conception of Man in Existential Philosophy,” *Journal of Religion* XIX (July 1939): 208. Cf. *Systematic Theology*, II, 31, 35, 38.

²⁶ Tillich, “A Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of Incarnation,” 142.

²⁷ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, 44.

²⁸ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 35. Cf. *Systematic Theology*, I, 191-192.

²⁹ Tillich, “The Conception of Man in Existential Philosophy,” 211-214.

³⁰ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 48, 69. Cf. *Systematic Theology*, I, 189, II, 74.

³¹ Paul Tillich, “Freedom in the Period of Transformation,” in *Freedom: Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940), 123-124m 131-132,

Despair

All three elements of anxiety – death, meaninglessness and guilt – combine to produce despair, the ultimate or boundary situation. One element or another may stand out more clearly for various people in various situations, but all three are inescapably present. It is guilt that seals Sartre's "No Exit." For if there were but the nonbeing of death and meaninglessness, the human could affirm both one's ontic and one's spiritual meaning by one's own act of voluntary death. But guilt makes all this impossible. "Guilt and condemnation are qualitatively, not quantitatively, infinite."³² They point to the dimension of the ultimate and the unconditional from which we have become estranged through our own responsible act. In this way Tillich's contemporary understanding of the situation of loneliness and despair is ultimately specified by the pervading element of guilt.

Just as the first stage of the dialectic helped clarify the transcendent basis of the authority of tradition, this reflection on guilt points up the earl heart of the problem of evil. This is an important addition beyond the work of Habermas, for once social and psychological analyses have uncovered the roots of false consciousness and the mechanisms of self-delusion, one is still faced with the crucial moral choice between good and evil.

The element of nonbeing is extended beyond this field of being to that of knowledge. After recognizing that existence is both the appearance and the contradiction of essence, he adds that "our thinking is a part of our existence and shares the fate that human existence contradicts its true nature."³³ Reason is affected by the nonbeing of finitude and of estrangement. Under the conditions of existence it is torn by internal conflicts and estranged from its depth and ground. Another note of the existential situation of knowledge is its inclusion of actualized freedom. This not only separates thought and being, but holds them apart. There results a special kind of truth, one which is attained, not in an absolute standpoint at the end of history, but in the situation of the knower. Just when subjectivity becomes the hallmark of truth it is marked by separation and despair. "Truth is just that subjectivity which does not disregard its despair, its exclusion from the objective world of essence, but which holds to its passionately."³⁴

Through this negative stage of the dialectic there remains the original positive element, the bond to the divine. "Man is never cut off from the ground of being not even in the state of condemnation."³⁵ However, in the state of existence the human being does not actualize, but contradicts the essential manifestation of the divine ground. One does not affirm, but perverts the values of one's tradition. This is more than differentiation or individualization, it is the tragically guilty estrangement of being and knowing from the divine, and from ourselves as images of the divine. Tillich's systematic analysis of the predicament of modern humans manifests the true dimension of the exaggeration of individualization which is experienced as a sense of loneliness and expressed theologically as the Fall of the human. It does this in the contemporary context of meaninglessness by questioning not only the supports of previous generations, but the very meaning of support.

The first stage of Tillich's existential dialectic presented the essential or potential state of finite reality in union with the divine. The second or negative moment of this dialectic by placing differentiation in its present context of meaninglessness expressed profoundly the human difficulty

³² Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 54.

³³ Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, 61.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

³⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, II, 78.

in participating not only in the absolute but in its reflection in the classical content of one's heritage. Let us see how the third stage attempts to provide this element of participation in a contemporary fashion

Synthesis

Since the existential separation and disruption leaves the human being opaque to the divine, Tillich will not allow the divine to be derived from an analysis of human present experience. If then, God is to be the answer to the existential question of the human being, he must come "to human existence from beyond it."³⁶ The divine depth must break through in particular things and particular circumstances. This is the phenomenon of revelation in which the essential power of natural objects is delivered from the bondage of its existential contradiction. The finite thing or situation can now be said to participate in the power of the ultimate. In this way revelation provides more than a mere representation of the divine. It opens up levels of mind and of reality hidden till now and produces an experience of the divine, the most profound of these levels. The appearance of the divine varies according to the particular situation. Experienced in correlation with the threat of nonbeing, God has the form of the "infinite power of being resisting nonbeing," that is, he would be being itself. In correlation with the question in the form of anxiety, God as the answer would be "the ground of courage." Each would be a form of the particular participation in the divine which takes place in this situation. This same participation founds the symbols of the divine. Consequently, their diversification and continuance will depend on the situation.

For a better understanding of the contemporary nature of Tillich's philosophy it is necessary to investigate further the development of the situation of revelation in the present context of meaninglessness. As cognitive this encounter includes two elements. One is objective and termed a miracle or sign event; the other is subjective and named ecstasy or inspiration. The objective and the subjective are so strictly correlated that one cannot be had without the other. The truth of revelation is truth only for one who is grasped by the divine presence.³⁷

Sign Event

Tillich insists that miracle does not mean a supernatural interference with the natural structure of events. To make this clear he prefers the term sign event as signifying that which produces the numinous astonishment Rudolf Otto connects with the presence of the divine. Such a sign event can be realized in the context of meaninglessness because it presupposes the stigma of nonbeing, the disruptive tensions driving toward human complete annihilation. In particular situations this stigma becomes evident and manifests the negative side of the mystery of God, the abyss. However, such situations also imply the positive side of the mystery of God. For their very reality manifests the divine ground and power of being over which nonbeing is not completely victorious.

The characteristics which Tillich attributes to a miracle will now be sufficiently evident. He speaks of a miracle as "an event which is astonishing, unusual, shaking, without contradicting the rational structure of reality, and event which points to the mystery of being, expressing its relation to us in a definite way;...an occurrence which is received as a sign-event in an ecstatic experience."³⁸ The subjective element pertains to the very nature of a miracle. Thus, even a person

³⁶ Ibid., I, 64-65.

³⁷ Ibid., 6, III. Cf. Paul Tillich, "What is Divine revelation," *The Witness* XXVI (April 1943): 8-9.

³⁸ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 117.

who later learns about the sign-event must share in the ecstasy; he or she must have more than a report about the belief of another. An objective miracle would be a contradiction in terms.

Ecstasy

The etymology of ecstasy describes its subjective element as “standing outside one’s self.” It indicates a state in which the mind transcends its ordinary situation, its subject-object structure. Miracle was seen to be negatively dependent on the stigma of nonbeing. In the mind there corresponds to this stigma the shock of nonbeing, the anxiety of death, meaninglessness and guilt. These tend to disrupt the normal balance of the mind, to shake it in its structure and to force it to its boundary line where it openly faces nonbeing. There it is thrown back on itself. But again it is forced to its extreme situation, to the very limit of human possibilities, and there it finds the fall pervading “no.” Face to face with the meaninglessness and despair which one must recognize if one is serious about anything at all, one is grasped by mystery. For in the act of despair one accepted meaninglessness and that acceptance itself was a meaningful act. It could be done only on the power of the being it negates.³⁹ In this way the reality of a transcending power is manifested within oneself.

Here the critical analysis of tradition and of external and internal structures of oppression surpass hermeneutic tools and become the human part of the process of revelation. They help articulate the question answered only by the divine power to be. Even more, this power manifests itself in the midst of our suffering and that of our people.

This is revelation. The power of being is present in the affirmation of meaninglessness and in the affirmation of ourselves as facing meaninglessness. It comes to one by affirming itself in one in spite of nonbeing.⁴⁰ In true ecstasy one receives ultimate power by the presence of the ultimate which breaks through the contradictions of existence where and when it will. It is God who determines the circumstances and the degree in which he will be participated. This rules out the possibility of natural revelations whereby reason grasps God whenever it wills. Natural knowledge of self and world can lead to the question of the ground of being and reason, but in the state of existence it is God who must grasp the human being.⁴¹

Tillich calls the cognitive aspect of ecstasy, inspiration. In what concerns the divine he replaces the term “knowledge” by “awareness.” Furthermore, in this area the awareness is not new objects. That would be to invade reason with a strange body of knowledge which could not be assimilated, and hence would destroy its rational structure. Rather, that which is opened to the human is a new dimension of being. It is participated in by all, but still retains its transcendence.

It matters little that the contemporary situation of skepticism and meaninglessness has removed all possibility of content for this act. What is important is that we have been grasped by that which answers the ultimate question of our very being, our unconditional and ultimate concern. This is Tillich’s phenomenological description of God. “Only certain is the ultimacy as

³⁹ Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 176. Despair supposes something positive. The negative lives by the positive which it negates. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 38-39.

⁴⁰ Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Problem of Existence* (Washington DC: Henderson Services, 1951), 30-31.

⁴¹ Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, 79-80. Cf. *Systematic Theology*, I, 114-120.

ultimacy.”⁴² The ultimate concern provides the place at which one believes and the “faith which one believes” are identified, the place where the difference between the subject and the object disappears. The source of our faith is present as both subject and object in a way that is beyond both of them. The absence of this dichotomy is the reason why Tillich refuses to speak of knowledge in this realm and insists instead on awareness. He compares it to the mystic’s notion of the knowledge of God has of Himself, the “truth itself” of St. Augustine. It is absolutely certain, but the identity of subject and object means that it is also absolutely personal. Consequently, this experience of the ultimate cannot be directly received from others.⁴³ Revelations something which we ourselves must live.

Awareness and Content: Tradition as Certainty and Risk

In this experience it is necessary to distinguish the point of immediate awareness from the breadth of content. The point of awareness is expressed in what Tillich refers to as the ontological principle. “Man is immediately aware of something unconditional which is the prius of the interaction and separation of both subject and object, both theoretically and practically.”⁴⁴ He has no doubt about the certainty of this point, although nonsymbolically he can say only that this is being itself. However, in revelation he has experienced not only its reality, but its relation to him.⁴⁵ He expresses the combination of these in the metaphysical terms of ground and abyss of being, power of being, ultimate and unconditioned concern. Furthermore, generally this points is experienced in terms of one’s own culture, in a special situation, and even in some one thing such as a nation or a god. This concrete content of our act of belief differs from ultimacy in that it is not immediately evident. Since it remains within the subject-object dichotomy its acceptance as ultimate requires an act of courage and venturing faith. The certainty we have about the breadth of concrete content is then only conditional.⁴⁶ Time and critique such as was spoken in Chapter II may reveal this content to be finite. In that case our faith will still have been an authentic contact with the unconditional itself. Only the concrete expression will have been deficient.

This implies two correlated elements in human act of faith. One is that of certainty concerning one’s own being as related to something ultimate and unconditional. The other is that of risk, that of surrendering to a concern which is not really ultimate and may be destructive if taken as if it were. The risk necessarily arises in the state of existence where both reason and objects are not only finite, but separated from their ground. It places an element of doubt in relation to our tradition and its heritage of values which is neither of the methodological variety found in the scientist, nor of the transitory type often had by the sceptic. The doubt is rather existential, an awareness of the lasting element of insecurity. Nevertheless, this doubt can be accepted and overcome in spite of itself by an act of courage which affirms the reality of the absolute as reflected in the normative

⁴² Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, vol. X of World Perspectives, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 8-11, 17.

⁴³ Paul Tillich, “The Problem of Theological Method,” *Journal of Religion* XXVIII (January 1947): 22-23.

⁴⁴ Paul Tillich, “The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* I (May 1946): 10.

⁴⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, 109.

⁴⁶ Tillich, “The Problem of Theological Method,” 22-23; *Dynamics of Faith*, 18.

character of the values of our tradition. Faith remains the one state of ultimate concern, but as such it subsumes both certainty concerning the unconditioned and existential doubt.

Can a system with such an uncertainty concerning concrete realities still be called a realism? Tillich believes that it can, but only if it is specified as a belief-ful or self-transcending realism. In this the really real, the ground and power of everything real, is grasped in and through a concrete historical cultural situation. The value of the present moment which has become transparent for its ground is, paradoxically, both all and nothing. In itself it is not infinite and “the more it is seen in the light of the ultimate power, the more it appears as questionable and void of lasting significance.”⁴⁷ The appearance of self-subsistence gradually melts away. But by this very fact the ground and power of the present reality becomes evident. The concrete situation becomes theonomous and the infinite depth and eternal significance of the tradition is revealed in an acstatic experience.

Conclusion

In the light of Tillich’s dialectic it becomes possible to recognize the strengths and overcome the weaknesses in the preceding discussions of the hermeneutics of perennial wisdom in a time of great social change. First it identifies with Gadamer the real basis in the Absolute as Word or expressive consciousness for the transcendent, perennial and authoritative character of the tradition. We are then not alone, cut off or trapped in time as we face our present problems. As the Absolute is expressive consciousness, tradition presents not a closed or repetitive vision, but a wealth of meaning which can be drawn upon in ever new manners according to ever changing circumstances. Further, by developing an existential dialectic he was able to take account of the perversions of human interrelations and the self-delusions identified by Habermas in his elaboration of a place for the social sciences in a process of social critique. Finally, the relating all of these in a dialectic of history Tillich has made it possible to see the disruptive elements in life as integral to the unfolding of the Absolute in our human mode of existence. For the human being, the divine appears through the suffering: “The poor nations shall judge the rich ones” said John Paul II in a turn of phrase of the Scriptures.

It was, I believe, for this reason that Martin Luther King was able to provide miraculous leadership for his people in the midst of their trials. Like Gandhi he too might have dealt only in the opportunism of political power, but both men knew that true strength and real leadership must be based on other sources. In his doctoral dissertation King had written of Tillich’s dialectic. In this light, he was able to relate in a dynamic existential dialectic the wisdom of his biblical tradition and the deep consciousness of the social and psychological structures which held his people in bondage. Faced with oppression in the form of racial prejudices the foot of the status of Abraham Lincoln, where he evoked the true values of their heritages in speech that echoed in its content Gandhi’s words:

I shall work for an India in which the poorest shall feel that it is their country in whose making they have an effective voice; an India in which there shall be no high class and low class people; an India in which all communities shall live in perfect harmony. There can be no room in such an

⁴⁷ Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, 78.

India for the curse of untouchability or the curse of the intoxicating drinks and drugs. Women will enjoy the same rights as men.⁴⁸

It was uniquely fitting that the culmination of Martin Luther King's struggle for the freedom of his people should be this speech before a half million people of all races gathered at the foot of the monument to Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator. Symmetry was achieved on that day, not too long before his assassination. In a voice ringing with the ecstasy of liberation through suffering he evoked the full power of our combined traditions, black and white, Christian and Hindu, Indian and American.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit together at the table of Brotherhood...I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a State sweltering with heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will be judged not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

So he called: let freedom ring! From Rocky mountain in Georgia to the Rocky costs of Maine, let freedom ring until in the words of the Black spiritual we can shout out together, all God's children: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

⁴⁸ M. Gandhi, in Ignatius Jesudasan, ed. *A Gandhian Theology of Liberation* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette, 1980), 310.

Conclusion

Today we are passing from four hundred years of modernity marked by objective science to a new adventure which thusfar can be called only post-modern. The modern period began by removing all inherited culture in order to confront directly and to control all things. The new period into which we are entering seeks to re-discover that human consciousness and freedom share in creating the meaning they uncover and evolve, the symbols they shape cumulatively, and the cultures they form. We take on a new level of responsibility for our lives and our world.

Chapter I studies the great gift that Hans-Georg Gadamer has made by identifying the nature of a culture, the formation of a cultural tradition, and the role of interpretation in enabling us to see and to respond, to relate to others and with them to shape the future.

Chapter II examined the critique by Jurgen Habermas warning against the ways in which cultures, in the economic and political interplay of their search for profit and power, not only enable but restrict human life.

Chapter III followed the effort of Paul Ricoeur to relate the two, recognizing the way in which the tradition is not a static construct but the continual unfolding of the human exploration of being with its truth and goodness. In this light it inspires and directs even the critique. As Boethius wrote long ago, God directs our life suavely, not by external imposition, but by the constant and at times subtle attraction of his good upon our freedom so that what he ordains we do freely and responsibly.

Chapter IV on the thought of Paul Tillich concerns the inner human drama this entails. For human freedom can cause not only good, but evil as well. Hence, we must face the question of whether the power of evil can negate that good. Concretely for Tillich in 1930 Germany, this was the extreme question: could the human being -- specifically Hitler and his movement -- defeat the Providence of God? If not then good must be found through their evil: resurrection could come only through death.

As we venture beyond modernity into the 3rd millennium and began to live at a global level we face these issues afresh. What do we have from our cultural tradition, and how is this to be applied afresh for these new times; whence can we find our bearings to correct and direct our progress?

This is the challenge of tradition and contemporary life. It calls for the work of hermeneutics in order to rediscover perennial wisdom and especially to apply it appropriately in the direction of the vast social changes of our times. This is our fundamental challenge of these newly global times.