

RICHARD J. BERNSTEIN - Beyond Objectivism and Relativism.

PART THREE
FROM HERMENEUTICS
TO PRAXIS

THE term "hermeneutics," with its ancient lineage, has only recently begun to enter the working vocabulary of Anglo-American thinkers. Its novelty is indicated in a passage cited earlier from Thomas Kuhn's *The Essential Tension* (1977) in which he confesses that "the term 'hermeneutic' . . . was no part of my vocabulary as recently as five years ago. Increasingly, I suspect that anyone who believes that history may have deep philosophical import will have to learn to bridge the longstanding divide between the Continental and English-language philosophical traditions."¹

We can trace the paths by which interest in hermeneutics has spread and deepened among Anglo-American thinkers. One of the primary traditions that feeds into contemporary hermeneutics has been that of biblical hermeneutics. The meaning and scope of hermeneutics was significantly extended in the nineteenth century by such German thinkers as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, who in turn influenced Heidegger and Bultmann. Some of the earliest discussions of hermeneutics in an Anglo-American context were by biblical scholars, theologians, and students of the history of religions who were

influenced by or reacting against the claims of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Bultmann. But the problems of the interpretation of sacred texts, as Frank Kermode has most recently argued, have analogues with the problems of the interpretation of literary texts.² It is not surprising in an age when the question of interpretation has become so fundamental for literary history and literary criticism that interest in hermeneutics should become so prominent.³

A significant event focusing attention on hermeneutics in the United States in recent times occurred at a symposium held in 1970 in which Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer participated. Taylor, although he was trained at Oxford at a time when the work of Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin were the dominant influences, has always had a long-standing interest in bridging "the divide between Continental and English-language philosophical traditions." He began his paper with the question,

Is there a sense in which interpretation is essential to explanation in the sciences of man? The view that it is, that there is an unavoidably "hermeneutical" component in the sciences of man, goes back to Dilthey. But recently the question has come again to the fore, for instance, in the work of Gadamer, in Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud, and in the writings of Habermas.⁴

Taylor's question and the positive answer that he develops in his paper have had extensive resonances because they appeared at a time when important developments were taking place within the sciences of man and the social sciences. This was a period when there were increasing doubts about the methodological self-understanding of the social disciplines that had been shaped by logical positivism and empiricism. Three factors contributed to the uneasiness about the nature of the social disciplines and to the receptivity to hermeneutics. There was a growing awareness that themes in analytic philosophy, and especially insights of the later Wittgenstein and the theory of speech acts developed by Austin, were relevant to a critical understanding of social life. This was complemented by the realization that the tradition of interpretive sociology was neither dead nor passé, and more generally that hermeneutics could be used to criticize positivist strains in the social disciplines and open the way to a more penetrating understanding of them. Anglo-American thinkers became more receptive to the type of hermeneutical critiques developed by Ricoeur, Gadamer, and Habermas. Finally, many practitioners of the social disciplines themselves began to question the adequacy of the notion of social science as a fledgling natural science.

Receptividade
da Hermenêutica

filosofia Analítica

WITTGENSTEIN TARDOS
filosofia da LINGUAGEM
2. teoria da LINGUAGEM
interpretativa

3. crítica social
- ≠
críticas sociais

Because hermeneutics, as it was shaped in the nineteenth century, was intimately related to the study of history and the nature of historical knowledge, it is only natural that discussions of hermeneutics began to appear among historians who were reflecting on the status of their discipline. In this respect the work of Hayden White and Quentin Skinner should be mentioned.⁵ Although both have been sharply critical of some of the claims made by hermeneutics, nevertheless both have entered into serious dialogue with this tradition. A key influence on Skinner has been Collingwood. One can only speculate about the hearing that hermeneutics might have received from Anglo-American philosophers if the work of Collingwood had had the influence it so eminently deserves.⁶ The major themes of Collingwood's investigations of art and history are those which have been at the very center of hermeneutical discussion. We have already seen how Mary Hesse began exploring the significance of hermeneutics for the study of the history and philosophy of science and how Clifford Geertz characterizes anthropological research as a hermeneutical inquiry.

From the perspective of professional Anglo-American analytic philosophers, the several fields that I have mentioned—the study of sacred and literary texts, the study of the nature of history, and the range of the sciences of man—have been seen as peripheral to the "hard core" of serious philosophy. Although there were some preliminary skirmishes, it was only with the appearance of Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) that a philosopher who had a reputation for making serious contributions to analytic philosophy dared to suggest that the lessons of hermeneutics might be essential for the understanding of philosophy itself. The title of the penultimate chapter of his book, "From Epistemology to Hermeneutics," might have served as the subtitle for the entire book. Rorty argues that it is epistemology that has been the basis for and stands at the center of modern philosophy. But he portrays the death of epistemology, or, more accurately, shows why it should be abandoned. It is in the aftermath of epistemology (and its successor disciplines) that hermeneutics becomes relevant—not as leading to a new "constructive" foundational discipline but as "an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled—that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt."⁷ It is not surprising that the publication of Rorty's book has provoked so much controversial discussion.

In speaking of the spread of interest in hermeneutics, we should

not exaggerate the degree of change. There are still many, perhaps the majority of thinkers in the several fields that I have mentioned, who view hermeneutics as some sort of woolly foreign intrusion to be approached with suspicion. But I believe that the recent concern with hermeneutics reflects more than a faddish interest in the exotic. On the contrary, what has happened is that thinkers in diverse fields, working on a variety of problems, have come to share many of the insights, emphases, and concerns of contemporary philosophic hermeneutics.

The above sketch of the growing interest in hermeneutics during the past decade or so has been presented from an Anglo-American perspective. The narrative would be very different if told from a continental point of view, especially that of German philosophy.⁸ It was in the nineteenth century, the great age of the rise of historical consciousness, that the exploration of hermeneutics deepened on the Continent and was seen to have consequences for the entire range of the human sciences. As Gadamer tells us,

In the nineteenth century, the old theological and literary ancillary discipline of hermeneutics was developed into a system which made it the basis of all the human sciences. It wholly transcended its original pragmatic purpose of making it possible, or easier, to understand literary texts. It is not only the literary tradition that is estranged and in need of new and more appropriate assimilation, but all that no longer expresses itself in and through its own world—that is, everything that is handed down, whether art or the other spiritual creations of the past, law, religion, philosophy and so forth—is estranged from its original meaning and depends, for its unlocking and communicating, on that spirit that we, like the Greeks, name Hermes: the messenger of the gods. It is to the development of historical consciousness that hermeneutics owes its central function within the human sciences. (TM, pp. 146–47; WM, p. 157)

Schleiermacher, who was one of the first to argue for the general significance of hermeneutics, drew upon this tradition to meet the challenge of the skepticism about religious understanding. But by the time of Dilthey, this interest had been extended to deal with two of the great intellectual problems of the age: the study of history and the nature of historical knowledge; and the rival claims of the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Nineteenth-century hermeneutics developed as a reaction against the intellectual imperialism of the growth of positivism, inductivism, and the type of scientism that claimed that it is the natural sciences alone that provide the model and the standards for what is to count as genuine knowledge. The character of hermeneutics was shaped by the assault

on the integrity and autonomy of the human sciences. The primary task was seen, especially by Dilthey, as that of determining what is distinctive about humanistic and historical knowledge and of revealing its characteristic subject matter, aims, and methods in a manner that would meet and challenge the belief that only the natural sciences can provide us with "objective knowledge." Dilthey's dream was to do for the historical human sciences what Kant presumably accomplished for mathematics and the natural sciences: to write a *Critique of Historical Knowledge* that would show at once the possibility, nature, scope, and legitimacy of this type of "objective knowledge."

But what were the sources of the nineteenth-century interest in hermeneutics? Gadamer mentions the "development of historical consciousness," which certainly was a major factor in the development of the entire range of the cultural disciplines in Germany. Historians of hermeneutics have argued that there are many diverse sources reaching back to the tradition of classical and medieval rhetoric, whose last great representative was the prophetic thinker Vico; the tradition of practical philosophy that took shape as a result of Aristotle's reflections on *praxis* and *phronēsis*; legal history and jurisprudence; the humanism of the Renaissance, and the post-Reformation discipline of biblical interpretation. It is clear from the way in which Gadamer begins *Truth and Method* with a review of the "leading humanistic concepts"—including *Bildung*, *sensus communis*, judgment, and taste—that hermeneutics is closely intertwined with the entire history of humanistic studies.

But only in the twentieth century, primarily due to the influence of the phenomenological movement and, in particular, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, has hermeneutics moved to the very center of continental philosophy. Implicit in Heidegger, and explicit in Gadamer, are two interrelated fundamental claims: the claim for the *ontological* significance of hermeneutics, and the claim for its *universality*. Hermeneutics is no longer conceived of as a subdiscipline of humanistic studies or even as the characteristic Method of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, but rather as pertaining to questions concerning what human beings are. We are "thrown" into the world as beings who understand and interpret—so if we are to understand what it is to be human beings, we must seek to understand understanding itself, in its rich, full, and complex dimensions. Furthermore, understanding is not one type of activity, to be contrasted with other human activities. (We will see that, for Gadamer, understanding is misconceived when it is thought of as an activity of a *subject*; it is a "happening," an "event," a *pathos*). Understanding is universal

including
method

!

and may properly be said to underlie and pervade all activities. One of my main objectives in part III will be to clarify and explore what is meant by the claim that hermeneutics is ontological and universal. But it should already be clear that hermeneutics conceived in this manner is no longer thought of as the method of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. It is presumably more fundamental than Method, and sharply critical of imperialistic claims made in the name of Method.

If one were to try to tell the complete story of the developments, variations, and vicissitudes of twentieth-century hermeneutics, it would require nothing less than a study of the whole of continental philosophy in recent times. Fortunately my task is a more limited one, for I am interested in the ways in which philosophic hermeneutics contributes to overcoming the Cartesian Anxiety and helps us to move beyond objectivism and relativism. In exploring the fusion of hermeneutics and *praxis*, I intend to show how the implicit *telos* within philosophic hermeneutics requires us to move beyond hermeneutics itself. While I will refer to a range of thinkers, I will concentrate on the work of Gadamer. For although Gadamer's views are not shared by all those working in this tradition (and have been sharply criticized), he has presented one of the most comprehensive, powerful, and subtle explanations of philosophic hermeneutics.

Treating Gadamer in an Anglo-American philosophic context presents special problems. Gadamer's understanding of philosophic hermeneutics emerged from his own practice of the interpretation of texts. Typically, and especially in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer does not simply state the theses that he seeks to defend, and argue for them in the usual manner of analytic philosophers. He proceeds in what, from an analytic perspective, looks like indirect, oblique, "suggestive" discourse—by interpreting, questioning, and conversing with texts. Because the range of his interpretations is staggering in its scope and subtlety, one sometimes feels that in order to understand him one must already have the *Bildung* that he talks about. Yet Gadamer beautifully orchestrates *Truth and Method* so that what at first might appear to be only a display of erudition is not that at all. Themes, concepts, and interpretations enter and interweave in his reflections so that they mutually support each other and exhibit a textured vision of philosophic hermeneutics, and how it is revelatory of human finitude.

Several commentators have queried the significance of the very title of Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode*, questioning not only the precise meaning of *Wahrheit* and *Methode* but also how one is to

understand the conjunction "und." (*Wahrheit und Methode* was not Gadamer's original choice for the title.) At times it seems as if Gadamer is emphasizing not the conjunction but the disjunction between Truth and Method, so that a more apt title might have been "Truth versus Method." Gadamer has denied that it was his intention to play off Truth against Method, although when we examine what Gadamer means by "play," we will see that there is indeed, throughout the work, a "play" of Truth and Method. A more appropriate title or subtitle of the book, and indeed of Gadamer's entire philosophic project, might have been "Beyond Objectivism and Relativism." Gadamer's primary philosophic aim is to expose what is wrong with the type of thinking that moves between these antithetical poles and to open us to a new way of thinking about understanding that reveals that our being-in-the-world is distorted when we impose the concepts of objectivism and relativism.

To appreciate what is distinctive about philosophic hermeneutics, we need to discuss the Cartesian legacy that serves as the backdrop for the drama that Gadamer unfolds. Gadamer builds upon the work of Heidegger, who himself engaged in a thoroughgoing critique of modern subjectivism that stems from Descartes (and can even be traced back to earlier motifs in Platonism). In speaking of the Cartesian legacy, one must be careful to distinguish the historical Descartes from Cartesianism. Recent historical scholarship, which itself has been partially influenced by a hermeneutical sensibility, has revealed how much disparity there is between what Descartes' texts say and the interpretation of his work by later thinkers. We can nevertheless discriminate the main features of Cartesianism that did enter the mainstream of philosophy. By listing these salient characteristics and relating them to Gadamer's thinking, we can gain a proper orientation for appreciating the nature of philosophic hermeneutics.

THE CARTESIAN LEGACY

First, Descartes introduces a rigorous distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This distinction is the basis for the sharp separation of two types of quasi substance, mind and body. I speak of mind and body as "quasi substances" because they lack one essential characteristic that was traditionally associated with the doctrine of substance: independence or self-sufficiency. As Descartes makes clear in the *Meditations*, both mind and body are ultimately dependent for their sustained existence on God. Consequently, one might

say that implicit in Descartes' "dualism" is the suggestion that there is only one completely self-sufficient substance—God himself. Although Descartes does not employ the expressions "subject" and "object" in the ways in which they have come to be used by post-Cartesian philosophers (he still draws on the scholastic tradition), nevertheless his metaphysical and epistemological dichotomies provide the basis for this systematic distinction. Even those post-Cartesian philosophers who have challenged metaphysical dualism have generally accepted some version of the subject-object dichotomy as being basic for understanding our knowledge of the world.

Second, if one is to achieve clear and distinct knowledge, the "I" (the subject) must engage in the activity of intellectual self-purification. By the procedure of methodical doubt, I must bracket or suspend judgment in everything that can be doubted in order to discover the Archimedean point that can serve as a proper foundation for the sciences. I must suspend judgment in all my former opinions and prejudices. This is essentially a solitary, monological activity (although it is likened to an internal dialogue), in the sense that I, in the solitude of my study, can by self-reflection discover the groundlessness of former opinions and prejudices. Descartes never really doubts that one can achieve this self-transparency and self-understanding by proper meditative reflection.

Third, Descartes understands human finitude in a distinctive way. For although we are finite, we are not imperfect. In the fourth Meditation, when Descartes seeks to explain his errors, he tells us

that they depend on a combination of two causes, to wit, on the faculty of knowledge that rests in me, and on the power of choice or free will—that is to say, of the understanding and at the same time of the will. For by the understanding alone I [neither assert nor deny anything, but] apprehend the ideas of things as to which I can form a judgment.⁹

It is by virtue of this "ample" and "unconstrained" free will that I have the capacity to assert or to deny—that is, to *judge*. There is no intrinsic defect or imperfection in my will or my understanding. Human error (and sin) results from the misuse of these capacities—a misuse for which I alone, and not God, am responsible. We are created in the image of God, with whom we share such an "infinite" will. However, our understanding, while containing no intrinsic imperfection, is limited and finite. We cannot understand everything that an omniscient being understands. We err when we affirm or deny that which we do not understand clearly and distinctly—when we allow our will to outstrip the domain of what we truly under-

stand. Human finitude is most sharply expressed in the realization of our complete dependence on a beneficent God for our sustained existence, but in the realm of knowledge our finite knowledge is related to God's knowledge as a part to a (infinite) whole.

Fourth, truth is primarily ascribed to *judgments*. Although Descartes speaks of the "material falsity of ideas," the primary source of error and falsity is misjudgment, when I allow myself to affirm or deny what I do not understand clearly and distinctly. And because judging is an activity of the will, it is always within my power (at least when meditating) to withhold my judgment. It is I who am responsible for making false judgments, although because of the "exigencies of action" and the "infirmity" of my nature, I cannot hope to altogether avoid making errors.

Fifth, once we discover the Archimedean point that can serve as a foundation, then we can build a solid edifice of knowledge by following strict rules and Method. These rules can be specified, and they serve two closely related functions. They enable us to extend our knowledge systematically, and they ensure that nothing will be admitted as knowledge (and consequently as true) unless it satisfies the rigorous requirements of the specified rules.

Sixth, when *justifying* claims to knowledge, there should be no appeal other than the appeal to reason itself. We must be skeptical about any claims to knowledge that are based solely on the testimony of the senses, former opinions, prejudices, tradition, or any authority other than reason. There may be many sources for our coming to know something, but the court of appeal to validate claims to knowledge is *reason*—a reason which is universal, not limited by historical contingencies, and shared by all rational beings.

Seventh, one of the important consequences of Cartesianism was to forge a close link between experience and the senses and to focus almost exclusive attention on the *epistemological* role of experience. Of course, it was not due solely to Descartes that the senses have been thought of as the primary source of experience. This is also fundamental to the empiricist tradition. But despite major differences between rationalists and empiricists in their understanding of the senses and their contribution to knowledge, both traditions are dominated by an epistemological interest in the senses and experience.

Given these seven points, it should be clear why Descartes is so suspicious of any claims to knowledge that are based upon appeals to authority, tradition, or opinions. We even find here the seeds for the typical Enlightenment contrasts between reason and tradition, reason and authority, reason and superstition. We can also under-

stand why Descartes (despite his own traditional education) was so skeptical about and even hostile to the study of history, classical languages, and texts. While the erudition achieved may be an innocent adornment, it can get in the way of, and divert us from, the serious project of discovering the foundations and building the edifice of objective knowledge.

Gadamer's critique of Cartesianism (like that of Heidegger and Peirce) is radical in the sense of "getting at the roots." Gadamer does not merely raise objections about the epistemological, methodological, or even the metaphysical claims of Cartesianism. The basis of his critique is *ontological*; he thinks that Cartesianism is based on a misunderstanding of being, and in particular upon a misunderstanding of our being-in-the-world. But while Gadamer's critique is radical, it is not frontal. On the contrary, it is indirect and almost oblique, but nevertheless—or perhaps because of this indirectness—devastating.

TRUTH AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ART

In the first part of *Truth and Method*, which is entitled "The Question of Truth as It Emerges in the Experience of Art," Gadamer explores a topic that is barely mentioned by Descartes and might even seem peripheral to Cartesianism. Gadamer's main concern is with the "subjectivisation of aesthetics in the Kantian critique," but it is here that he also begins his assault on the Cartesian legacy. The questions that preoccupy Gadamer here are these: How are we to account for the typically modern denigration of the idea of the truth of works of art? How are we to deal with the modern embarrassment in even speaking about truth in regard to works of art? What is the source for the deep prejudice that the appreciation of art and beauty has nothing to do with knowledge and truth? Gadamer examines the sources of this modern prejudice because he wants to question and challenge it. He finds that Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (especially the first part of this critique) and its decisive influence played a key role in the emergence of aesthetics and the concepts of "aesthetic consciousness" and "aesthetic differentiation."

It is important to appreciate the problem Kant confronts in his analysis of aesthetic judgment. Kant, after completing the first two critiques, in which he sought to reveal the a priori foundations of knowledge and morality, now faced the task of not only unifying the critical project through a study of judgment, but also of demonstrating the legitimacy of judgments of taste, and in particular the type

of *reflective judgment* characteristic of aesthetic judgment. He sought to provide an *analytic* and a *deduction* that would reveal the a priori foundations of this distinctive type of judgment. Aesthetic judgments are not to be confused or identified with knowledge of the phenomenal world or with the activity of pure practical reason. But this does not mean that for Kant aesthetic judgments are merely arbitrary or idiosyncratic. They do make a distinctive claim to universality (or more accurately, generality or communicability).¹⁰ Throughout Kant maintains a basic dichotomy between the subjective and the objective, although the meaning of these concepts is transformed because of Kant's Copernican Revolution.

The specific problem for him was to explain how aesthetic judgment is related to a distinctive type of subjective aesthetic pleasure (to be carefully distinguished from other sorts of pleasure) and at the same time to account for the communal validity of such judgments. Kant tells us that the cognitive powers are here in "free play, because no definite concept limits them to a definite rule of cognition. . . . This state of *free play* of the cognitive faculties in a representation by which an object is given must be universally communicable."¹¹ Using a more contemporary idiom, Kant's project was to show that aesthetic judgments are grounded in human subjectivity and yet are not merely relative to an individual subject. Taste is communal, not idiosyncratic.

Aesthetic judgments, however, are not judgments of truth or falsity. Gadamer locates the same tendency—to exclude completely the question of truth—in Kant's analysis of genius. Anticipating what happened after (and partly as a result of) Kant, Gadamer tells us:

The radical subjectivisation involved in Kant's new basis for aesthetics was a completely new departure. In discrediting any kind of theoretical knowledge apart from that of natural science, it compelled the human sciences to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in self-analysis. But it made this reliance easier by offering as a subsidiary contribution the "artistic element," "feeling," and "empathy." (TM, p. 39; WM, p. 38)

It is this "radical subjectivisation" of aesthetic judgment that Gadamer calls "aesthetic consciousness," and he claims that it no longer left any room for speaking of knowledge or of claims to truth by a work of art. Such a notion of "aesthetic consciousness" goes hand-in-hand with what Gadamer calls the abstraction of "aesthetic differentiation," according to which we are to disregard everything in which a work of art is rooted, such as its original context and its secular or religious function, in order for the "pure work of art" to

pleasure
vs
knowledge?
MR KANT

HP

HP

stand out. We can call this the "museum" conception of art, which assumes that by isolating the work of art from its original context and placing it in a museum we abstract it from everything that is extraneous to it in order to appreciate and judge it aesthetically. And Gadamer does claim that the growth of the modern museum as the repository of works of art is closely related to the growth of aesthetic consciousness and aesthetic differentiation.

Given these tendencies that are implicit in Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment, it is not difficult to see how they lead to consequences that undermine what he sought to accomplish. Once we begin questioning whether there is a common faculty of taste (a *sensus communis*), we are easily led down the path to relativism. And this is what did happen after Kant—so much so that today it is extraordinarily difficult to retrieve any idea of taste or aesthetic judgment that is more than the expression of personal preferences. Ironically (given Kant's intentions), the same tendency has worked itself out with a vengeance with regard to all judgments of value, including moral judgments.

Gadamer draws out these consequences of Kant's "radical subjectivisation" in order to begin to show what is wrong with this entire way of approaching works of art. At this stage in his inquiry, he raises a series of questions which indicate the direction of his thinking.

Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but equally certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to provide a basis for the fact that artistic experience is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge and indeed from all conceptual knowledge, but still knowledge, i.e., the transmission of truth? (TM, p. 87; WM, p. 93)

If such questions are not to be taken as merely rhetorical but as questions that can be given, as Gadamer thinks they can, affirmative answers, then we need to find a way of thinking that overcomes this "radical subjectivisation." In this regard we can appreciate the introduction of a concept that might at first seem incidental, and even fanciful—the concept of *play*. Its importance, however, is indicated when Gadamer speaks of play as "the clue to ontological explanation" and claims that it points the way toward understanding "the ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutical significance" (TM, p. 91; WM, p. 97).

Many philosophers who identify themselves with the phenomenological movement have a tendency to talk constantly about phenomenology and what it can achieve, rather than to *do* phenomenological analysis. But Gadamer's rich description of play and games is an example of phenomenological analysis at its best. But why introduce the concept of play here? And what does it mean to say that play is the "clue to ontological explanation"? To anticipate, Gadamer is searching for a phenomenon or model that provides an alternative to the Cartesian model that rivets our attention on "subjective attitudes" (*Vorstellung*) toward what is presumably "objective." If he is to succeed in moving beyond objectivism and relativism (and the entire cluster of dichotomies associated with this opposition), then he needs to show us—to point the way to the alternative. This is what he seeks to accomplish by introducing the concept of play. Gadamer not only gives a subtle phenomenological description of play; he also draws upon Huizinga's penetrating analysis of play and upon the crucial role of "free play" in Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment.¹²

Beginning with ordinary games and children's play, Gadamer stresses the primacy of the game or the play that we participate in. "Play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in his play" (TM, p. 92; WM, p. 97). Gadamer calls attention to the internal buoyancy, the to-and-fro movement that belongs to play itself. Play is a "happening."

Play obviously represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. . . . The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus takes from him the burden of the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence. This is seen also in the spontaneous tendency to repetition that emerges in the player and in the constant self-renewal of play, which influences its form. (TM, p. 94; WM, p. 100)

Gadamer seeks to show us that there is a distinctive "mode of being" of play. For play has its own essence (*Wesen*), independent of the consciousness of those who play. According to Gadamer, "The players are not the subjects of play: instead play merely reaches presentation [*Darstellung*] through the players" (TM, p. 92; WM, p. 98). Furthermore, play is not even to be understood as a kind of activity; the actual subject of play is not the individual, who among other activities plays, but instead the play itself.

As we explore Gadamer's understanding of philosophic hermeneutics, we will see just how central this concept of play is for him;

museum for
experience
practices!

it turns out to be the key or the clue to his understanding of language and dialogue.

Now I contend that the basic constitution of the game, to be filled with its spirit—the spirit of buoyancy, freedom and the joy of success—and to fulfill him who is playing, is structurally related to the constitution of the dialogue in which language is a reality. When one enters into dialogue with another person and then is carried along further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter [*die Sache*] is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement and in the end plays them into each other.¹³

ISSO È O PROPRIO PSICOGRAMA

But at this point one might be inclined to object. If we are really speaking about human games and play, then there is no play without players—the *subjects*. And the *objects* here, insofar as we are speaking about games (and not just “free play”), are the rules of the game and the objective to be achieved—for example, scoring the most points. Gadamer, of course, knows this as well as anyone else. But such an objection is likely to miss the point of Gadamer’s phenomenological description. There is a not-so-innocent *epistemological* sense of what is “subjective” and what is “objective” (which is basic to Kant’s understanding of aesthetics) that Gadamer is seeking to undermine. If we recognize the distinctive features of play that Gadamer is highlighting—the primacy of the play itself, the to-and-fro movement of play, the sense in which play has a rhythm and structure of its own—then we may begin to realize that trying to analyze play in terms of the attitudes of subjects toward what is objective or “out there” distorts the very phenomenon that we are trying to describe. But still we may ask, what does the concept of play have to do with the ontology of a work of art, truth, and with hermeneutical understanding? If asked to answer in a word, I think Gadamer would say, “Everything”—but let us see how this unfolds.

As Gadamer develops and enriches his analysis of play, it becomes clear that he is showing that the concept of play provides an understanding of the ontological status of works of art—how they are related to us and we are related to them. It is not as if we are somehow detached or disinterested spectators simply looking upon “objects” and seeking to purify our “aesthetic consciousness” by “aesthetic differentiation.” Rather there is a to-and-fro movement, a type of participation characteristic of our involvement with works of art.

My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be determined as an object of an aesthetic awareness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is a part of the essential process of representation [*Seinsvorganges der Darstellung*] and is an essential part of play as play. (TM, p. 104; WM, p. 111)

A work of art is not to be thought of as a self-contained and self-enclosed object (something *an sich*) that stands over against a spectator, who, as a subject, must purify himself or herself in order to achieve aesthetic consciousness of the work of art. There is a dynamic interaction or transaction between the work of art and the spectator who “shares” in it.¹⁴

Even this way of speaking can obscure the fact that a work of art is essentially incomplete, in the sense that it requires an interpreter. And the interpreter is not someone who is detached from the work of art but is someone upon whom the work of art makes a claim. The spectator, then, is present to the work of art in the sense that he or she participates in it. This even has an affinity, as Gadamer notes, with the early Greek idea of the *theoros*, the *witness* to sacred festivals (and is source of the later philosophic notion of *theoria*). “*Theoria* is a true sharing, not something active, but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees” (TM, p. 111; WM, p. 118).¹⁵ This also helps to explain why Gadamer characterizes a work of art not as a thing or object but as an event or happening of being. “A work of art belongs so closely to that to which it is related that it enriches its being as if through a new event of being” (TM, p. 130; WM, p. 140).

In order to further clarify the distinctive ontological character of a work of art, Gadamer discusses dramatic and musical performances—what he calls “the reproductive arts.” He introduces a theme here that plays a major role in his understanding of hermeneutics.

It is thus of the nature of dramatic or musical works that their performance at different times and on different occasions is, and must be, different. Now it is important to see that, *mutatis mutandis*, this is also true of the plastic arts. But in the latter it is not the case either that the work exists *an sich* and only the effect varies: it is the work of art itself that displays itself under different conditions. The viewer of today not only sees in a different way, but he sees different things. (TM, p. 130; WM, pp. 140–41)

If it is true that “we” are as deeply involved in the ontological event of a work of art as Gadamer suggests, and also true (as Gadamer maintains) that “we” are always changing because of our histo-

ricity, then it begins to look as if Gadamer's understanding of works of art and their interpretation leads straight to relativism. This is the criticism that has most frequently and persistently been brought against Gadamer. I have already indicated that this is to misunderstand what he is doing and saying. (Later we will consider whether Gadamer in fact avoids historical relativism.) But if we are to escape such a blatant relativism, then our task is to comprehend what it means to claim that works of art do not exist *an sich* but are events involving spectators or interpreters in a manner that avoids relativistic consequences. The problem becomes even more acute when we turn to the written word (which has always been the primary subject of hermeneutics), and specifically to literary works of art, for Gadamer tells us "to be read is an essential part of the literary work of art" (TM, p. 143; WM, p. 153).

Summarizing (and generalizing), Gadamer again raises a series of questions.

As we were able to show that the being of the work of art is play which needs to be perceived by the spectator in order to be completed, so it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning. We must ask whether what was seen to be true of the experience of art is also true of texts as a whole, including those that are not works of art. We saw that the work of art is fully realised only when it is "presented," and were forced to the conclusion that all literary works of art can achieve completion only when they are read. Is this true also of the understanding of any text? Is the meaning of all texts realised only when they are understood? In other words, does understanding belong to the meaning of a text just as being heard belongs to the meaning of music? (TM, p. 146; WM, p. 156)

This passage also indicates the movement of Gadamer's own thinking. Although Gadamer begins with a discussion of works of art, he moves to the question of the interpretation of texts, to history, to anything that is "handed down to us" through a living tradition. What is now required is to understand understanding itself and to do this in a manner that permits us to make sense of the claim that understanding belongs to the meaning of a text. Gadamer has already given us a hint about how to approach this question by his comments on the reproductive or performing arts. Consider a musical or a dramatic performance. Here the original score or text needs to be understood and interpreted by those engaged in the performance. In this context we do not have any difficulty in speaking of the original score or text making claims upon the interpreter and in realizing that all interpretation involves highlighting. Furthermore, it makes

A verdade é que esta não tem o sentido de autenticidade
 forma de expressão
 HP
 conhecimento do
 conhecimento

no sense to speak of *the* single or *the* correct interpretation. We recognize that there can be a variety of interpretations, and we can even discriminate distinctive interpretations, such as Schnabel's interpretations of Beethoven's sonatas. We can also distinguish between better and worse performances—the brilliant interpretations of a distinguished performer from those of the novice. Here, too, it is quite easy to grasp what is meant by saying that the work of art is fully realized only when it is performed. Of course, a Beethoven sonata consists of the notes written down by Beethoven, but the sonata is also the realization of the written score. We not only recognize that different musicians will perform a work differently but even that on each occasion the performance of a given artist will itself be different. But in this instance, acknowledging the variety of different interpretations does not invite us to speak of relativism or to think that all performances are of equal merit. And we certainly judge better and worse performances, making judgments that are not to be assimilated to the expression of private likings (even though we do acknowledge that there can be conflicting judgments).

Now it may be objected that while this is true when speaking about different performances, the analogy breaks down as soon as we shift to literary texts and start talking about the claims to truth that they make upon us. But we can see where Gadamer is leading us when we realize that in drawing an analogy between interpretation in the reproductive arts and interpretation of texts he is not punning or making some sort of "category mistake." We are dealing with the same phenomenon: the phenomenon of understanding.

The classical discipline concerned with the art of understanding texts is hermeneutics. If my argument is correct, however, then the real problem of hermeneutics is quite different from its common acceptance. It points in the same direction in which my criticism of the aesthetic consciousness has moved the problem of aesthetics. In fact, hermeneutics would then have to be understood in so comprehensive a sense as to embrace the whole sphere of art and its complex of questions. Every work of art, not only literature, must be understood like any other text that requires understanding, and this kind of understanding has to be acquired. This gives to the hermeneutical consciousness a comprehensive breadth that surpasses even that of the aesthetic consciousness. Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics. . . . Conversely, hermeneutics must be so determined as a whole that it does justice to the experience of art. *Understanding must be conceived as a part of the process of the coming into being of meaning, in which the significance of all statements—those of art and those of everything else that has been transmitted—is formed and made complete.* (italics added, TM, p. 146; WM, p. 157)

HP
 HP
 HERMENEUTICA
 COMO INTERPRETACAO
 DO FENOMENO
 QUE ACORDE
 MENTO
 HP

UNDERSTANDING AND PREJUDICE

As the passage just cited suggests, the "radical subjectivisation" that Gadamer ascribes to Kant's aesthetics is not limited to aesthetic phenomena, or even to Kant, but pervades all of modern thought.¹⁶ It is itself a reflection of the modern obsession with objectivism. Gadamer has already indicated this when he claims that the unintended consequences of Kant's critical inquiry was to leave the human sciences in an unhappy disjunction. Either they must model themselves on the natural sciences, if they are to provide us with objective knowledge, or they must give up any claim to objective knowledge and be resigned to dealing with what is "left over"—with the "merely" subjective, with "private" feelings. One of Gadamer's most striking criticisms of nineteenth-century German hermeneutics is that although it intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of the human sciences as autonomous disciplines, it implicitly accepted the very dichotomy of the subjective and the objective that was employed to call into question the cognitive legitimacy of these disciplines.

As a consequence, a new concept of inner experience (*Erlebnis*) was elaborated, and a concept of psychological empathy was developed, according to which the aim of "understanding" is to grasp the subjective intentions of the author of a work of art or a text, or (in the case of historical understanding) to grasp the subjective intentions of historical agents.¹⁷ But Gadamer's statement that "understanding must be conceived as a part of the process of the coming into being of meaning" indicates that neither meaning nor understanding are to be identified with psychological states of mind. This, for Gadamer, is still a vestige of the Cartesian legacy that plagued nineteenth-century hermeneutics. The task of hermeneutical understanding is not to (deceptively) convince us that we can somehow abstract ourselves from our own historical context, or that it is even conceivable to think that by some pure act of empathy we can leap out of our situation and "into" the minds of the creators of works of art or historical subjects. Meaning and understanding are not psychological processes, discrete events, or states of mind; they are essentially and intrinsically *linguistic*.¹⁸ It is the work of art or text itself that possesses meaning. And furthermore, this meaning is not self-contained—simply "there" to be discovered; meaning comes to realization only in and through the "happening" of understanding.

Once again, despite Gadamer's warnings to the contrary, a skeptical critic might claim that we seem to be on the brink of a new, sophisticated version of relativism. For it would *seem* that if the

meaning of a work of art or text is affected by or conditioned by the understanding of its meaning, then there does not *seem* to be any meaning that has "objective" integrity, that is "there" in the work of art or text to be understood. Such a relativism (which *seems* to make meaning dependent on our changing understanding of this meaning) is a misinterpretation of Gadamer. Indeed, it is just this type of relativism that he seeks to refute. But the possibility of misunderstanding his argument in this way points to a problem that needs to be confronted if we are to escape from such relativistic consequences—the question of the nature and role that prejudice plays in all understanding. One of the boldest and most controversial aspects of Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics is his defense of prejudice and his argument with the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice" (*TM*, p. 240; *WM*, p. 255).

We might try to make Gadamer's position more intellectually palatable by substituting the more neutral term "prejudgment" for "prejudice," because the latter term suggests something that is negative, unfounded, and false.¹⁹ But such a substitution (while not entirely inaccurate) tends to weaken the strong claims that Gadamer wants to make.

It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation, for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and the English Enlightenment. It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, "Nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity.²⁰

Gadamer emphatically tells us that "this recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust" (*TM*, p. 239; *WM*, p. 255). If we are not simply to dismiss these claims about prejudice, then we must carefully tease out what Gadamer is telling us and pursue the rich implications of this passage.

If Gadamer is right in claiming that not only understanding but

na aut parer
ca omnia pmanet

SE "ENTENDE" É DAR-SE
AS INTENÇÕES SUBJETIVAS

##

all knowing "inevitably involves some prejudices," then it is difficult to imagine a more radical critique of Cartesianism, as well as of the Enlightenment conception of human knowledge. For in these traditions there are sharp dichotomies between reason and prejudice, or between knowledge and prejudice. To gain knowledge we must bracket and overcome all prejudices. Gadamer might have drawn support for his provocative formulation from the tradition in the philosophy of science that runs from Peirce to Popper. Here too we find an attack on the Cartesian misunderstanding of the nature of science and knowledge. There is no knowledge without *preconceptions* and *prejudices*. The task is not to remove all such preconceptions, but to test them critically in the course of inquiry. Peirce tells us:

We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us *can* be questioned.²¹

It is clear, however, that Gadamer does want to make the all-important distinction between *blind* prejudices and "justified [*berechtigte*] prejudices productive of knowledge" (*TM*, p. 247; *WM*, p. 263), or what might be called *enabling* prejudices. But this does not diminish the significance of his thesis that both types of prejudice are constitutive of what we are. But then how are we to make this crucial distinction? How are we to discriminate which of our prejudices are blind and which are enabling?

One answer is clearly ruled out. We cannot do this by an act of pure self-reflection, such as Descartes claimed, in which we bracket all prejudices, for there is no knowledge and no understanding without prejudices. We even have dramatic evidence of this in the case of Descartes, who prided himself on doubting everything that can be doubted. For it is evident, in retrospect, that Descartes himself was filled with all sorts of prejudices and judgments that he inherited from the very tradition that he was battling. Gadamer's answer to the question of how we come to make this distinction among our prejudices is the very one that Descartes ruled out of serious consideration. For Gadamer, it is in and through the encounter with works of art, texts, and more generally what is handed down to us through tradition that we discover which of our prejudices are blind and which are enabling. In opposition to Descartes' *monological* notion of purely rational self-reflection by which we can achieve transparent self-knowledge, Gadamer tells us that it is only through the *dialogical* encounter with what is at once alien to us, makes a claim upon us,

and has an affinity with what we are that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices.

This does not mean that we can ever finally complete such a project, that we can ever achieve complete self-transparency, that we can attain that state which Descartes (and in another way, Hegel) claims is the *telos* of such a project, the attainment of perfect or absolute knowledge. To think that such a possibility is a real possibility is to fail to do justice to the realization that prejudices "constitute our being": that it literally makes no sense to think that a human being can ever be devoid of prejudices. To risk and test our prejudices is a constant task (not a final achievement). This is one way of understanding what Gadamer means by human finitude (a conception which is strikingly different from the Cartesian notion of a finite but perfect knowledge). We can also see the affinities between what Gadamer is saying and our earlier discussion of the "truth" of the incommensurability thesis. For I argued that the "truth" of this thesis, as developed by Kuhn, Feyerabend, Rorty, and even Winch, is to point to the openness of experience, not to the type of closure where "we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices." Gadamer makes a similar point when he declares that "prejudices are biases of our openness to the world."

The concept of prejudice is closely related to two other concepts that Gadamer seeks to restore and defend against Enlightenment prejudices: authority and tradition. Gadamer argues that Enlightenment thinkers not only denigrated the concept of authority, they deformed it. They thought of authority as a matter of blind obedience to persons in positions of power.

But this is not the essence of authority. It is true that it is primarily persons that have authority, but the authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge [*der Anerkennung und der Erkenntnis*]-knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, i.e., it has priority over one's own. . . . Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge. (*TM*, p. 248; *WM*, p. 263)

And Gadamer makes explicit the connection between authority and positive, enabling prejudices.

Thus the recognition of authority is always connected with the idea that what authority states is not irrational and arbitrary, but can be seen, in principle, to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the

no concept
of a
category

HP
perforato!

Acevia!!
HP

2003 Outlets
Crawford

teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person himself. Their validity demands that one should be biased in favour of the person who presents them. But this makes them then, in a sense, objective prejudices, for they bring about the same bias in favour of something that can come about through other means, e.g., through solid grounds offered by reason. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the enlightenment. (TM, p. 249; WM, p. 264)

Thus far we (and Gadamer) have emphasized two dimensions of the temporality of prejudices and prejudgments. They are always constitutive of what we are now (although this is, of course, a changing now). But if we ask what are the sources of our prejudices, and especially those prejudices which open us to experience, then we must turn to the past, to tradition, and to the proper authority (based on knowledge) which "implants" these prejudices. Shortly we will see that a comprehensive analysis of prejudice must also recognize its anticipatory, or future-oriented, dimension.

Just as Gadamer questions the typical Enlightenment contrasts between reason and prejudice, or between reason and authority, he also questions what lies behind these contrasts—the opposition between reason and tradition. He has been preparing the ground for showing us that there is something fundamentally wrong with this opposition. All reason functions *within* traditions. Here, too, there has been a deformation of the concept of tradition when we think of it as the "dead weight" of the past. A living tradition not only informs and shapes what we are but is always in the process of reconstitution.²² When tradition is no longer open in this manner, we can speak of it as "dead," or as no longer a tradition. Even the Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment tended to misconceive the concept of tradition as "something historically given, like nature" (*eine geschichtliche Gegebenheit von der Art der Natur*) (TM, p. 249; WM, p. 265). Consequently both the Enlightenment and the Romantic reaction to it tended to reify tradition, to think of it as something "given" and determinate which is to be overthrown or celebrated. And both tended to contrast tradition with the autonomy of reason.

It seems to me, however, that there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. . . . The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only what is new, or what is planned, appears as the result of reason. But this is an illusion.

Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely-chosen action as revolution and renewal. This is why both the enlightenment's critique of tradition and its romantic rehabilitation are less than their true historical being. (TM, p. 250; WM, p. 265)

Gadamer pursues the analysis of prejudice, authority, and tradition in the context of probing what is distinctive about hermeneutical understanding, but one cannot help being struck by his rapprochement with insights gleaned from the postempiricist philosophy and history of science, where the importance of tradition has also been recognized. As we have traced the stages of development in recent philosophy of science, we have seen the importance of the concept of research traditions in the practice of science. This was anticipated by the Kuhn's emphasis on the historical dimension of what he called "normal science," was refined by Lakatos' analysis of research programs, and was further elaborated by Laudan's analysis of research traditions. In these analyses of science, the concept of tradition is employed to give us a better grasp of the way in which scientific rationality must be situated within living traditions. It is important to be sensitive to differences among various types of tradition and to the ways in which they are reconstituted, criticized, and even overthrown. But any attempt to distinguish scientific practice from other forms of human conduct by employing the opposition between reason and tradition is inadequate and misleading.

But we want to know how Gadamer's reflections on prejudice, authority, and tradition enable us to increase our comprehension of what understanding is, and how they help to clarify the central thesis that "understanding must be conceived as part of the process of coming into being of meaning." We can see how Gadamer weaves these themes together by turning to his discussion and transformation of the hermeneutical circle.

THE HERMENEUTICAL CIRCLE

At several earlier stages of our inquiry we have anticipated the discussion of the hermeneutical circle, witnessing how thinkers working in different contexts have discovered for themselves its centrality. Kuhn even records "a decisive episode in the summer of 1947" when he made this discovery in his struggle to make sense of

Aristotle's physics. He reports that he was deeply perplexed about how Aristotle, who had been "an acute and naturalistic observer" and who "in such fields as biology or political behavior" had given penetrating interpretations, could have said so many absurd things about motion. "How could his characteristic talents have failed him so when applied to motion? . . . And, above all, why had his views been taken so seriously for so long a time by so many of his successors?" The more Kuhn read, the more perplexed he became. But "one memorable (and very hot) summer day those perplexities suddenly vanished." Kuhn discovered the

rudiments of an alternative way of reading the texts with which I had been struggling. For the first time I gave due weight to the fact that Aristotle's subject was change-of-quality in general, including both the fall of a stone and the growth of a child to adulthood. In his physics, the subject that was to become mechanics was at best a still-not-quite-isolable special case. More consequential was my recognition that the permanent ingredients of Aristotle's universe, its ontologically primary and indestructible elements, were not material bodies but rather the qualities which, when imposed on some portion of omnipresent neutral matter, constituted an individual material body or substance.²³

In Gadamerian terms, we can say that Kuhn's initial perplexity was the result of his approaching Aristotle's physics through the prejudices of modern mechanics. Aristotle's claims seemed not only false but absurd. In effect, Kuhn was asking the wrong sorts of questions, and what he had to learn was to ask the right questions—and to come to understand the questions that Aristotle was seeking to answer. Kuhn tells us that this episode changed his intellectual career and became "central to my historical research." In trying to transmit the lesson he learned to his students, he, in effect, formulates his own version of the hermeneutical circle, in a passage that I quoted in part I:

When reading the works of an important thinker, look first for the apparent absurdities in the text and ask yourself how a sensible person could have written them. When you find an answer, I continue, when those passages make sense, then you may find that more central passages, ones you previously thought you understood, have changed their meaning.²⁴

This maxim is extremely abstract and sketchy. It would not be very helpful unless one had had some experience in the *practice* of interpretation. We know that to be able to do this well requires a great deal of background knowledge that can enable us to understand what

the texts are saying. In order to make sense of "apparent absurdities," we need to try out alternative readings that themselves can only be tested by seeing how they make sense (or do not quite fit) with other parts of the text we are seeking to understand. Whatever "subjective processes" take place in an interpreter—whether this happens in a flash on a hot summer day or is the result of a laborious struggle—the essential question is the adequacy of the interpretation, which can be judged only by returning to the texts themselves.

But it is not only in Kuhn that we detect the importance of the hermeneutical circle; it is just as vital for Feyerabend and is evident in his characterization of the "anthropological method" which he thinks is appropriate not only for understanding science but for understanding any "form of life." It is especially prominent when Feyerabend tells us that "each item of information is a building block of understanding, which means that it is to be clarified by the discovery of further blocks from the language and ideology of the tribe."²⁵ Here Feyerabend, too, is characterizing a type of understanding that constantly moves back and forth between "parts" and the "whole" that we seek to understand. This is the very process that Geertz so eloquently characterizes (and explicitly relates to the hermeneutical circle), "namely, a continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring both into view simultaneously."²⁶

We have also seen how important the hermeneutical circle is for Winch. Although he does not explicitly mention it, the tracing of the circle is the procedure that he follows in seeking to understand Zande witchcraft. And Charles Taylor explicitly defends the importance of the hermeneutical circle when he argues that there is an unavoidably hermeneutical component to the sciences of man. Taylor is acutely aware that the appeal to the hermeneutical circle challenges the biases of those schooled in empiricism who demand some method of definitive empirical verification in testing hypotheses. He states the typical objection to the hermeneutical circle—that it is really a *vicious* circle. For if we "validate" our interpretations by appealing to other interpretations of the "parts," then we fail to break out of the circle of interpretations. When Taylor seeks to meet this objection, he introduces a "suggestion" that becomes thematic for Gadamer's own understanding and transformation of the hermeneutical circle. According to Taylor, a hermeneutical science of man

would not be founded on brute data; its most primitive data would be readings of meanings, and its object would have the [following] three proper-

ties. . . : the meanings are for a subject in a field or fields; they are, moreover, meanings which are partially constituted by self-definitions, which are in this sense already interpretations, and which can thus be re-expressed or made explicit by a science of politics. In our case, the subject may be a society or community; but the intersubjective meanings . . . embody a certain self-definition, a vision of the agent and his society, which is that of the society or community.²⁷

Such a science

cannot but move in a hermeneutical circle. A given reading of the intersubjective meanings of a society, or of given institutions or practices, may seem well founded, because it makes sense of these practices or the development of that society. But the conviction that it does make sense of this history itself is founded on further related readings²⁸

Here the empiricist or positivist objects. For he or she demands some clear procedure, some method that can break out of the circle of interpretations and serve as a touchstone for determining which interpretations or readings are correct and which are not. → *THE GERM RESEARCH*

Taylor does not try to meet this demand (and the implied criticism) by claiming that there are clearly formulizable rules or procedures for sorting out better and worse interpretations. Rather, he tells us,

Some claims of the form "If you don't understand, then your intuitions are at fault, are blind or inadequate," some claims of this form will be justified; . . . some differences will be nonarbitrable by further evidence, but . . . each side can only make appeal to deeper insight on the part of the other.²⁹

I do not want, at this stage, to evaluate the adequacy of this response but only to note that according to Taylor the circularity of such a hermeneutical understanding is neither vicious nor to be judged as a defect.³⁰ It is seen as such only when judged by the mistaken and unwarranted epistemological demands for empirical verification—the appeal to some "brute data." But toward the conclusion of his analysis Taylor suggests an idea that is crucial to Gadamer's understanding of the hermeneutical circle—that "the practical and the theoretical are inextricably joined here."

It may not just be that to understand a certain explanation one has to sharpen one's intuitions, it may be that one has to change one's orientation—if not in adopting another orientation, at least in living one's own in a way which allows for greater comprehension of others. Thus, in the sciences of man insofar as they are hermeneutical there can be a valid response to "I

don't understand" which takes the form, not only "develop your intuitions," but more radically "change yourself." This puts an end to any aspiration to a value-free or "ideology-free" science of man. A study of the science of man is inseparable from an examination of the options between which men must choose.³¹

And Taylor concludes his paper by explicitly relating his discussion to Aristotle.

There are thus good grounds both in epistemological arguments and in their greater fruitfulness for opting for hermeneutical sciences of man. But we cannot hide from ourselves how greatly this option breaks with certain commonly held notions about our scientific tradition. We cannot measure such sciences against the requirements of a science of verification: we cannot judge them by their predictive capacity. . . . These sciences cannot be "wertfrei": they are moral sciences in a more radical sense than the eighteenth century understood. Finally, their successful prosecution requires a high degree of self-knowledge, a freedom from illusion, in the sense of error which is rooted and expressed in one's way of life; for our incapacity to understand is rooted in our own self-definitions, hence in what we are. To say this is not to say anything new: Aristotle makes a similar point in Book I of the *Ethics*. But it is still radically shocking and unassimilable to the mainstream of modern science.³²

Up until this last "radically shocking" suggestion that calls into question the very possibility of a *wertfrei* science of man and that links interpretation with practical choice, there has been a consistent theme in these several formulations of the hermeneutical circle. The circle of understanding is "object" oriented, in the sense that it directs us to the texts, institutions, practices, or forms of life that we are seeking to understand. It directs us to the sensitive dialectical play between part and whole in the circle of understanding. Many standard (and pre-Heideggerian) characterizations of the hermeneutical circle focus exclusively on the relation of part to whole in the texts or phenomena which we seek to understand. No essential reference is made to the interpreter, to the individual who is engaged in the process of understanding and questioning, except insofar as he or she must have the insight, imagination, openness, and patience to acquire this art—an art achieved through practice. There is no determinate method for acquiring or pursuing this art, in the sense of explicit rules that are to be followed. Or we might say that rules here function as heuristic guides that gain their concrete meaning by appealing to exemplars of such hermeneutical interpretation. But a full statement and defense of the hermeneutical circle requires us to ask the Kantian question, How is such understanding and interpre-

*Used method
no practice to
create hermeneutics*

tation possible? What presuppositions are we making about ourselves, and what we are trying to understand if we are to show the legitimacy of the hermeneutical circle? These are the questions that Gadamer seeks to answer.³³

From his perspective, the understanding of the hermeneutical circle primarily as the Method of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and as a rival and alternative to the Method of the *Naturwissenschaften*, still is wedded to a Cartesian framework with its acceptance of the categorial distinction between what is objective and what is subjective. But Heidegger transformed the meaning, scope, and significance of the hermeneutical circle. Gadamer quotes the central passage from Heidegger's *Being and Time* in which he comments on the hermeneutical circle.

[The hermeneutical circle] is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle or even a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having [*Vorhabe*], fore-sight [*Vorsicht*], and fore-conceptions [*Vorgriffe*] to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.³⁴

Gadamer makes the following claim about this passage:

Just as they stand, these lines announce not only the conditions imposed on the practice of understanding, they also describe the manner in which interpretation always proceeds when it intends an understanding tempered to the "thing itself." For the very first time the *positive ontological meaning* of the circle that understanding implies is explicitly affirmed. . . . In order to be authentic the inquiring gaze must be focused on the "thing itself," and in such a manner that it may be grasped, as it were, "in person." Likewise it is evident that an understanding faithful to the meaning of the text, for example, is not a matter of a simple, more or less vague wish nor of "good and pious intentions," but rather has the same meaning as the program Heidegger designated as the "first, last, and constant task" of interpretative understanding. Now, the circular character of understanding is precisely the outcome of the effort which leads the interpreter to strictly abide by this program, despite any errors he might commit in the course of his investigations.³⁵

This dense passage has several implications. The reference to the *positive ontological meaning* of the circle indicates that the hermeneutical circle is not "second best"; it is not an intellectual stepsister to the methods of the natural sciences. The statement indicates the positive role that fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception, and

prejudgment play in all understanding. The reference to the *ontological* character of the circle indicates something basic about our very being-in-the-world—that we are essentially beings constituted by and engaged in interpretative understanding. The reference to the "things themselves" is not to be misunderstood as suggesting that these "things" exist *an sich* and that we must "purify" ourselves of all forestructures and prejudgments in order to grasp or know them "objectively." On the contrary, the meaning of the "things themselves" can only be grasped through the circle of understanding, a circle that presupposes the forestructures that enable us to understand.

The most important consequence of Gadamer's understanding of the hermeneutical circle is that it clarifies the relation between the interpreter and what he or she seeks to understand. And here again we can detect the significance of Gadamer's phenomenological analysis of play as a "primordial mode of being." We must learn the art of being responsive to works of art, texts, traditions (and, we can now add, other persons or forms of life) that we are trying to understand. We must participate or share in them, listen to them, open ourselves to what they are saying and to the claims to truth that they make upon us.³⁶ And we can accomplish this only because of the forestructures and prejudgments that are constitutive of our being. When Gadamer says that works of art, texts, or tradition "speak to us," he is not referring to a loose, metaphorical way of "speaking" that we ourselves "project" onto the texts; rather, he is expressing what he takes to be the most fundamental ontological character of our being-in-the-world. We can also better appreciate why Gadamer thinks it is misleading to characterize understanding as an "activity of a subject." It is true, of course, that understanding requires effort and care, imagination and perceptiveness, but this is directed to the *pathos* of opening ourselves to what we seek to understand—of allowing it to "speak to us." And such receptiveness is possible only by virtue of those "justified prejudices" that open us to experience. Gadamer emphasizes this point when he tells us:

But do not make me say what I have not in fact said, and I have *not* said that when we listen to someone or when we read we ought to forget our own opinions or shield ourselves against forming an anticipatory idea about the content of communication. In reality, to be open to "other people's opinions," to a text, and so forth, implies right off that they are *situated* in my system of opinions, or better, that I situate myself in relation to them. . . .

The authentic intention of understanding, however, is this: in reading a text, in wishing to understand it, what we always expect is that it will *inform* us of something. A consciousness formed by the authentic herme-

COMMON a
"with-
to das
no-
do
chra

✱

✱

neutical attitude will be receptive to the origins and entirely foreign features of that which comes to it from outside its own horizons. Yet this receptivity is not acquired with an objectivist "neutrality": it is neither possible necessary, nor desirable that we put ourselves within brackets. The hermeneutical attitude supposes only that we self-consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in so doing strip them of their extreme character. In keeping to this attitude we grant the text the opportunity to appear as an authentically different being and to manifest its own truth, over and against our own preconceived notions.³⁷

What might, on first appearance, strike one as extraordinarily paradoxical brings us to the heart of Gadamer's understanding and transformation of the hermeneutical circle. On the one hand, Gadamer stresses that we must always temper our understanding to the "things themselves"; we must listen to them and open ourselves so that they can "speak to us"; we must be receptive to the claims to truth that they make upon us. But on the other hand, we do not do this by bracketing or forgetting all our prejudgments and prejudices. On the contrary, it is only because of the play of these prejudgments that we are enabled to understand the "things themselves." In contrast, then, to many standard characterizations of the hermeneutical circle that focus exclusively on the text, tradition, or practices to be understood, Gadamer (following Heidegger) thematizes the forestructures of the interpreter. By opening ourselves to the "newness" of what is handed down to us, through the play of our forestructures and the "things themselves," we can become aware of those prejudices that blind us to the meaning and truth of what we are trying to understand and those prejudices that enable us to understand.

This shift in the significance of the hermeneutical circle, involving the recognition that prejudices enable us to understand, and that hermeneutical understanding is constitutive of what we are in the process of becoming, has some very strong consequences. Thus far we have not distinguished between understanding and interpretation. If we want to interpret a Shakespearean tragedy, we must be sure that we understand Shakespeare's English, and especially the ways in which it differs from contemporary English. But contrary to that tradition within hermeneutics that seeks to draw a rigorous distinction between understanding and interpretation (and to relegate these activities to different subdisciplines), Gadamer maintains that there is no essential difference between understanding and interpretation. All understanding involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves understanding. (This claim scandalizes those who think that there is or can be "objective understanding," freed

receptividade
neutraidade
"apofia"
(abocar-me
naquele horizonte)

resumo da
hermenêutica
GADAMERIANA!

from all prejudices and not "contaminated" by interpretation.) The continuity of understanding and interpretation is evident in the phenomenon of translation, Gadamer points out. For there is no translation without highlighting, and all highlighting involves interpretation.³⁸ We can, of course, speak of and discriminate misinterpretations and misunderstandings, but this does not mean that we do this by reaching some level in which no interpretation is involved.

We can see why for Gadamer the process of understanding can never (ontologically) achieve finality, why it is always open and anticipatory. We are always understanding and interpreting in light of our anticipatory prejudgments and prejudices, which are themselves changing in the course of history. This is why Gadamer tells us that to understand is always to understand *differently*. But this does not mean that our interpretations are arbitrary or distortive. We should always aim (if informed by an "authentic hermeneutical attitude") at a correct understanding of what the "things themselves" say. But what the "things themselves" say will be different in light of our changing horizons and the different questions that we learn to ask. Such an analysis of the ongoing and open character of all understanding and interpretation can be construed as distortive only if we assume that a text possesses some meaning in itself that can be isolated from our prejudgments. But this is precisely what Gadamer is denying, and this play between the "things themselves" and our prejudgments helps us comprehend why "understanding must be conceived as part of the process of the coming into being of meaning." Meaning is always *coming into being* through the "happening" of understanding.

Gadamer's point is brought into sharp focus in his characterization of the "classical." He defines it as

that which speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past, a mere testimony to something that still needs to be interpreted, but says something to the present as if it were said specially to it. What we call "classical" does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its own constant communication it does overcome it. *The classical, then, is certainly "timeless," but this timelessness is a mode of historical being.* (TM, p. 257; WM, p. 274, italics added)

TEMPORAL DISTANCE, EFFECTIVE-HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE FUSION OF HORIZONS

Gadamer's claims that timelessness is a mode of historical being opens up a new dimension of philosophic hermeneutics. For Gada-

o clássico é atemporal, e a atemporalidade é um modo de ser-histórico

é um ato de...
Ataque?

revela a
hermenêutica
histórica

!

mer's reflections on philosophic hermeneutics can be approached (as is also true of Heidegger) as a meditation on temporality and historicity. I want to consider only those aspects of temporality that can help to forestall a common misinterpretation of Gadamer. To put it very simply, we might be inclined to say that because Gadamer's thinking is oriented toward tradition, he expresses a nostalgia for what has been destroyed by the onslaught of modernity. But it is vital to see that his thinking moves us in a very different direction. Gadamer has been sharply critical of the romantic infatuation with a past that is frequently an imaginative construction of our own present concerns. This is only another version of the false belief that we can escape or bracket all our prejudices and enter into a radically different world.

CARTELA
Artes de
HUMANISMO

Temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather the naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own and thus advance towards historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognise the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.

[Temporal distance] lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that the true meaning has filtered out of it all kinds of things that obscure it, but there emerge continually new sources of understanding, which reveal unsuspected elements of meaning. (TM, pp. 264-66; WM, pp. 281-82)

Another aspect of temporality needs to be emphasized: the temporality of those prejudices that are the conditions for understanding. Where do these prejudices come from? They are themselves handed down from the traditions that shape us and that are constitutive of the historicity of our being. And as we have seen, a tradition is only alive when it is freely appropriated. But there is also an anticipatory or future-oriented dimension to all prejudices. This is already indicated by Heidegger's linguistic emphasis on fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conceptions. All understanding is projective. To accomplish "an understanding is to form a project [Entwurf] from one's own possibilities." In short, prejudices and prejudices have a threefold temporal character: they are handed down to us through

PREJUDICATO
PRECONCEITO
TRANSICAO
CONSTITUINTES do NOSSO PA
ANTECIPATORIO

tradition; they are constitutive of what we are now (and are in the process of becoming); and they are anticipatory—always open to future testing and transformation.

Gadamer is laying the groundwork for his own version of the thesis that there is an "inextricable connection of the theoretical and the practical" in all understanding and interpretation—that hermeneutical understanding shapes our practical lives (and is not a purely disinterested, theoretical activity). This signals the third element that Gadamer seeks to integrate into all understanding and interpretation—the moment of application. All understanding, as we noted in part I, involves not only interpretation but also application. And Gadamer tells us that recognizing the intrinsic role of application in all understanding represents "the rediscovery of the fundamental hermeneutic problem" (*Wiedergewinnung des hermeneutischen Grundproblems*) (TM, p. 274; WM, p. 290). It is here that we discover the fusion of hermeneutics and praxis, which becomes the most central theme in Gadamer's analysis of philosophic hermeneutics. This is the reason why Gadamer believes that philosophic hermeneutics is the heir to the older tradition of practical philosophy. But before examining this crucial stage of Gadamer's argument, I want to consider briefly two other concepts that will help round out the discussion of philosophic hermeneutics and set the stage for exploring the centrality of praxis and phronēsis: effective-historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) and the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*).

alienação
x
familiaridade
TENSAO

Both of these themes have been in the background of our discussion, but we need to bring them into the foreground. We can introduce these interrelated themes by reminding ourselves of what underlies Gadamer's analysis of works of art, texts, and history. The characteristic of anything that is "handed down to us" that elicits the need for understanding is the tension between strangeness or alienness and familiarity. This is one more way in which hermeneutics relates to the discussion of incommensurability. For the problem that Kuhn, Feyerabend, Rorty, Winch, and Geertz are all struggling with is how to understand and do justice to something that at once strikes us as so strange and alien and yet has sufficient affinity with us that we can come to understand it. The problem is structurally similar, whether we are trying to make sense of Aristotle's physics, Greek archaic art, Zande witchcraft, or the embodied concepts of a self in Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan cultures. The hermeneutical task is to find the resources in our language and experience to enable us to understand these initially alien phenomena without imposing

*MA OPE TH
DO NOT READ?*

PARCIMENTO?

blind or distortive prejudices on them. If we were confronting something so alien and strange that it had nothing in common with our language and experience, no affinity whatsoever, then it would no longer be intelligible to speak of understanding. This point is just as fundamental for Gadamer as it is for Davidson.

I have used the term "affinity" to indicate the relationship that exists between us and the alien text or tradition that we seek to understand and appropriate. But the German word that Gadamer employs (*Zugehörigkeit*) is much stronger, and it is better translated as "belongingness." As Gadamer sees it, we belong to a tradition before it belongs to us: tradition, through its sedimentations, has a power which is constantly determining what we are in the process of becoming. We are *always already* "thrown" into a tradition. We can see how far Gadamer is from any naive form of relativism that fails to appreciate how we are always shaped by effective-history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). It is not just that works of art, texts, and tradition have effects and leave traces. Rather, what we are, whether we are explicitly aware of it or not, is always being influenced by tradition, even when we think we are most free of it. Again, it is important to reiterate that a tradition is not something "naturelike," something "given" that stands over against us. It is always "part of us" and works through its effective-history.

This sets the task for effective-historical *consciousness* (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*), and explains its possibility. According to Gadamer, "historical objectivism," which treats the "object" as if it were ontologically independent of the "subject," "conceals the involvement of the historical consciousness itself in effective-history" (*TM*, p. 268; *WM*, p. 285). The task of effective-historical *consciousness* is to bring to explicit awareness this historical affinity or belongingness.

True historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it not chase the phantom of an historical object which is the object of progressive research, but learn to see in the object the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship in which exist both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding itself. (*TM*, p. 267; *WM*, p. 283)

Effective-historical consciousness influences what we consider worthy of investigation and how we go about investigating it. It is "already operative in the choice of the right question to ask" (*TM*, p.

268; *WM*, p. 285). Effective-historical consciousness does not indicate a final state of self-knowledge. Rather, we are always "on the way" to such self-knowledge, a self-knowledge achieved with the dialectical interplay with the "other." But if the movement toward such *consciousness* of effective-history is the primary task of philosophical hermeneutics, how is this to be achieved? In asking and answering this question, Gadamer does not specify procedural rules, but instead clarifies what it means to achieve effective-historical consciousness. This is the context in which Gadamer introduces his notion of the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*).

Drawing on Nietzsche and Husserl, Gadamer characterizes a *horizon* as follows:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence an essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "horizon." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. (*TM*, p. 269; *WM*, p. 286)

A horizon, then, is limited and finite, but it is *essentially* open. For to have a horizon is not to be limited to what is nearest but to be able to move beyond it. Indeed the very idea of a closed horizon is a false abstraction.

The closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. It is not historical consciousness that first sets the surrounding horizon in motion. But in it this motion becomes aware of itself. (*TM*, p. 271; *WM*, p. 288)

Horizons are limited, finite, changing, and fluid.

The question then arises, What are we doing (or rather what is happening to us) when we try to understand a horizon other than our own? We already know that the answer that others have given—the idea that we can escape our own standpoint and leap into the horizon of the past—is not the right answer. For this is impossible, and violates Gadamer's claim that we are always ontologically grounded in our situation and horizon. Rather, what we seek to achieve is a "fusion of horizons," a fusion whereby our own horizon is enlarged and enriched. Gadamer's main point becomes even sharper when we

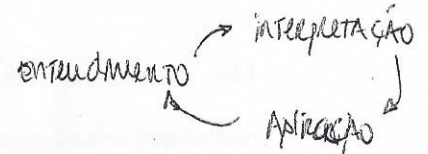
realize that for him the medium of all human horizons is linguistic, and that the language that we speak (or that rather speaks through us) is essentially open to understanding alien horizons. It is through the fusion of horizons that we risk and test our prejudices. In this sense, learning from other forms of life and horizons is at the very same time coming to an understanding of ourselves. "Only through others do we gain true knowledge of ourselves."³⁹ Applying this to history and historical consciousness, Gadamer writes:

When our historical consciousness places itself within historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own, but together they constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. It is, in fact, a single horizon that embraces everything contained in historical consciousness. Our own past, and that other past towards which our historical consciousness is directed, help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives, and which determines it as tradition. (*TM*, p. 271; *WM*, p. 288)

For Gadamer, there is nothing which is in principle beyond the possibility of understanding. This is one of the primary senses in which hermeneutics is universal, although we can never exhaust the meaning of that which we seek to understand or bring understanding to final closure. To use the language of incommensurability, we can say that the incommensurability of different forms of life or different historical epochs always presents a challenge to us, a challenge that requires learning to ask the right questions and drawing on the resources of our own linguistic horizon in order to understand that which is alien. For Gadamer, it is not a dead metaphor to liken the fusion of horizons that is the constant task of effective-historical consciousness to an ongoing and open dialogue or conversation.

APPLICATION: THE REDISCOVERY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM

With this outline of Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics, we can understand what it means to claim that hermeneutics is both ontological and universal. It is ontological in the sense that understanding "denotes the basic being-in-motion of [*Dasein*] which constitutes its finiteness and historicity"; understanding is the primordial mode of being of what we most essentially are. Understanding is universal in several senses. It is not just one activity which is to be distinguished from other human activities, but underlies all human activ-



ities. It is universal in the sense that nothing is in principle beyond understanding, even though we never exhaust the "things themselves" through understanding. The universality of understanding can also be approached through the "linguistic turn" of Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics. Language is the medium of all understanding and all tradition. And language is not to be understood as an instrument or tool that we use; rather it is the medium in which we live. Like play itself, which reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players, so language itself reaches presentation through those who speak and write.⁴⁰

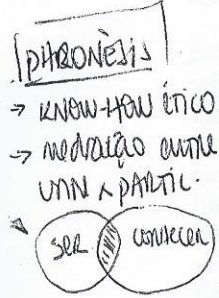
We have also laid the groundwork for exploring Gadamer's fusion of hermeneutics and *praxis*. This leitmotif has appeared from the very beginning of our analysis and becomes thematic when Gadamer claims that understanding, interpretation, and application (or appropriation) are not three independent activities to be relegated to three different subdisciplines but rather are internally related. They are all moments of the single process of understanding.⁴¹ This integration of the moment of application into understanding brings us to the truly distinctive feature of philosophic hermeneutics. And we will also see that it reveals some deep problems and tensions within Gadamer's hermeneutics.

As I have indicated in part I, the issue of "application" is taken up in *Truth and Method* at the stage of his argument when Gadamer questions an older tradition that divided hermeneutics into *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding), *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation), and *subtilitas applicandi* (application). It is here that Gadamer explicitly discusses the relevance of Aristotle's analysis of *phronēsis* in book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Gadamer's own understanding, interpretation, and appropriation of Aristotle has rich philosophic consequences and is itself a model of what he means by hermeneutical understanding. It is an exemplar of effective-historical consciousness; the fusion of horizons; the positive role of temporal distance; the way in which understanding is part of the process of the coming into being of meaning; the way in which tradition "speaks to us" and makes a "claim to truth" upon us, and what it means to say that "the interpreter dealing with a traditional text seeks to apply it to himself." Furthermore, when we see how Gadamer appropriates what Aristotle says, we can understand why the *Geisteswissenschaften* are practical disciplines in the sense that Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* are practical and why Gadamer thinks that "hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of the older tradition of practical philosophy" whose chief task is to "justify this way of

reason and defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science." Gadamer's own understanding of philosophic hermeneutics can itself be interpreted as a series of footnotes on his decisive intellectual encounter with Aristotle.

We can see why *phronēsis* is so important to Gadamer by returning to the apparent paradox that we find at the heart of Gadamer's elucidation of the happening of understanding. Hermeneutic understanding is always tempered to the "thing itself" (*die Sache selbst*) that we are seeking to understand. We seek nothing less than to understand the same text or the same piece of tradition. But the meaning of what we seek to understand comes into being only through the happening of understanding. And such understanding is possible because of the prejudices that are constitutive of what we are and that come into play in understanding. *Phronēsis* is a form of reasoning and knowledge that involves a distinctive mediation between the universal and the particular. This mediation is not accomplished by any appeal to technical rules or Method (in the Cartesian sense) or by the subsumption of a pre-given determinate universal to a particular case. The "intellectual virtue" of *phronēsis* is a form of reasoning, yielding a type of ethical know-how in which what is universal and what is particular are codetermined. Furthermore, *phronēsis* involves a "peculiar interlacing of being and knowledge, determination through one's own becoming, *Hexis*, recognition of the situational Good, and *Logos*."⁴² It is not to be identified with the type of "objective knowledge" that is detached from one's own being and becoming. Just as *phronēsis* determines what the *phronimos* becomes, Gadamer wants to make a similar claim for all authentic understanding—that it is not detached from the interpreter but becomes constitutive of his or her *praxis*. Understanding, for Gadamer, is a form of *phronēsis*.

We can comprehend what this means by noting the contrasts that Gadamer emphasizes when he examines the distinctions that Aristotle makes between *phronēsis* and the other "intellectual virtues," especially *epistēmē* and *technē*. Aristotle characterizes all of these virtues (and not just *epistēmē*) as being related to "truth" (*alētheia*).⁴³ *Epistēmē*, scientific knowledge, is knowledge of what is universal, of what exists invariably, and takes the form of scientific demonstration. The subject matter, the form, the *telos*, and the way in which *epistēmē* is learned and taught differ from *phronēsis*, the form of reasoning appropriate to *praxis*, which deals with what is variable and always involves a mediation between the universal and the particular that requires deliberation and choice.



HEXIS

ENTENDIMENTO COMO FORMA DE PHRONĒSIS



For Gadamer, however, the contrast between *epistēmē* and *phronēsis* is not as important for hermeneutics as the distinctions between *technē* (technical know-how) and *phronēsis* (ethical know-how). Gadamer stresses three contrasts.

1. *Technē*, or a technique,

is learned and can be forgotten; we can "lose" a skill. But ethical "reason" can neither be learned nor forgotten. . . . Man always finds himself in an "acting situation" and he is always obliged to use ethical knowledge and apply it according to the exigencies of his concrete situation.⁴⁴

2. There is a different conceptual relation between means and ends in *technē* than in *phronēsis*. The end of ethical know-how, unlike that of a technique, is not a "particular thing" or product but rather the "complete ethical rectitude of a lifetime."⁴⁵ Even more important, while technical activity does not require that the means that allow it to arrive at an end be weighed anew on each occasion, this is precisely what is required in ethical know-how. In ethical know-how there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation. For the end itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation.⁴⁶

3. *Phronēsis*, unlike *technē*, requires an understanding of other human beings. This is indicated when Aristotle considers the variants of *phronēsis*, especially *synēsis* (understanding).

It appears in the fact of concern, not about myself, but about the other person. Thus it is a mode of moral judgment. . . . The question here, then, is not of a general kind of knowledge, but of its specification at a particular moment. This knowledge also is not in any sense technical knowledge. . . . The person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him. (TM, p. 288; WM, p. 306)

For Gadamer, this variation of *phronēsis* provides the clue for grasping the centrality of friendship in Aristotle's *Ethics*.

We can gain a concrete understanding of what Gadamer means by the distinctive codetermination of the universal and the-particular that is characteristic of *phronēsis* by considering how he weaves legal hermeneutics into his analysis of application. To Gadamer, the hermeneutical process used in making a legal judgment exemplifies the hermeneutical process as a whole. Gadamer argues that the judge does not simply "apply" fixed, determinate laws to particular situa-

tions. Rather the judge must interpret and appropriate precedents and law to each new, particular situation. It is by virtue of such considered judgment that the meaning of the law and the meaning of the particular case are codetermined. "We can, then, bring out as what is truly common to all forms of hermeneutics the fact that the sense to be understood finds its concrete . . . form only in interpretation, but that this interpretative work is wholly committed to the meaning of the text" (*TM*, p. 297; *WM*, p. 315).

But what does this analysis of *phronēsis* and the ways in which it differs from *epistēmē* and *technē* have to do with the problems of hermeneutics? The analogy that Gadamer draws is that just as application is not a subsequent or occasional part of *phronēsis* in which we relate some pre-given determinate-universal to a particular, this, Gadamer claims, is characteristic of all authentic understanding and interpretation.

The interpreter dealing with a traditional text seeks to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he understands it as such and only afterwards uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal thing, the text; i.e., to understand what this piece of tradition says, what constitutes the meaning and importance of the text. In order to understand that, he must not seek to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation, if he wants to understand at all. (*TM*, p. 289; *WM*, p. 307)

The striking thing about this passage is that it applies perfectly to the way in which Gadamer himself understands, interprets, and appropriates Aristotle's text. That is what I meant earlier when I said that Aristotle's analysis of *phronēsis* is not only a model of the problems of hermeneutics but that Gadamer's interpretation of Aristotle is also itself a model or exemplar of what is meant by hermeneutical understanding. Gadamer tells us that if we are to understand what a text or a tradition says, then we must not seek to disregard ourselves and our hermeneutical situation. Gadamer brings his own awareness of our hermeneutical situation to his interpretation of Aristotle's text, emphasizing (as the essence of our hermeneutical situation) that we are confronted with a world in which there has been "a domination of technology based on science," a "false idolatry of the expert," "a scientific mystification of the modern society of specialization," and a dangerous "inner longing . . . to find in science a substitute for lost orientation." This is the problem that orients Gadamer's questioning of Aristotle's text; Gadamer's central

claim is that we have deformed the concept of *praxis* and forgotten what *praxis* really is.⁴⁷

Through a dialogical encounter with Aristotle's text, we risk and test our own entrenched prejudices that prevent us from grasping the autonomy and integrity of *phronēsis*. This does not mean that we approach Aristotle without any prejudgments. We can understand Aristotle and appropriate the truth of what he is saying because we ourselves have been shaped by this effective-history. Gadamer is not advocating a nostalgic return to Aristotle but rather an appropriation of Aristotle's insights to our concrete situation. Gadamer's interpretation of Aristotle illustrates what he means by the fusion of horizons. We are, of course, questioning Aristotle's text from our own historical hermeneutical horizon. But in coming to understand what Aristotle is saying, our prejudices are challenged and we enlarge our own horizon. This fusion of horizons provides a critical perspective on our own situation, enabling us to see how *praxis* has been deformed. Every encounter with tradition is intrinsically critical. By being sensitive to Aristotle's own confrontation with the "professional lawmakers whose function at that time corresponded to the role of the expert in modern scientific society," we can better understand the problems we confront in our own situation. We can learn from Aristotle what practice really is, and why it is not to be identified with the "application of science to technical tasks." Gadamer realizes that in modern society *technē* itself has been transformed, but this only highlights the importance of what we can learn from Aristotle about *praxis* and *phronēsis*. He tells us:

In a scientific culture such as ours the fields of *technē* and art are much more expanded. Thus the fields of mastering means to pre-given ends have been rendered even more monological and controllable. The crucial change is that practical wisdom can no longer be promoted by personal contact and the mutual exchange of views among citizens. Not only has craftsmanship been replaced by industrial work; many forms of our daily life are technologically organized so that they no longer require personal decision. In modern technological society public opinion itself has in a new and really decisive way become the object of very complicated techniques—and this, I think, is the main problem facing our civilization.⁴⁸

The temporal distance between ourselves and Aristotle is not a negative barrier but is, rather, positive and productive for understanding. By opening ourselves to what Aristotle's text says to us, and to the claim to truth that it makes upon us, we bring to life new meanings of the text. And this understanding, as a form of *phronēsis*, is a practical-moral knowledge which becomes constitutive of what we

are in the process of becoming. Gadamer seeks to show us that authentic hermeneutical understanding becomes integral to our very being and transforms what we are in process of becoming, just as *phronēsis* determines the being of the *phronimos*.

This stress on the moment of appropriation in hermeneutical understanding enables us to see why Gadamer believes that the *Geisteswissenschaften*, when truly practiced, are practical-moral disciplines. As hermeneutical disciplines, they are not primarily directed toward amassing theoretical, "objective" knowledge. Rather, while hermeneutical understanding does require theoretical distancing, it also involves the type of appropriation characteristic of *phronēsis*.⁴⁹ The type of knowledge and truth that hermeneutics yields is practical knowledge and truth that shapes our *praxis* (we will soon explicitly examine the question of truth). This also helps to explain why for Gadamer the "chief task" of philosophic hermeneutics is to "correct the peculiar falsehood of modern consciousness" and "to defend practical and political reason against the domination of technology based on science." It is the scientism of our age and the false idolatry of the expert that pose the threat to practical and political reason. The task of philosophy today is to elicit in us the type of questioning that can become a counterforce against the contemporary deformation of *praxis*. It is in this sense that "hermeneutic philosophy is the heir of the older tradition of practical philosophy."

THE MOVEMENT BEYOND PHILOSOPHIC HERMENEUTICS

I have indicated that Gadamer's appropriation of the tradition of practical philosophy is not without tensions and problems. If we take Gadamer seriously and press his own claims, they lead us beyond philosophic hermeneutics. But before I begin my immanent critique—a critique that takes Gadamer's arguments seriously and draws out their conclusions—it is important to remember that in *Truth and Method* Gadamer's primary concern is with the understanding and interpretation of works of art, texts, and tradition, with "what is handed down to us." Ethics and politics are not in the foreground of his investigations. Even his discussion of Aristotle is introduced only insofar as it helps to illuminate the hermeneutical phenomenon. But it is also clear that if we pay close attention to Gadamer's writings before and after the publication of *Truth and Method*, we will see that from his very earliest to his most recent writings he has consis-

tently shown a concern with ethics and politics, especially with what we can learn from Greek philosophy. In his writings since the publication of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer has returned again and again to the dialectical interplay of hermeneutics and *praxis*. When we enlarge our horizon and consider the implications of what he is saying for a contemporary understanding of *praxis*, a number of difficulties come into sharp relief.

Let me begin with a consideration of the meaning of *truth* for Gadamer, then move to his conception of *criticism*. This will allow us to take a close look at some of the difficulties with his appropriation of *phronēsis*. Finally, we can turn to Gadamer's reflections on dialogue and freedom.

Although the concept of truth is basic to Gadamer's entire project of philosophic hermeneutics, it turns out to be one of the most elusive concepts in his work. After all, a primary intention of *Truth and Method* is to elucidate and defend the legitimacy of speaking of the "truth" of works of art, texts, and tradition. Gadamer tells us that it was not his aim to play off Method against Truth, but rather to show that there is "an entirely different notion of knowledge and truth"⁵⁰ which is not exhausted by the achievements of scientific method and which is available to us through hermeneutical understanding. The appeal to truth—a truth that enables us to go beyond our own historical horizon through a fusion of horizons—is absolutely essential in order to distinguish philosophic hermeneutics from a historicist form of relativism. Gadamer concludes *Truth and Method* with strong claims about this distinctive type of truth.

Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed towards escaping their thrall. It has emerged throughout our investigation that the certainty that is imparted by the use of scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth. This is so especially of the human sciences, but this does not mean a diminution of their scientific quality, but, on the contrary, the justification of the claim to special humane significance that they have always made. The fact that in the knowing involved in them the knower's own being is involved marks, certainly, the limitation of "method," but not that of science. Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must—and effectively can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and research, a discipline that guarantees truth [*die Wahrheit verbürgt*]. (TM, pp. 446–47; WM, p. 465)

But what precisely does "truth" mean here? And what does it mean to say that there is a discipline of questioning and research that "guarantees truth"? It is much easier to say what "truth" does

Handwritten notes in the left margin:
 - "Method do Hermeneutik" (written vertically)
 - "Method do Hermeneutik" (written diagonally)
 - "Method do Hermeneutik" (written diagonally)
 - A large handwritten 'X' mark.

Handwritten 'X' mark in the right margin.

not mean than to give a positive account. It might seem curious (although I do not think it is accidental) that in a work entitled *Truth and Method* the topic of truth never becomes fully thematic and is discussed only briefly toward the very end of the book. (The word "truth" is not even listed in the index.) It is clear, however, that like Hegel and Heidegger, Gadamer rejects the notion of truth as correspondence, as *adequatio intellectus et rei*, at least in regard to the distinctive type of truth that is achieved through hermeneutical understanding. What Gadamer means by "truth" is a blending of motifs that have resonances in Hegel and Heidegger. Like Hegel, Gadamer seeks to show that there is a truth that is revealed in the process of experience (*Erfahrung*) and that emerges in the dialogical encounter with tradition. Even the passage just quoted echoes the typical Hegelian movement from certainty (*Gewissheit*) to truth (*Wahrheit*). And like Heidegger, Gadamer also seeks to recover the notion of *alētheia* as unconcealment (*Unverborgenheit*). There is even a parallel between Heidegger's claim that *Dasein* is "equally in truth and in untruth" and Gadamer's claim that prejudices (both blind and enabling ones) are constitutive of our being. But Gadamer also distances himself from both Hegel and Heidegger. He categorically rejects what Hegel himself took to be the ground of his conception of truth—that "truth is the whole" that is finally revealed in *Wissenschaft*, the absolute knowledge that completes and overcomes experience.⁵¹ Gadamer also stands in an uneasy relation with Heidegger. He draws back from the "radical" thinking (*Denken*) of Heidegger. With implicit reference to Heidegger, Gadamer writes, "When science expands into a total technocracy and thus brings on the 'cosmic night' of the 'forgetfulness of being', the nihilism that Nietzsche prophesied, then may one look at the last fading light of the sun that is set in the evening sky, instead of turning around to look for the first shimmer of its return" (*TM*, p. xxv; *WM*, p. xxv). And with explicit reference to Heidegger, he tells us, "What man needs is not only a persistent asking of ultimate questions, but the sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now" (*TM*, p. xxv; *WM*, p. xxv).⁵² But even if we play out the similarities and differences with Hegel and Heidegger, the precise meaning of truth in Gadamer's philosophy still eludes us. Even more problematic and revealing, if we closely examine the way in which Gadamer appeals to "truth," we see that he is employing a concept of truth that he never fully makes explicit. Typically he speaks of the "claim to truth" (*Anspruch auf Wahrheit*) that works of art, texts, and tradition make upon us. Gadamer never says (and it would certainly pervert

Verdade

Argumento

CULTURA E TRADIÇÃO

his meaning) that something is true simply because it is handed down to us. This is just as evident in his claims about the tradition of practical philosophy as it is in his criticism of the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice. In saying, for example, that "when Aristotle, in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, distinguishes the manner of 'practical' knowledge . . . from theoretical and technical knowledge, he expresses, in my opinion, one of the greatest truths by which the Greeks throw light upon the 'scientific' mystification of modern society of specialization," Gadamer is not telling us that this is one of the "greatest truths" simply because it is what Aristotle's text says. Furthermore, in this context, he is clearly referring to a *discursive* truth which needs to be justified or warranted by argumentation. Rather, Aristotle's doctrine is true because Gadamer thinks we can now give convincing arguments and reasons to show why it is true. The emphasis here is not simply on what tradition says to us or even on the "claim to truth" that it makes upon us but on the validation of such claims by our own thinking and argumentation. Gadamer has warned us against reifying tradition and taking it as something simply given. Furthermore, tradition is not a seamless whole. There are conflicting traditions making conflicting claims of truth upon us—for example, a tradition of Enlightenment thinking, as well as the older tradition of practical philosophy. If we take our historicity seriously, then the challenge that always confronts us is to give the best possible reasons and arguments that are appropriate to our hermeneutical situation in order to validate claims to truth.

Gadamer himself makes this point forcefully in his friendly quarrel with Leo Strauss. Commenting on a theme that Gadamer shares with Strauss—the importance of the concept of friendship in Aristotle's ethics for enabling us to recognize the limitations of modern ethics—he asks,

Does this insight emerge because we "read" the classics with an eye that is trained by historical science, reconstructing their meaning, as it were, and then considering it possible, trusting that they are right? Or do we see truth in them because we are thinking ourselves as we try to understand them, i.e., because what they say seems true to us when we consider the corresponding modern theories that are invoked? (*TM*, p. 485; *WM*, p. 507)

There is no ambiguity in the answers that Gadamer gives to these questions. He emphasizes *our* thinking, understanding, and argumentation. But then this casts the entire question of truth in a very different light. When it comes to the validation of claims to truth,

then the essential issue concerns the reasons and arguments that we can give to support such claims—reasons and arguments that are of course fallible and that are anticipatory, in the sense that they can be challenged and criticized by future argumentation. In effect, I am suggesting that Gadamer is appealing to a concept of truth that (pragmatically speaking) amounts to what can be argumentatively validated by the community of interpreters who open themselves to what tradition "says to us."⁵³ This does not mean that there is some transcendental or ahistorical perspective from which we can evaluate competing claims to truth. We judge and evaluate such claims by the standards and practices that have been hammered out in the course of history.

Gadamer typically links truth (*Wahrheit*) with the thing (*die Sache*) itself. He tells us, "I repeat again what I have often insisted upon: every hermeneutical understanding begins and ends with the 'thing itself'."⁵⁴ In appealing to the thing itself, Gadamer does not mean Kant's *Ding-an-sich*. Rather he plays on the implications of Aristotle's assertion, in the *Ethics*, that the appropriate form of knowledge and reasoning is conditioned by the subject matter; on the way in which Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is always directing us to *die Sache* in order to reveal the dialectical movement of consciousness; and on the significance of the call for the "return to the things themselves" in Husserl and the transformation of this demand in Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity." But this appeal to *die Sache* is not sufficient to clarify the concept (*Begriff*) of truth, since the question can always be asked, When do we have a true understanding of the thing (*die Sache*) itself? Gadamer implicitly recognizes that this is always a proper question when he says that our anticipatory interpretations "may not conform to what the thing is."⁵⁵ The crucial point as it pertains to truth is that however prominent the thing itself may be in testing our interpretations, a true understanding of the thing itself must be warranted by appropriate forms of argumentation that are intended to show that we have properly grasped what the thing itself says.⁵⁶

The point that I am making about the concept of truth that is implicit in Gadamer's writings is closely related to the allied concept of criticism. Gadamer says,

It is a grave misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition which enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism. . . . In truth the confrontation of our historic tradition is always a critical challenge of this tradition. . . . Every experience is such a confrontation.⁵⁷

é verdade aqui
o que pode ser
argumentado/validado
por uma comunidade de
interpretes

Here too there are echoes of Hegel, for, like Hegel, Gadamer thinks that experience—*Erfahrung*—always involves an element of negativity, of "determinate negation" (see *TM*, pp. 310–25; *WM*, pp. 329–44). But even if we read this passage in the light of a full understanding of Gadamer's approach to tradition, there is a problem here that Gadamer does not squarely confront. All criticism appeals to some principles, standards, or criteria. Gadamer is extremely incisive in exposing the fallacy of thinking that such principles, standards, or criteria can be removed from our own historicity and in showing that there is an essential openness and indeterminacy about them. (This parallels Kuhn's effort to elucidate the criteria for evaluating competing scientific theories.) But even if we grant Gadamer everything that he wants to say about human finitude rooted in historicity, this does not lessen the burden of answering the question of what is and what ought to be the basis for the critical evaluation of the problems of modernity. One can be sympathetic with Gadamer's critique of objectivism, foundationalism, the search for some Archimedean point that somehow stands outside of our historical situation. But if we press the theme of application and appropriation to our historical situation, then we must still address the question, What is the basis for our critical judgments? When Gadamer tells us that the "concept of 'praxis' which was developed in the last two centuries is an awful deformation of what practice really is" or when he speaks of "the peculiar falsehood of modern consciousness[,] the idolatry of scientific method[,] and the anonymous authority of the sciences," he is himself appealing to critical standards and norms that demand rational justification and argumentation. It is not sufficient to give a justification that directs us to tradition. What is required is a form of argumentation that seeks to warrant what is valid in this tradition.

We can also approach the question of the inadequacies of Gadamer's conception of truth and criticism from a slightly different perspective. Gadamer frequently presents his own thinking as a corrective to the oneness and excesses of the scientism that is so pervasive in contemporary thought, which he traces back to the Cartesian and Enlightenment legacies. It is certainly true that Gadamer does present a strong apologia for the centrality and legitimacy of the concepts of prejudgment, authority, and tradition. But we can ask, in a Gadamerian fashion, Isn't there also a claim to truth in the Enlightenment tradition that needs to be recovered and honored?⁵⁸ We do a grave injustice to the Enlightenment if we think that it was simply an "epistemological" movement and fail to recognize that

CRITICA

1. justificação
racional da
critica

2. m/justiça e/
ILUMINISMO

any adequate hermeneutical understanding of the Enlightenment needs to recognize its social and political roots. Thus, for example, we can grant that true authority is not blind obedience, but rather that authority is based on knowledge and recognition. But as the Enlightenment thinkers knew, authority always presents itself as possessing superior knowledge; that is the basis for its claim to legitimacy. Persons in authority do not tell us to obey blindly, but to obey or follow them because they have superior judgment and insight. The real political and practical problem is to be able to critically evaluate when such claims are legitimate and when they are not. Or, if we use the language of Gadamer, the practical issue is to be able to distinguish rightful authority (which is based on knowledge and recognition) from pseudo versions of it that falsely claim to be based on superior knowledge. Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics does not include a detailed understanding of how power as domination (*Herrschaft*)—the type of domination that deforms *praxis*—operates in the modern world.

At times Gadamer seems to suggest that in the contemporary world the threat and danger for *praxis* comes from *technē*. But such a judgment would be profoundly misleading. Even if we appeal to Plato and Aristotle, they never would draw such a conclusion. And despite contemporary transformations of the meaning and scope of the practical and the technical, the point that we need to be aware of is this: the danger for contemporary *praxis* is not *technē*, but domination (*Herrschaft*).

A philosophic perspective such as philosophic hermeneutics can be judged not only by what it says and what comes into sharp focus but also by what is left unsaid and relegated to the fringes of its horizon. Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics is virtually silent on the complex issues concerning domination and power. But as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Weber, the Frankfurt thinkers, and Foucault have taught us, no intellectual orientation that seeks to illuminate concrete *praxis* in the contemporary world can be judged adequate if it fails to confront questions concerning the character, dynamics, and tactics of power and domination.

These critical remarks about truth, criticism, and power point to some of the difficulties and lacunae in Gadamer's appropriation of *phronēsis*, that distinctive "intellectual virtue" that is required for "ethical know-how" which mediates and codetermines the universal and the particular. Let us examine *phronēsis* carefully, concentrating on the "universal" element that is mediated. Gadamer's meaning is illustrated by his interpretation of the role of natural law in Aristotle.

In the realm of *praxis*, natural law is not to be thought of as a law that is eternal, immutable, and fully determinate. Gadamer tells us, "According to Aristotle, the idea of an immutable natural law applies only to the divine world, and he declares that with us humans natural law is in the last analysis just as inconstant as positive law."⁵⁹ While natural law is not to be reduced to or confused with positive law, natural law always requires interpretation and specification in concrete, particular situations of *praxis*. Finding justice in a concrete situation demands perfecting law with equity (*epieikeia*): "It follows, then, according to Aristotle that the idea of natural law serves only a critical function. Nothing in the idea authorizes us to use it dogmatically by attributing the inviolability of natural law to particular and concrete juridical contents."⁶⁰ The claim that Gadamer makes about Aristotle's understanding of natural law (the universal element) as something that is essentially open to interpretation and that is only specified when mediated in a concrete ethical situation that demands choice and decision is paradigmatic, for Gadamer, of the application of all ethical principles and norms. But as Aristotle stresses, and Gadamer realizes, *phronēsis* presupposes the existence of *nomoi* (funded laws) in the *polis* or community. This is what keeps *phronēsis* from degenerating into the mere cleverness or calculation that characterizes the *deinos* (the clever person).⁶¹ Given a community in which there is a living, shared acceptance of ethical principles and norms, then *phronēsis* as the mediation of such universals in particular situations makes good sense.

The problem for us today, the chief characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, is that we are in a state of great confusion and uncertainty (some might even say chaos) about what norms or "universals" ought to govern our practical lives. Gadamer realizes—but I do not think he squarely faces the issues that it raises—that we are living in a time when the very conditions required for the exercise of *phronēsis*—the shared acceptance and stability of universal principles and laws—are themselves threatened (or do not exist). Of course, Gadamer is right when he insists that no matter how corrupt or deformed a society may be, there can always be *phronēsis*. There can always be those individuals who exemplify the virtues of the *phronimos*. That is a lesson we can learn from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. And it is also true that in the best of *poleis* there will always be occasions when *phronēsis* degenerates into instrumental or even vicious cleverness. But to insist that these are always real possibilities in any society, no matter how just or unjust the society may be, is not yet to confront a crucial question—the question of

o mesmo problema
o construtivismo:
para a resposta que
caracter o lado certo
A 12?

XX

4 -

XX

what material, social, and political conditions need to be concretely realized in order to encourage the flourishing of *phronēsis* in all citizens.

Furthermore, Gadamer does not adequately clarify the type of discourse that is appropriate when questions about the validity of basic norms (universals) are raised. How is such recognition and agreement to be achieved? When there is serious disagreement about what norms ought to be binding, should all participants be able to have a say? When pressed about these questions, Gadamer frequently deals with a different issue. He tells us that such universals are inherited from tradition, that they are essentially open, that their meaning can be specified only in application to concrete, practical situations. But this does not clarify the issue of what we are to do in a situation in which there is confusion or conflict about which norms or universals are appropriate, or how we are to evaluate a situation in which we question the validity of such norms.

If we follow out the logic of Gadamer's own line of thinking, if we are really concerned with the "sense of what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now," then this demands that we turn our attention to the question of how we can nurture the type of communities required for the flourishing of *phronēsis*. At the heart of Gadamer's thinking about praxis is a paradox. On the one hand, he acutely analyzes the deformation of *praxis* in the contemporary world, and yet on the other hand he seems to suggest, regardless of the type of community in which we live, that *phronēsis* is always a real possibility. Ironically, there is something almost *unhistorical* in the way in which Gadamer appropriates *phronēsis*. Except for some occasional remarks, we do not find any detailed systematic analysis of social structure and causes of the deformation of *praxis* in contemporary society. Insufficient attention is paid to the historical differences that would illuminate precisely how *praxis* and *phronēsis* are threatened and undermined in the contemporary world. Since Aristotle clearly saw the continuity and interplay of ethics and politics, one would think that this is a movement necessitated by Gadamer's own appropriation of *phronēsis*. But although Gadamer acknowledges this to-and-fro movement, he stops short of facing the issues of what is to be done when the *polis* or community itself is "corrupt"—when there is a breakdown of its *nomoi* and of a rational discourse about the norms that ought to govern our practical lives.⁶²

In defense of Gadamer, one can see why he stops short of confronting the practical issues of our historical hermeneutical situ-

A. O paradoxo
da phronēsis
(est) a reconstrução
cast /



ation. We can read his philosophic hermeneutics as a meditation on the meaning of human finitude, as a constant warning against the excesses of what he calls "planning reason," a caution that philosophy must give up the idea of an "infinite intellect." "The role of prophet, of Cassandra, of preacher" does not suit the philosopher. Gadamer, like Heidegger, is deeply skeptical about the human *will* and about the belief that we can make or engineer communities in which there are living, shared, universal principles. The claims of philosophic hermeneutics are at once bold and modest. They are bold insofar as hermeneutics has the task of defending practical and political reason against the various attacks on it in the contemporary world and of eliciting the sense of questioning that can make us aware of our ignorance. But philosophic hermeneutics—or any form of philosophy—cannot solve the problems of society or politics. It is dangerous to submit to the temptation of playing the prophet. This is the way to dogmatism—and even terror. Even if one accepts Gadamer's cautions about prophesy and dogmatism, though, we are still confronted with a practical task, one to which Gadamer's own investigations lead us: to foster the type of dialogical communities in which *phronēsis* becomes a living reality and where citizens can actually assume what Gadamer tells us is their "noblest task"—"decision-making according to one's own responsibility—instead of conceding that task to the expert."

There is another significant gap in Gadamer's fusion of hermeneutics and *praxis*. This is not just an innocent omission but a glaring substantive deficiency, if one is concerned about contemporary practical and political life. Consider again some of Gadamer's reiterated critical judgments about our contemporary historical situation. He tells us that the contemporary understanding of practical reason as "technical control" has degraded the concept of *praxis*. But if this is true—and I certainly agree that it is—then one wants to know what is it about modern societies that has caused this to happen. Gadamer speaks of the dangerous role of experts and technicians in modern society when they are invested with "exaggerated authority." Again, while I think he is right in his judgment, his comments raise the problem of how we are to account for this phenomenon and determine its social consequences. He declares, as we have seen, that in "modern technological society, public opinion itself has in a new and really decisive way become the object of very complicated techniques—and this . . . is the main problem facing our civilization." But if this phenomenon is "new and really deci-

5. Qual a causa
da degeneração
da razão
prática?

sive," then again we need some explanation of how this "new" state of affairs has come about.

Trying to precisely formulate and answer such questions is not just a matter of idle theoretical curiosity; it is of the utmost practical importance. Without some sort of theoretical understanding and explanation of the structure and dynamics of modern technological society, there is always the real danger that *praxis* will be ineffectual, merely abstract. Let us not forget that *praxis* requires choice, deliberation, and decision about what is to be done in concrete situations. Informed action requires us to try to understand and explain the salient characteristics of the situations we confront. I do not want to suggest that there is an easy way of answering such questions. We know how much disagreement exists about what is a proper way of trying to give answers—or even about what counts as a satisfactory formulation of questions. But if we are genuinely concerned with *praxis*, we cannot avoid struggling with these complex issues.

One might again seek to come to Gadamer's defense by arguing that I am placing an illegitimate demand upon him. After all, Gadamer explicitly tells us that his first and last concern is philosophy. He is not doing, nor does he claim to be doing, social scientific analysis; this is simply not Gadamer's field of inquiry. The chief task for philosophic hermeneutics is to illuminate what happens when we understand—and this is essentially a philosophic question. But such a line of defense is inadequate, and a bit too facile. Why? Because Gadamer does claim to illuminate the essential character of the *Geisteswissenschaften* (although not to provide a methodological treatise on them).

It is here that the disparity between the continental dichotomy of the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and the Anglo-American trichotomy of natural science, social science, and humanities, comes into sharp relief. There is a fundamental unresolved ambiguity in Gadamer's philosophy concerning the social sciences. However much one recognizes the importance of the hermeneutical dimension of the social sciences, one must also forthrightly confront those aspects of these disciplines that seek to develop *theoretical* and *causal explanations* of social phenomena. Sometimes—and Gadamer's remarks about the social sciences are very sparse—he writes as though they are like underdeveloped natural sciences, implying that it is essential for us to realize their "limited relevance," because they never tell us how they are to be applied. *Phronēsis* is always required to apply the results of the social sciences. But at other times he writes as if all the social sciences, when prop-

erly understood, are to be assimilated to practical philosophy as a model of the human sciences.

What is obscured by this indecisiveness can be directly related to the question of the dialectical interplay between *phronēsis* and *technē*. Once we are clear about the categorial distinction between these concepts, then we can ask, Is there any type of contemporary social knowledge that can help us to understand what are the available *techniques* that can inform our *praxis*? I do not find any evidence in Gadamer to show that he faces the complex issues raised by this question. Again, we can even appeal to the Greeks in order to point out that both for them and for us *technē* without *phronēsis* is blind, while *phronēsis* without *technē* is empty.

The major point of this immanent critique of philosophic hermeneutics—that it leads us to questions and practical tasks that take us beyond hermeneutics—can be approached in still another way. Thus far I have been concentrating on Gadamer's appropriation of the "truth" in Aristotle's understanding of *praxis* and *phronēsis*, but a full-scale analysis of Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics would require seeing how it represents an appropriation and interweaving of themes drawn from Aristotle, Plato, and Hegel—the three philosophers who, in addition to Heidegger, have had the most profound influence on Gadamer. I want to consider two of the most important themes that Gadamer appropriates from Plato and Hegel: the centrality of *dialogue* and *conversation*, and the meaning of *freedom*.

Gadamer's first book dealt with Plato, and throughout his long and productive philosophic career he has returned again and again to the interpretation and appropriation of Plato's texts. In all his work, Gadamer has been drawn to what we can learn from Plato about the meaning of dialogue, and he shows in his detailed studies how illuminating Plato's texts become when we read them as dialogues.⁶³ But the notion of dialogue has been present from the very beginning of Gadamer's discussion of play as the "clue to ontological explanation."

When one enters into a dialogue with another person and then is carried further by the dialogue, it is no longer the will of the individual person, holding itself back or exposing itself, that is determinative. Rather, the law of the subject matter [*die Sache*] is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement, and in the end plays them into each other.

A conversation or a dialogue is

a process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is characteristic

delimitar
hermeneutical as
diálogo

of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject [*das sachliche Recht seiner Meinung damit wir in der Sache miteinander einig werden Können*]. (TM, p. 347; WM, p. 363)

In a genuine dialogue or conversation, what is to be understood [*die Sache*] guides the movement of the dialogue. The concept of dialogue is fundamental for grasping what is distinctive about hermeneutical understanding.

Gadamer is, of course, aware of the differences between the dialogue that we have with texts and tradition and that which occurs with other persons. "Texts are 'permanently fixed expressions of life' which have to be understood, and that means that one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text [,] is expressed only through the other partner, the interpreter" (TM, p. 349; WM, p. 365).⁶⁴ The conversation or dialogue that Gadamer takes to be the quintessence of hermeneutical understanding always evokes the memory of a living conversation or dialogue between persons. But Gadamer, in his analysis of dialogue and conversation, stresses not only the common bond and the genuine novelty that a turn in a conversation may take but the mutuality, the respect required, the genuine seeking to listen to and understand what the other is saying, the openness to risk and test our own opinions through such an encounter. In Gadamer's distinctive understanding of practical philosophy, he blends this concept of dialogue, which he finds illustrated in the Platonic Dialogues, with his understanding of *phronēsis*.⁶⁵ But here, too, there are strong practical and political implications that Gadamer fails to pursue. For Gadamer's entire corpus can be read as showing us that what we truly are, what is most characteristic of our humanity is that we are dialogical or conversational beings in whom "language is a reality." According to Gadamer's reading of the history of philosophy, this idea can be found at the very beginning of Western philosophy and is the most important lesson to be learned from this philosophic tradition in our own time.

But if we are really to appropriate this central idea to our historical situation, it will point us toward important practical and political tasks. It would be a gross distortion to imagine that we might conceive of the entire political realm organized on the principle of dialogue or conversation, considering the fragile conditions that are required for genuine dialogue and conversation. Nevertheless, if we

condições de diálogo
ocorrem

think out what is required for such a dialogue based on mutual understanding, respect, a willingness to listen and risk one's opinions and prejudices, a mutual seeking of the correctness of what is said, we will have defined a powerful regulative ideal that can orient our practical and political lives. If the quintessence of what we are is to be dialogical—and if this is not just the privilege of the few—then whatever the limitations of the practical realization of this ideal, it nevertheless can and should give practical orientation to our lives. We must ask what it is that blocks and prevents such dialogue, and what is to be done, "what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct, here and now" to make such genuine dialogue a concrete reality.

What Gadamer appropriates from Hegel is as significant as what he rejects. As we have seen, experience (*Erfahrung*), the movement from certainty (*Gewissheit*) to truth (*Wahrheit*), the centrality of *die Sache selbst* in leading and guiding us, the way in which self-understanding is achieved only in and through the dialectical encounter with the "other," the "recognition" theme that is so central for understanding the movement of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the play of identity and difference, the speculative character of language—all are ideas that have their resonances in Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics. What Gadamer rejects in Hegel and criticizes is the claim to finality, the idea that humans can achieve the stance of the "infinite intellect," that there is a "true infinity" that completes the process of experience, that there is or can be "absolute knowledge" or *Wissenschaft* that overcomes the essential openness and anticipatory quality of all experience. But here, where I am seeking to draw out the practical consequences of what Gadamer is saying, I want to single out his appropriation from Hegel of the principle of freedom—a freedom that is realized only when there is authentic mutual "recognition" among individuals.

Many critics (and defenders) of Gadamer stress the conservative implications of philosophic hermeneutics. Certainly Gadamer seeks to conserve the "truth" that speaks to us through tradition, although, as we have seen, he strongly denies that focusing on the essential factor of tradition implies uncritical acceptance of tradition, or "socio-political conservatism." But the critics have neglected the latent radical strain implicit in Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics as practical philosophy. This radical strain is indicated in his emphasis—which has become more and more dominant in recent years—on freedom and solidarity that embrace all of humanity.

For there is no higher principle of reason than that of freedom. Thus the

Gadamer e
Hegel

ACCIMA

REJETA

opinion of Hegel and thus our own opinion as well. No higher principle is thinkable than that of the freedom of all, and we understand actual history from the perspective of this principle: as the ever-to-be-renewed and the never-ending struggle for this freedom.⁶⁶

In a passage that echoes the Frankfurt School's radical interpretation of Hegel, Gadamer writes:

The principle that all are free never again can be shaken. But does this mean that on account of this, history has come to an end? Are all human beings actually free? Has not history since then been a matter of just this, that the historical conduct of man has to translate the principle of freedom into reality? Obviously this points to the unending march of world history into the openness of its future tasks and gives no becalming assurance that everything is already in order.⁶⁷

What Gadamer tells us about freedom is complemented by what he says about solidarity. His understanding of solidarity also goes back to his interpretation of Greek philosophy and the primacy of the principle of friendship in Greek ethics and politics. We recall that when Gadamer examines Aristotle's analysis of the distinction between *phronēsis* and *technē*, he notes that the variant of *phronēsis* which is called *synēsis* requires friendship and solidarity.

Once again we discover that the person with understanding [*synēsis*] does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him. (*TM*, p. 288; *WM*, p. 306)

This theme, too, which Gadamer appropriates from Greek philosophy, is universalized. "Genuine solidarity, authentic community, should be realized."⁶⁸ In summarizing his answer to the question "What is practice?" he writes:

Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason. There is a saying of Heraclitus, the "weeping" philosopher: The *logos* is common to all, but people behave as if each had a private reason. Does this have to remain this way?⁶⁹

One of the reasons why many modern thinkers have been so suspicious of *phronēsis*, and more generally of the tradition of practical philosophy that was shaped by Aristotle, is because of the elitist connotations of this "intellectual virtue." Aristotle himself did not think of it as a virtue that could be ascribed to every human being

but only to those gifted individuals who had been properly educated. And it cannot be denied that many of those who have been drawn to this tradition in the modern age, especially insofar as they have opposed what they take to be the excesses and abstractness of the Enlightenment conception of reason, have not only been critical of political reform and revolution but have been attracted to the elitist quality of *phronēsis*. But Gadamer softens this elitist aura by blending his discussion of *phronēsis* with his analysis of a type of dialogue and conversation that presupposes mutual respect, recognition, and understanding. When all of this is integrated with the Hegelian "truth"—"the principle that all are free never again can be shaken"—then the radicalization of *phronēsis* and *praxis* becomes manifest. There is an implicit *telos* here, not in the sense of what will work itself out in the course of history, but rather in the sense of what ought to be concretely realized.

PHILOSOPHIC HERMENEUTICS AND THE CARTESIAN ANXIETY

Earlier I have suggested that if we are to exorcise the Cartesian Anxiety by moving beyond objectivism and relativism, then we need to find an alternative way of thinking and of understanding our being-in-the-world. We are now in a position to see that the whole of Gadamer's project—and all of the bypaths that he has followed—can be interpreted as being addressed to this issue. For the direction of his thinking that is initially concerned with the analysis of works of art, texts, and tradition has universalistic consequences. From the introduction of the concept of play, with its intrinsic to-and-fro movement and buoyancy, to his analysis of dialogue and conversation where "the law of the subject matter [*die Sache*] is at issue in the dialogue and elicits statement and counterstatement, and in the end plays them into each other," all of the themes in Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics contribute to the movement beyond objectivism and relativism. Gadamer is not simply attempting to reveal what happens when we "understand" in some limited and parochial sense of understanding. If we are truly dialogical beings—always in conversation, always in the process of understanding—then the dynamics of the play of understanding underlie and pervade all human activities. Gadamer deplores the "aesthetic consciousness" (which might just as well be called "subjectivism," or what MacIntyre calls "emotivism" and which leads to relativism) that has become preva-

lent in the modern period. He finds the same deficiencies and inadequacies in that form of "historical consciousness" which thinks of itself as standing over and against historical "objects." His positive analysis of prejudgments, of the way in which they both enable us to understand and are also risked and tested in all genuine encounters and experience, also helps to contribute to the movement beyond objectivism and relativism. We find variations on the same theme in Gadamer's analysis of *praxis* and *phronēsis*. In a variety of subtle ways Gadamer shows us what is wrong with that way of thinking that dichotomizes the world into "objects" which exist *an sich* and "subjects" that are detached from and stand over against them. We do not comprehend what the things themselves "say" unless we realize that their meaning transcends them and comes into being through the happening or event of understanding. And we do not understand ourselves as "subjects" unless we understand how we are always being shaped by effective-history and tradition. We are always *in medias res*: there are no absolute beginnings or endings. Experience is always anticipatory and open. "The truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience. . . . The dialectic of experience has its own fulfillment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself" (TM, p. 319; WM, p. 337). Overcoming the Cartesian Anxiety is learning to live without the idea of the "infinite intellect," finality, and absolute knowledge. The approach that pervades so much of Gadamer's thinking and helps to give it unified perspective, his practical-moral orientation, is directed toward reminding us, and calling us back to, an understanding of what it means to be finite historical beings who are always "on the way" and who must assume personal responsibility for our decisions and choices.

While Gadamer's sustained and multifaceted critique of objectivism is apparent, it may seem more questionable whether he escapes from the clutches of relativism. But Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics is just as critical of the varieties of relativism as it is of objectivism. Indeed, insofar as Gadamer begins his analysis in *Truth and Method* with a critique of aesthetic consciousness and historicism, one might say that developing a critique of relativism is his primary concern. "Aesthetic consciousness," as we have seen, does lead to relativism—not only in the realm of the aesthetic but in all domains of human life. Relativism ultimately makes sense (and gains its plausibility) as the dialectical antithesis to objectivism. If we see through objectivism, if we expose what is wrong with this way of

thinking, then we are at the same time questioning the very intelligibility of relativism.

But we do not have to leave matters at this abstract level of analysis. We can appreciate how Gadamer's reflections on language, horizons, and historicity contribute to undermining relativism. Understanding, he says, is limited, but not closed; it is essentially open to appropriating what is alien. Gadamer, no less than Popper, is sharply critical of the Myth of the Framework, the myth that we forever are enclosed in our own horizons, our own paradigms, our own culture. "Just as the individual is never simply an individual, because he is always involved with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon" (TM, p. 271; WM, p. 288). Gadamer helps us to understand the "truth" of the incommensurability thesis and to reject what is false about it. He shows that insofar as the appeal to incommensurability has been used (or misused) to justify the Myth of the Framework or the notion that there is no way of comparing and communicating with alien horizons and forms of life, it is to be rejected as false. But insofar as it is used to point to the openness of all experience and language and to describe our situation as that of being constantly challenged to understand what is alien, and thereby to risk our prejudices, the incommensurability thesis, for Gadamer, is an idea that is basic for an understanding of our being-in-the-world.

Gadamer also exposes another feature of relativism. The varieties of relativism constantly flirt with the suggestion that what we take to be real, or true, or right is arbitrary, as if we could somehow simply decide by an act of will what is real, true, and right. But historicity is not to be confused with arbitrariness. Gadamer reminds us that we belong to tradition, history, and language before they belong to us. We cannot escape from the dynamic power of effective-history, which is always shaping what we are becoming. We become fools of history if we think that by an act of will we can escape the prejudgments, practices, and traditions that are constitutive of what we are, and that in Rorty's phrase have been "hammered out" in the course of history. But we are also always in the process of modifying and shaping what we are becoming.

But even when we understand how philosophic hermeneutics contributes to the movement beyond objectivism and relativism and provides concrete exemplification of what such a movement means,

it does not entirely succeed in charting the course beyond objectivism and relativism. I have tried to show that many of the problems that Gadamer leaves unsolved are related to the ambiguities he allows concerning the meaning of truth, and specifically concerning the validation of the "claims to truth" that tradition makes upon us. And here one must frankly admit that there is a danger of lapsing into relativism. I have argued Gadamer is really committed to a communicative understanding of truth, believing that "claims to truth" always implicitly demand argumentation to warrant them, but he has failed to make this view fully explicit. He also fails to notice how this ambiguity transforms much of the rest of what he says. For although all claims to truth are fallible and open to criticism, they still require validation—validation that can be realized only through offering the best reasons and arguments that can be given in support of them—reasons and arguments that are themselves embedded in the practices that have been developed in the course of history. We never escape from the obligation of seeking to validate claims to truth through argumentation and opening ourselves to the criticism of others.

The ambiguity that Gadamer allows concerning the meaning and validation of claims to truth has consequences for the distinction and contrast between Truth and Method. Typically, when dealing with hermeneutical understanding, Gadamer speaks of it as an "entirely different type of knowledge and truth" from that which is yielded by Method and science. But he has never developed a full-scale analysis of the type of knowledge and truth that he takes to be characteristic of Method and the natural sciences. It is never quite clear, then, what is *common* to these *different* forms of knowledge and truth. And there are conflicting tendencies in what Gadamer does say. At times, he suggests that these two types of knowledge and truth are compatible as long as we are aware of the limits and proper domain of science. It is not science that is the main target of Gadamer's criticism, but scientism. But Gadamer often seems to suggest that Method (and science) is never sufficient to reveal Truth. Given the strong claims that Gadamer makes about the universality of hermeneutics, there is something misleading about this contrast. For if understanding underlies all human inquiry and knowledge, then what Gadamer labels Method must itself be hermeneutical. The appropriate contrast would then be not between Truth and Method but between different types or dimensions of hermeneutical practice. Gadamer tends to rely on an image of science which the postempiricist philosophy and history of science have called into question. In

O método também
é hermenêutico *

fairness to Gadamer, it should be noted that he completed his major study of hermeneutics before the emergence of the postempiricist philosophy and history of science. There is something right about understanding the importance of the mathematization of the physical world, the search for invariant laws, the centrality of the hypothetical-deductive form of explanation in the sciences, and the central role that prediction plays in science. But as we have seen, all this needs to be qualified by the hermeneutical dimension of the sciences. Method is more like hermeneutical understanding than Gadamer frequently acknowledges, and when it comes to validating competing understandings and interpretations we are confronted with the type of critical problems that are so fundamental for understanding scientific inquiry. Gadamer speaks of his emphasis on tradition and the assimilation of what is past and handed down as a corrective to those tendencies in modern thought that neglect or are insensitive to tradition and effective-history. But as we think through this "corrective," we come back to the need to integrate the "truth" of the Cartesian and Enlightenment traditions that Gadamer is criticizing—the demand for intersubjective and public criteria for the evaluation of all claims to truth by the community of interpreters.

All of these tensions and problems come into sharp focus in Gadamer's elucidation of *praxis* and *phronēsis*. He has opened us to many questions that he does not adequately answer. If we pursue what he means by truth and criticism, if we turn our attention to the status of the shared principles and universals required for the exercise of *phronēsis*, or to examining what type of communities are required for all individuals to be able to assume the "noblest task of the citizen—making decisions according to one's responsibility"—or to the legitimate causal questions that need to be confronted in seeking to understand and explain the dynamics, conflicts, and contradictions of contemporary society or to the practical implications of what he has to say about dialogue, conversation, freedom, and solidarity, then we are led beyond philosophic hermeneutics. These questions lead us—with a deepened understanding of human finitude that helps us to exorcise the Cartesian Anxiety—to the task of further clarifying what *praxis* means in our historical situation and to the practical tasks of concretely realizing what Gadamer so nobly defends as being central to our humanity.

PART THREE: FROM HERMENEUTICS TO PRAXIS

1. P. xv.
 2. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
 3. One can trace the encounter between hermeneutics and literary studies in the articles published in the journal *New Literary History*.
 4. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," p. 25.
 5. See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969):1-53; "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts," *New Literary History* 3 (1972):393-408, and "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Political Theory* 2 (1974):227-303. See Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973).
 6. Gadamer has been one of the few German philosophers to recognize the importance of Collingwood, especially Collingwood's idea of a logic of question and answer. Gadamer was responsible for the German translation of Collingwood's *Autobiography*. See his discussion of Collingwood in *TM*, pp. 333-41; *WM*, pp. 351-60.
 7. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 315.
 8. See Dilthey's essay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics," trans. Fredric Jameson, *New Literary History* 3 (1972):229-44. See also Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 9. *Meditations*, p. 174.
 10. Hannah Arendt stresses this distinction between the *universality* characteristic of theoretical and practical reason and the *generality* or communicability of aesthetic judgments. See her discussion of the significance of this distinction in "Crisis in Culture." See also *Hannah Arendt: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.
 11. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), p. 52.
 12. Kathleen Wright has pointed out to me that Gadamer's analysis of play can also be related to Heidegger's discussion of *Spiel* and *Spiegel*.
 13. "Man and Language," in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 66.
 14. Although Gadamer's erudition is extremely impressive, there is no evidence in his publications that he has ever seriously encountered the American pragmatists. Yet there is a fundamental affinity between Gadamer's critique of Cartesianism and the critique developed by the pragmatic thinkers.
- There are also basic similarities between Gadamer's understanding of play and the way in which we participate or share in works of art and Dewey's understanding of art as experience. Dewey, through his understanding of experience as situational and transactional, also seeks to overcome modern subjectivism and the "spectator theory of knowledge" without lapsing into relativism. In Gadamerian terms, Dewey's understanding of art as experience presents an alternative way of understanding our being-in-the-world. For Dewey, too, all *praxis* involves *pathos*, and all *pathos* involves *praxis*. In this respect both Gadamer and Dewey reflect the influence of Hegel's concept of experience (*Erfahrung*). There is, however, a major difference between Dewey and the American pragmatists, on the one hand, and Gadamer on the other. Gadamer typically emphasizes the differences between hermeneutical experience and science (despite his claims about the universality of hermeneutics). But the starting point for the pragmatists was a reinterpretation of science itself that brings out what Gadamer would call its "hermeneutical dimension." This difference of emphasis is of more than historical interest. The pragmatists were far more alert to the analogues and continuity between science (properly understood) and other dimensions of experience and human understanding. See my discussion of Peirce and Dewey in *Praxis and Action*, pt. 3.
 15. The English word "passive" fails to capture Gadamer's nuanced meaning.

What Gadamer means is much closer to the Greek *pathos*. All *pathos* involves undergoing, experiencing, suffering. Just as the concept of *pathos* has been emasculated in many of its contemporary uses, Gadamer argues that this is also true of the concept of *praxis*. All genuine *praxis* involves *pathos*. The dialectical interplay of *praxis* and *pathos* is characteristic of all experience (*Erfahrung*). See Gadamer's discussion of *Erfahrung*, *TM*, pp. 310-25; *WM*, pp. 329-44. Fred R. Dallmayr has explored the relation of *praxis* and experience in a number of contemporary thinkers, including Gadamer. See Dallmayr's "Praxis and Experience" (forthcoming).

16. Gadamer claims that we can find anticipations of "a critique of the moral consequences of 'aesthetic consciousness'" in Plato's critique of mimetic poetry. See "Plato and the Poets," in his *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 65. See also Smith's comment on the critique of "aesthetic consciousness," p. 65, n. 10. What Gadamer calls "aesthetic consciousness" can be directly related to MacIntyre's description of emotivism in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre also shows the relation of emotivism to aestheticism.

17. One of the travesties of Gadamer's thought in the English translation of *Wahrheit und Methode* is that the subtle and central distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* is obscured. Both German terms are translated as "experience." But Gadamer carefully shows not only how recent is the use of *Erlebnis* but also how its use is entwined with the emergence of "aesthetic consciousness." Gadamer tells us:

Schleiermacher's appeal to living feeling against the cold rationalism of the enlightenment, Schiller's call for aesthetic freedom against mechanistic society, Hegel's contrasting of life (later, of spirit) with "positivity," were forerunners of the protest against modern industrial society which at the beginning of our century caused the words *Erlebnis* and *Erleben* to become almost sacred clarion calls. (*TM*, p. 57; *WM*, p. 55)

This distinctive meaning of *Erlebnis* is itself colored by the reaction against objectivism.

But *Erfahrung*, as Gadamer uses this concept, does not have the heightened subjectivistic resonances of *Erlebnis*. *Erfahrung* involves the dialectical interplay of *pathos* and *praxis*. *Erfahrung* always involves (as Hegel showed) negativity. To explain what he means by *Erfahrung*, Gadamer draws upon and blends motifs from Aeschylus, Aristotle, and Hegel. For the contrast between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, see *TM*, pp. 55-63; *WM*, pp. 56-66; and *TM*, pp. 310-25; *WM*, pp. 329-44.

18. Gadamer himself recognizes the affinity of his claims about the linguistic character of meaning and understanding with Wittgenstein's investigations of language games. See "The Phenomenological Movement," in *Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 175-77. A similar emphasis on language and symbolic form is found in Geertz's analysis of understanding in "From the Native's Point of View." We find an analogous linguistic turn in Ricoeur's analysis of understanding. (See Thompson, *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*).

19. The German word which is translated as "prejudice" is *Vorurteil*. This can be translated as "prejudgment," in order to avoid the exclusively perjorative meaning that "prejudice" conveys in English. Gadamer's main point is that prejudices or prejudgments are *preconditions* for all understanding. But for Gadamer, both negative or unfounded prejudices and positive or justified prejudices are constitutive of understanding. See his discussion of the meaning of prejudice, *TM*, pp. 239-53; *WM*, pp. 255-69.

20. "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," in his *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 9.

21. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 5.265, p. 156; see also Popper, "On the Sources of Knowledge and of Ignorance."

22. It is instructive to compare Gadamer's analysis of the concept of tradition with that of MacIntyre.

A tradition then not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings. Every tradition there-

fore is always in danger of lapsing into incoherence and when a tradition does so lapse it sometimes can only be recovered by a revolutionary reconstitution. ["Epistemological Crises," p. 461]

See also MacIntyre's discussion of the concept of tradition in *After Virtue*, especially chap. 15.

23. *Essential Tension*, pp. xi–xii.
24. *Ibid.*, p. xii.
25. *Against Method*, p. 251.
26. "From the Native's Point of View," p. 239.
27. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," p. 65. See my discussion of Taylor in *Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, pp. 109–12.
28. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," pp. 65–66.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
30. Taylor's claim may sound more subjectivistic than he intends it to be. There is plenty of ground for argumentation in evaluating different interpretations, and every interpretation is always open to further discussion and criticism. Nevertheless, Taylor does not want to deny or mitigate what can be seen as "a scandalous result according to the authoritative conception of science in our tradition" (p. 66). Ricoeur directs his attention to this crucial issue, in a manner that is closer to Gadamer, when he sketches a "dialectic of guessing and validation" in hermeneutical interpretation. See Ricoeur's discussion in "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.
31. "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," pp. 67–68.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
33. Gadamer draws the explicit parallel between his investigation and the Kantian question in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*:
Thus the following investigation also asks a philosophic question. But it does not ask it only of the so-called human sciences. . . . It does not ask it only of science and its modes of experience, but of all human experience of the world and human living. It asks (to put it in Kantian terms): How is understanding possible? This is a question which precedes any action of understanding on the part of subjectivity, including the methodical activity of the "understanding sciences" [*verstehende Geisteswissenschaften*] and their norms and rules. (*TM*, p. xviii; *WM*, p. xvii)
34. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 148.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–49.
36. Gadamer writes, "The best definition for hermeneutics is: to let what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distantiated by cultural or historical distances speak again. This is hermeneutics: to let what seems to be far and alienated speak again" ("Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences," *Research in Phenomenology* 9 [1980]:83).
37. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," pp. 151–52.
38. See Gadamer's discussion of translation and his claim that "every translation is at the same time an interpretation," in *TM*, p. 346; *WM*, p. 361.
39. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 107.
40. This is what Gadamer calls the "speculative" character of language. See his discussion, *TM*, pp. 423–31; *WM*, pp. 441–49. The meaning and significance of the speculative character of language is explored by P. Christopher Smith, *Hermeneutics as a Theory of Human Finitude* (forthcoming), and Kathleen Wright, "Gadamer on the Speculative Structure of Language" (forthcoming).
41. The expression "application" (*Anwendung*) is used to translate the Latin *applicatio*. But this translation can be misleading. For example, when we speak of "applied physics" or "applied mathematics" we normally want to distinguish between the pure or theoretical disciplines and their applications. We do not think of the applications as integral or internally related to the corresponding "pure" disciplines. We can call this the "technical" sense of application. But for Gadamer this is not what is distinctive about application as it pertains to understanding. Such application

is integral or internally related to all understanding. The English expression "appropriation" better conveys what Gadamer means, especially when we think of appropriation as transforming and becoming constitutive of the individual who understands. See Paul Ricoeur's discussion, "Appropriation," in *Paul Ricoeur: Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 182–93.

42. Gadamer, "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 107.
 43. *Nicomachean Ethics*, chap. 3.
 44. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 140. Gadamer explores the distinctions between *phronēsis* and *technē* in the section of his essay entitled "The Hermeneutical Problem and Aristotle's *Ethics*." This is a restatement, with a slightly different emphasis, of the discussion in *TM*, pp. 283–89; *WM*, pp. 300–307.
 45. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 142.
 46. Gadamer rejects the interpretation of Aristotle that claims that *phronēsis* and deliberation are only about "means" and never about "ends."
Thus the whole problem is summarized in the fact that in moral actions there is no "prior" knowledge of the right means which realize the end, and this is so because, above all else, the ends themselves are at stake and not perfectly fixed beforehand. This also explains why in his discussion of *phronēsis* Aristotle constantly oscillates between defining it as the knowledge of the ends and the knowledge of means. ("Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 143)
- For independent support of this reading of Aristotle, see John Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 19.
47. "Hermeneutics and Social Science," p. 312.
 48. *Ibid.*, pp. 313–14.
 49. On the theoretical dimension of hermeneutics, see "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task," in his *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1981).
 50. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 113.
 51. Concerning Hegel, Gadamer writes:
For Hegel, it is necessary, of course, that the movement of consciousness, experience [*Erfahrung*] should lead to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything different or alien to itself. For him the perfection of experience is "science," the certainty of itself in knowledge. Hence his criterion of experience is that of self-knowledge. That is why the dialectic of experience must end with the overcoming of all experience, which is attained in absolute knowledge, i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and object. We can now understand why Hegel's application to history, insofar as he saw it as part of the absolute self-consciousness of philosophy, does not do justice to the hermeneutical consciousness. The nature of experience is conceived in terms of that which goes beyond it, for experience itself can never be science. It is in absolute antithesis to knowledge and to that kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge. The truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience. . . . The dialectic of experience has its own fulfillment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself. (*TM*, pp. 318–19; *WM*, p. 337)
 52. In his correspondence with Leo Strauss, Gadamer distances himself from Heidegger when he emphatically states:
But where I otherwise still appeal to Heidegger—in that I attempt to think of "understanding" as an "event" [*Geschehen*—[this thought] is turned however in an entirely different direction. My point of departure is not the *complete forgetfulness of being* [*vollendete Seinsvergessenheit*], the "night of being," rather on the contrary—I say this against Heidegger as well as against Buber—the unreality of such an assertion. That holds good also for our relation to the tradition. [Gadamer and Leo Strauss, "Correspondence Concerning *Wahrheit und Methode*," *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 2 [1978]:8.]
- This emphatic difference has consequences for Gadamer's understanding of truth. For

Gadamer places a much greater positive significance on "the claim to truth" that is always implicit in tradition.

53. Earlier (n. 14), I noted that there are a number of parallels between Gadamer and the pragmatists. But here we touch upon a significant difference. The issue of the validation of claims to truth is far more important for the pragmatists than it is for Gadamer. In part this is because the analysis of scientific inquiry plays a much more prominent role for them than for Gadamer. But Gadamer implicitly appeals to what is explicit in the pragmatists—the essential role of a *critical* community of inquirers in testing and validating claims to truth. See my discussion of the community of inquirers in *Praxis and Action*, pp. 165–229.

54. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 159.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

56. For further discussion of the concept of truth, see "Wahrheit in den Geisteswissenschaften" and "Was ist Wahrheit?" in Gadamer's *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1967).

57. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," p. 108.

58. For a masterful and extremely subtle interpretation of the modern age, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1983).

59. "Problem of Historical Consciousness," pp. 141–42.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

61. See *TM*, p. 289; *WM*, p. 306.

62. Gadamer approaches the problem of corruption indirectly. This can be seen in his perceptive interpretations of Plato's *Dialogues*, especially the *Republic*. The central "political" problem that Plato confronts is the corruption of the *polis*. Gadamer says the following about the *Republic*:

Thus the exposition of this ideal state in the *Republic* serves in educating the political human being, but the *Republic* is not meant as a manual on educational methods and materials, and it does not point out the goal of the educational process to the educator. In the background of this work on the state is a real educational state, the community of Plato's academy. The *Republic* exemplifies the purpose of that academy. This community of students applying themselves rigorously to mathematics and dialectic is no apolitical society of scholars. Instead, the work done here is intended to lead to the result which remained unattainable for the current sophistic *paideia*, with its encyclopedic instruction and arbitrary moralistic reformulations of the educational content of ancient poetry. It is intended to lead to a new discovery of justice in one's own soul and thus to the *shaping of the political human being*. This education, however, the actual education to participation in the state, is anything but a total manipulation of the soul, a rigorous leading of it to a predetermined goal. Instead, precisely in extending its questioning behind the supposedly valid traditional moral ideas, it is in itself the new experience of justice. Thus this education is not authoritative instruction based on an ideal organization at all; rather it lives from questioning alone. ("Plato and the Poets," p. 52. See also "Plato's Educational State" in *Dialogue and Dialectic*)

The moral that can be drawn from this for our hermeneutical situation is that the political task of the philosopher is to help revive that sense of questioning that can lead to a "discovery of justice in one's own soul" and thus to "the shaping of the political human being." My quarrel with Gadamer is not that I think he is wrong about this, but rather to make the Hegelian point that the "discovery of justice in one's own soul" is only the beginning of "the shaping of the political human being." This process can become merely abstract and false unless one confronts the practical tasks of shaping or reshaping one's actual community in order to cultivate genuine dialogue among participants.

63. See the studies on Plato collected in *Dialogue and Dialectic*.

64. Gadamer's acknowledgment of the difference between a living dialogue where the other person can literally answer questions and the hermeneutical dialogue where "the text is expressed only through the other partner, the interpreter" opens a Pan-

dora's box of problems for philosophic hermeneutics. It is fundamental for Gadamer's understanding of philosophic hermeneutics that although we always understand a text differently, nevertheless we are interpreting the same text, the same "universal thing." "To understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways" (*TM*, p. 359; *WM*, p. 375). But if the interpreter not only must open himself or herself to what the text "says to us" at the "claim to truth" that it makes upon us but is also the linguistic medium for answering for the text, then this raises questions about in what sense, if any, we can speak of the same text, the same "universal thing." For it is not the text *an sich* that answers the interpreter, but only the text as understood, and all understanding is conditioned by our prejudices and judgments. This is a point that was pressed by Nietzsche and that has become a key idea in poststructuralist thinking. As Nietzsche showed, this problem can lead to a questioning of the very idea of truth and of the "claim to truth" that texts and tradition make upon us. It also raises problems in an ethical and political context concerning in what sense, if any, we can speak of the same universal principles, laws, or norms that are mediated by *phronēsis*, and what determines whether or not they are the same.

65. See *Die Idee des Guten*.

66. "On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy," in his *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 9. There is another aspect of what I am calling the radical, indeed, the subversive quality of Gadamer's writing and rhetoric. Any careful reader of Gadamer cannot help being struck by the depth of his critique of all forms of dogmatism and fanaticism. He always seeks to elicit questioning. Thus, for example, publishing such an essay as "Plato and the Poets" in the context of Germany in 1934 must be seen as a politically subversive and courageous act. Viewed superficially, it might appear to be merely a scholarly paper. But consider the political significance of Gadamer's statements about Plato's *Republic* against the background of the coming to power of the Nazis.

[The *Republic*] is intended to lead to a new discovery of justice in one's own soul and thus to *shaping of the political human being*. This education, however, the actual education to participation in the state, is anything but a total manipulation of the soul, a rigorous leading of it to a predetermined goal. Instead, precisely in extending questioning behind the supposedly valid traditional moral ideas, it is in itself the new experience of justice. Thus this education is not authoritative instruction based on an ideal organization at all; rather it lives from questioning alone. (*Dialogue and Dialectic*, p. 52)

Recently, I had an occasion to ask Gadamer if he was aware of the political significance of this article at the time of its publication. He told me that part of the reason for writing the article was the need to respond to what he was witnessing in Germany.

67. "Hegel's Philosophy and Its Aftereffects until Today," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 37.

68. "What Is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, p. 80.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

PART FOUR: PRAXIS, PRACTICAL DISCOURSE, AND JUDGMENT

1. See Gadamer's autobiographical sketch, *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977).