

ONE DOGMA AND ONE INNOCUOUS TRUTH OF RELATIVISM:
INCOMMENSURABILITY, INDETERMINISM,
AND HANS-GEORG GADAMER

by

Michael Bourke

B. A., Simon Fraser University, 1985

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
ENGLISH

© Michael Bourke 1996

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

August 1996

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.



National Library
of Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file / Votre référence

Our file / Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-612-16807-7

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

One Dogma and One Innocuous Truth of Relativism:

Incommensurability, Indeterminism, and Hans-Georg Gadamer

Author: _____
(signature)

Michael Bourke
(name)

August 20, 1996
(date)

APPROVAL

NAME: William Michael Bourke

DEGREE: Master of Arts (English)

TITLE OF THESIS: One Dogma and One Innocuous Truth of
Relativism: Incommensurability,
Indeterminism, and Hans-Georg Gadamer

Examining Committee:

Chair: June Sturrock

Jery Zaslove
Senior Supervisor
Professor of English

Chris Banerjee
Associate Professor of English

Bjorn Ramberg
External Examiner
Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy
Simon Fraser University

Date Approved: August 15, 1996

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts a philosophical contribution to a fundamental problem of literary theory; viz., the possibility of validity, and thereby knowledge, in interpretation. It does so by looking at two problems of relativism involved in Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of meaning that threaten his concept of validity in interpretation. It strengthens Gadamer's concept by defining more clearly his resolution of a problem of incommensurability of languages (or cultures, contexts, worldviews), and by resolving a related problem of indeterminacy of linguistic meaning, which Gadamer leaves untouched. Illustrative texts with which these problems are discussed include Euripides' *Bacchae*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, and Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 185.

Acknowledgments

For his patience and openness in allowing me to discover the approach taken in this thesis, I thank my senior supervisor, Jerry Zaslove.

Since much of this thesis for me lies in the readings of my graduate committee, each member has my gratitude. Bjørn Ramberg has caused me to look at the question of methodology more flexibly, and deepened my pragmatist intuitions concerning the problem of validity. Having drawn heavily from Bjørn's conceptions, I was especially gratified to receive his feedback. Chin Banerjee years ago extended my interest in Samuel Johnson. Now Chin's comments on my use of Johnson extend my political sympathies for the idea that we need to be wary of certain fusions of horizons. Jerry, showing patience again, has let me see for myself how the novel above all genres can explicit the concept of incommensurability and erode the sorts of semantic obstructions this concept describes.

For their help in getting this thesis ready to be bound, I am indebted to Martyn Armstrong and Tony Pagliacci.

Finally, for their singular encouragement, I thank my father, and my mother, who passed away while this project was midstream.

Table of Contents

Approval-----	ii
Abstract-----	iii
Acknowledgments-----	iv
1. Introduction-----	1
2. The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem-----	9
3. Hermeneutical Validity and Historically Effected Consciousness-----	47
4. Relativism (1): Incommensurability and Openness-----	73
5. Relativism (2): Indeterminism and Excluded Middle--	104
6. Conclusion: Excluded Middle and the Inclusion of Multiplicity-----	127
Appendix-----	135
Bibliography-----	136

1

Introduction

A surly (once so described¹) philosophy professor waves a book forward on his palm, pats it with the other and confides to his interlocutor: "Look, this is one text, not a multitude of different texts." What can we make of this sentence and fragment of a scene therein described? Given its position at the beginning of the thesis being commenced, we might assume that it relates in some way to one or more of the topics to which the title refers, especially since it can anyway readily be made to do so. The gesturing philosophy professor, the subject of the description, seems to be responding to a point of contention. Is the interlocutor at whom he directs his performance contending that just the book, the prop, in question is a multitude of different texts, or making a general point? Presumably the latter. But the description needs to be filled out further before we can feel confident about this or any number of other related and distinct matters pertaining to it.

So far it is hard to say exactly what motivates the professor's gesture and remark, what sort of thinking these are meant to resist, test, clarify, provoke a response from.

¹The person in question is the model for a fictional character in Clancy Sigal's novel, *Going Away: A Report, A Memoir* (1962). On page 72 the character is described as "a surly bastard on any count."

Perhaps situational information will help--or hinder. The footnote concerning the professor's surliness offers a clue to his identity. We can elaborate. This professor attends discussion nearly every Wednesday evening at a Vancouver restaurant called *Greek Characters*, and on one such evening an incident very similar to the one we are trying to picture actually occurred. With such information we could conceivably discover the professor, relate the incident to him and simply inquire what he had in mind. If he happens to recall he might provide an answer, even a reliable one. But there is an obvious problem. The author of our description might not construe his subject's meaning in quite the way the actual professor recalls his intention. This will be a problem even if the author sincerely wishes to describe the actual incident. We might read the author's thesis and come to see what he has in mind by textual multiplicity. Presumably, though, he believes the professor has in mind a different conception, and has tried to capture it accordingly.

Our problem grows if the author intends his sentence not merely as a description, but like the actual professor's book, as a rhetorical prop, which the resulting commentary already suggests. Let us say he declares his intention. He tells us that he has left his sentence more or less incomplete, to provide an indeterminate text. Well, how indeterminate is it? If the author insists that we can fill in the blanks as we will, presumably then we can fix a

precise meaning and thereby undo his intention. The author has or can have no objection up to a point. We can specify an exact meaning that fits some broader usage, some language. Have we thereby subverted his intention? Insofar as we stick to the language we nominate, and insofar as that language isolates itself from any interpretations beyond those which first instantiated it. But his intention continues to open itself to other imputations and so other languages. What if he had a very different, less generous, intention? Would we still be able to specify a contrary meaning? Any meaning? We can generalize (and alter) the last question: For a given text, what meanings can we make and what meanings, if any, are we constrained from making?

With this question I in effect fall back on the customary practice that Hegel disparaged of prefacing a thesis with a statement of the author's aims.² For the general aim of what follows in this thesis is to approach that question. In what follows immediately below I fall back further: An answer to the question would describe a notion of validity in interpretation, or its impossibility or unintelligibility. One of the chief obstructions to such a notion is the spectre of cognitive relativism, the possibility of a multiplicity of distinct ways of construing reality, including the reality of texts. These problems are featured and partly resolved in the hermeneutic writings of

²Hegel gives his thinking for disparaging this procedure in his preface to the *Phenomenology* (1977, 1-45).

the influential German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer has developed a theory of understanding (building on contributions of Hegel and Heidegger) which resists the "truth-dissolving" consequences of relativism, its threat to validity in interpretation, without erecting a new version of the myth of presence apparently abandoned by relativism. My general aim in the thesis will be to provide a sounder basis for Gadamer's notion of validity in interpretation by developing along distinct lines his defense against relativism.

In chapter 2, I draw attention to the central motive behind Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of understanding and his assertion of hermeneutic universality. I then resist a certain line of attack against this assertion, and thereupon need to outline the linguistic dimension of his theory, his theory of meaning. Once this dimension is outlined problems of indeterminacy of linguistic meaning begin to become apparent.³ Since Donald Davidson similarly faces these problems and has a more precise view of questions of meaning (his view also has a narrower scope), I have recourse to his ways of discussing language and meaning and to his perspectives and arguments. I am able to do so because of an extensive intersection in Davidson's and Gadamer's theories of meaning.

³This is the only kind of indeterminacy I will refer to in the thesis.

In chapter 3, I give an account of the productive role of history in Gadamer's theory of understanding and his notion of validity. I use Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 185 as an instance of mediation between incommensurate languages to illustrate a problem of validity for Gadamer--the problem of fusing incommensurate horizons. I then introduce Gadamer's concepts of historically effected consciousness and openness, as virtually indispensable features of his concept of fusion of horizons.

I take up the problem of incommensurate horizons more explicitly in chapter 4, where I rely on Bjørn Ramberg's extended analysis of incommensurability to describe a sense of the term which does not entail a relativistic separation of different worldviews or languages, nor the corollary prospect of intranslatability. This discussion includes particular problems of translation and of fusing incommensurate horizons in Euripides' *Bacchae*. For a contrasting approach I reintroduce Johnson's resolution of similar problems in *Rambler* 185. The contrast is meant to extend Ramberg's notion of incommensurability along lines suggested in his own discussion. The entire chapter depends on the Gadamerian/Davidsonian view of meaning described in chapter 2, which it turns out subverts the incommensurability thesis both as used in many practical discussions and as explicitly understood by most theorists who reject, and by some (e.g., Paul Feyerabend) who advocate, it.

Chapter 5 picks up threads of discussion from all the foregoing chapters, including the problem of indeterminacy of meaning. The aim of the chapter is essentially the aim of the thesis stated above: to strengthen Gadamer's notion of validity by dealing with a problem of relativism he leaves unresolved. I consider a resolution offered by E. D. Hirsch, which amounts to a rejection of Gadamer's theory of meaning, and a very different resolution offered by Joseph Margolis, which involves a piecemeal abandonment of classical logic. My own resolution is alluded to in the scene at the beginning of this introduction. It relies on a modest extension of Davidson's view of the connection between indeterminacy and different languages, and follows some advice of W. V. Quine's on the resolution of problems which spread across many areas of theory.

My inclusion of Davidson and Quine is not incidental. I regard them as important figures in the larger context in which this thesis works, and so I should say something about their involvement therein. Quine is without question the foremost living representative of the analytical and empiricist tradition, and Davidson his most apparent (or at least deserving) heir. This description of Quine is fraught with the irony that his most famous and enormously influential paper, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1961), dissents from the hitherto fundamental empiricist belief in an absolute cleavage between purely rational (analytic) and factual (synthetic) truths, and the empiricist project of

trying to reduce meaning "to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience" (Quine 1961, 20). Davidson has carried this dissent further in ways I suggest in the thesis. One of the remarkable and I think promising features of this stretching of (rupture in) a tradition which largely dismisses continental European philosophy after Kant (with the exception of Frege, Wittgenstein, and various positivist-minded logicians, mathematicians, and philosophers of science) is the opportunity⁴ it seems now to be providing for rapprochement of the analytical tradition and phenomenology and hermeneutics (or the various strands of philosophy coming from that part of the Continental tradition that includes Hegel and Nietzsche as central influential figures), of which I take Gadamer to be the most important recent representative.

This thesis is part of that rapprochement specifically in the area of literary theory. It is thereby part of another rapprochement, of which many traditionalists or purists in English literature departments are wary (perhaps now weary), namely, that between literary theory and critical practice. Since the waning of so-called New Criticism, the relationship between theory and critical practice has grown more problematic, until now it seems to

⁴Insofar as analytical philosophy retains the two dogmas Quine rejects, rapprochement between the two traditions is unlikely. The second dogma is particularly obstructive, as it entails the sort of (reductive) view of meaning whereby Gadamer's attempt to make a clearing for the life-world is misbegotten. I discuss Gadamer's attempt in the following chapter.

burst forth at its seams in all manner of enormities, grotesque excesses, and ineffectual or pernicious reactions thereto. This thesis does not attempt to chronicle the consequences or problems of this relationship, nor presume to offer any diagnoses or cures. As a matter of sound theoretical policy, however, it acknowledges no gap between the resolution of fundamental problems of literary theory and the practice of philosophy. To many practitioners of theory this policy may seem clear enough. What apparently is clear to fewer is the need to practice literary theory/philosophy within the aforementioned rapprochement between the analytical and various non-analytical Continental traditions. Many literary theorists attempting fundamental work or assuming the results thereof ignore important perspectives and miss the general clarity and rigor afforded within the analytical tradition. Analytical philosophy, however, tends to be humanistically narrow and lacks sufficient historical consciousness. This thesis seeks to broaden the scope and historical consciousness of analytical commitments in the discussion to follow through a fusion with Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy. In this way it adds to the first sort of rapprochement mentioned above. The author hopes it thereby adds to the second sort.⁵

⁵I.e., by eschewing, through a fusion of analytical and Gadamerian considerations (and largely passing over), jargon-ridden, obscurantist postmodernisms, ideological reductions of truth to power relations, subjectivist rejections of tradition, in short, the more conspicuous nihilisms currently passing for acceptable philosophy and leaving literary theory in disrepute.

2

The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem

Gadamer begins *Truth and Method* (1989) by stating that his work is "concerned with the problem of hermeneutics," which he describes as "[t]he phenomenon of understanding and of the correct interpretation of what has been understood" (xxi). The peculiar locution by which we are to understand a *phenomenon* as a *problem* reflects the question that centers this problem--namely, how can we legitimate the conditions whereby understanding or valid interpretation occurs?

The opening remarks of *Truth and Method* and a great deal of Gadamer's energy in this work and others seem to be directed not toward a solution to the hermeneutical problem but against the positivistic impulse to refer it to the objectifying methodologies of science--that is, against construing understanding or valid interpretation either primarily or exclusively as a relation between scientific methodology and "objects of experience" (xxi). But in fact Gadamer's concern with methodology (and realism) cannot be dissociated from the hermeneutical problem; for it prompts its central question, and much of what he says in response is meant as an answer to this initial concern.

Gadamer makes this connection explicit and implies why he was prompted to ask this question in his paper "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" (1976a):

[H]ow can we legitimate [the] hermeneutical conditionedness of our being in the face of modern science, which stands or falls with the principle of being unbiased and prejudiceless[?] (10)

By "the hermeneutical conditionedness of our being" Gadamer understands the historical and prejudicial structure of understanding, the fact that understanding only occurs within a pre-existing system of beliefs, values, and interests, which can never be wholly thematized. This fact means that we are caught up in a hermeneutical circle or worldview to which the meaning of everything we understand is relative. The legitimation of our hermeneutical conditionedness, accordingly, would show that understanding is not incorrigible or inevitably distorted on account of its (a) operating exclusively (and thereby circularly) within a pre-existing hermeneutical system that (b) we can never wholly thematize (nor therefore wholly justify).

Gadamer's approach to this problem is not to show how we might contain misunderstanding or distortion given (a) and (b), but to show that (a) and (b) do not in any case raise this spectre. Together (a) and (b) entail that our understanding is inescapably prejudiced: because, given (b), the horizons within which we understand can never be made wholly transparent, and given (a), we cannot understand beyond them. Gadamer follows Heidegger, though, in maintaining "the productivity of the hermeneutical circle,"

or more specifically, of the prejudices on which understanding depends:

Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world.

They are simply conditions whereby what we encounter says something to us. (Gadamer 1976a, 9)

Gadamer is responding to a certain Enlightenment (and scientific) conception of understanding, which requires the suspension of prejudices as a condition of knowledge, with a conception in which prejudices are inescapable. He seems, however, to be begging, or at least ignoring, an important question by making a virtue of this inescapability.

Prejudices, after all, ideally are suspended in the Enlightenment conception of understanding he has in mind because they distort understanding. That "[t]hey are simply conditions whereby what we encounter says something to us" does not preclude the possibility that we receive greatly distorted meanings and thereby more or less misunderstand "what we encounter." In other words, the impossibility of a productive Enlightenment conception in no way guarantees the success of a conception whereby prejudices determine our initial and continued efforts to understand.

Misunderstanding, in short, may be as inescapable as prejudice, and therefore largely inescapable unless we simply assume that prejudices do not largely distort meaning, or question beggingly assume that misunderstanding is not the norm and thereby infer from the inescapability of prejudices that they do not largely entail misunderstanding.

If Gadamer is begging a question, though, the question is more complicated than 'Is misunderstanding the norm?' The question could be put more fully by asking whether understanding or misunderstanding is primary, or by posing, as Gadamer does, this rhetorical question: "Is it not . . . the case that every misunderstanding presupposes a 'deep common accord'?" (1976a, 7). These questions address a concern over the structure of understanding that remains unanswered however, or if, we decide on the issue of whether misunderstanding is the norm. This concern is whether the prejudicial and holistic structure of understanding makes understanding incorrigible.

Gadamer's attempt to dispel this concern is essentially two-pronged. First, he shows that the prejudices whereby we understand are not static but may be changed by what we encounter, so that we are not left with the first set of meanings we project onto it. Second, he shows that the holistic structure of understanding ultimately limits the scope of any case of misunderstanding inasmuch as it disallows the notion of ontologically distinct worldviews and meaning. Gadamer, in other words, rejects the very idea of incommensurable worldviews, or worldviews that generate meaning in principle inaccessible to interpreters who speak different languages. He is not, then, especially concerned with whether or not misunderstanding is the norm; since a particular misunderstanding obviously need not be made permanent but may alert us to "a difference between our

customary usage [or first projection] and that of the text [or what we encounter]" (*TM* 268), and thereby prompt us to revise our interpretation. Moreover, he does not beg the question of whether understanding, rather than misunderstanding, is primary, or whether "every misunderstanding presupposes a 'deep common accord.'" He rejects the very idea of a dualist and realist metaphysics that posits distinct worldviews and thereby radical alienation between their respective interpreter occupants.

One of the main reasons Gadamer casts the problem of legitimating our hermeneutical conditionedness against an Enlightenment model of understanding is because this model entails the dualist metaphysics he needs to abandon in order to reject incommensurability and stave off relativism. Essential to such a dualism is the notion of a given object or object independent of any inquiring subject; in other words, of an uninterpreted reality. Gadamer argues that relativism trades on this notion while purportedly subverting it, and that once it is dispensed with the spectre of relativism disappears. In chapter 4, I outline this argument and its scope, and suggest that relativism is more resilient than Gadamer concedes.

Gadamer also argues that the notion of a given reality lies behind the scientific demand to methodize all knowledge, at least inasmuch as the scientific ideal of objectivity is construed exclusively as a methodological ideal. He never questions the indispensability of

methodological rigor in the natural or human sciences (TM 551), nor the connection between objectivity and methodology insofar as "objectivity" is understood merely to mean certain "controllable procedure[s]" (TM 552), or methods of testing, to corroborate or falsify hypotheses. What he questions is the ontological significance of "the ideal of scientific objectivity" (TM 476), the notion that through the objectifying procedures of science we can (and only through them can we) discover a wholly independent or uninterpreted given reality. Against this notion he maintains that while the world may be given to the extent that it presents itself within horizons of understanding that we inherit from our traditions, it is "always . . . already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations" (1976a, 15). Gadamer in other words wants to maintain--much as Thomas Kuhn does (Kuhn 22)--a distinction between the methodological activities of science and the hermeneutic basis of the underlying paradigms that define these activities.

In maintaining this distinction Gadamer denies any claim of ontological universality made for science and affirms the universality of hermeneutics. His denial of the universal applicability or ineliminability of scientific methods is entailed by the aforementioned distinction--since these methods yield no insight into the historically contingent conditions that underwrite them--and perhaps amounts to little more than a rejection of a strong realism

and positivism. His affirmation of the universality of hermeneutics, on the other hand, is not entailed by this distinction in any clear way; for there may be incommensurable worldviews insusceptible of inter-translation or interpretation--which I discuss in chapter 4--or meaningful experiences that are not interpretive--which I discuss near the close of this chapter in connection with Richard Shusterman's paper "Beneath Interpretation."

Gadamer's non-theoretical motive for emphasizing the ontological limits of science, or of science-inspired notions of objectivity, is his desire to resist the threat of alienation the scientific orientation of our culture poses to "our natural view of the world--the experience of the world that we have as we simply live out our lives" (1976a, 3). Hermeneutical reflection purportedly upholds the meaningfulness of the "life-world," or of our life experience, and thereby upholds sorts of meaning excluded by certain ideas of determinate meaning and objectively (methodically) grounded truth. Gadamer, indeed, regards his assertion of hermeneutic universality as a corrective to the kinds of consciousness that threaten the basis of our natural view of the world (*TM* xxxvii-iii). This basis is the tradition from which we inherit our worldview, and the corrective that hermeneutic reflection applies is, first, that a hermeneutic basis precedes and makes possible all understanding, and second, that our tradition exhaustively defines and continually and exhaustively redefines this

basis, and the acts of understanding and worldview that it makes possible.

Though these propositions obviously entail the indispensability of our tradition for understanding, their truth does not alleviate the threat of alienation posed by the objectivist orientation of our culture. Even if all modes of understanding operate on a hermeneutical basis, not all are interpretive through and through, or draw continually and directly upon tradition. The procedures of normal science,¹ for instance, operate aside from the values, interests, expectations and prejudices of tradition, even though these procedures will be defined by the values and interests implied by a scientific paradigm that is itself historically contingent (and thus a product of tradition), and the hypotheses subjected to these procedures may be indifferent with regard to the source of the expectations they reflect. Gadamer, in any case, is not concerned with science *per se*, or with objectivity confined to normal science. His concern is with the encroachment of our interest in scientific or quasi-scientific objectivity into virtually all areas of human experience, to the point where we disregard those meanings or truth-claims that do not fit the special demands of this interest--or, to avoid begging the question at hand, to the point where we reject

¹"Normal science" is how Thomas Kuhn characterizes the sorts of experimental and theoretical "puzzle-solving research now confined to the natural sciences" (Kuhn 1984, 22-3).

the very notion of meanings or truth-claims that cannot be subjected to some methodical procedure.

Gadamer's project would now be somewhat dated were his target simply a positivist reduction of all knowledge to scientific procedures and thereby an exclusion of all claims that escape such procedures. But his deepest concern is over the intrusion of a disguised or less obvious positivism into areas of inquiry or experience that cannot be accommodated by methods supported by a scientific paradigm. Indeed, the starting point of his attack on the conflation of truth and method is what he calls "the aesthetic consciousness," the practice among scholars and critics of defining the meaning of artworks in narrowly aesthetic or largely formalistic terms. While such practice is not scientific, it works on the assumption that (a) only such terms enable us to decide "regarding the expressive power and validity of" artworks we encounter (1976a, 4), because (b) only they allow us to analyse and judge these works with any objectivity. The aesthetic consciousness, in other words, embodies in (b) the objectivist orientation of our culture, and as such, indirectly, a positivist impulse, or at any rate the bifurcation of ontology into subject and object that Gadamer and many others today seem to believe underwrites western metaphysics.

It is irrelevant whether or not Gadamer concedes (b) or some variation of it, since his critique rejects any conclusion of the sort expressed by (a) (which in any case

is not entailed by (b)); this is a result of "the excess of meaning that is present in [an artwork] itself" (1976b, 102) and to the way an artwork seizes us when we are open to it, as opposed to treating it as "an object of aesthetic judgment . . . [that we] accept or reject . . . on our own terms" (1976a, 4). An artwork will exceed the meaning allowed by any critical paradigm that fixes it as an aesthetic object because our experience of it cannot be contained by any given or conventional set of aesthetic features, and its truth-claims or meanings presuppose our integrating experience. Our experience of an artwork, in turn, cannot be thus contained because it relates "to the whole of [our] life" (TM 67), i.e., to the changing prejudices, beliefs and interests whereby we experience.

It is by relating to our life or the conditions whereby we experience that a work of art says something to us or presents us with its meanings. Since it has no meaning outside this holistic constraint, we not only become alienated from an artwork but ontologically limit it when we understand it on aesthetic grounds alone. Thus we can abandon (a), since the expressive power of an artwork requires, so to speak, whole-hearted engagement, and (b)-- which expresses the criteria for objectivity--sounds hollow inasmuch as any methodical objectivity is secondary to the artwork's meaning (1976a, 5), and moreover, sought by itself limits that meaning.

An artwork thus limited by aesthetic distancing and confinement no longer seizes us. Conversely, when an artwork seizes us it "relates [us] back to the whole of [our] existence" (*TM* 70). When we experience a work of art, we therefore encounter something in a sense familiar to us. We can draw an analogy with Hegel's "thought thinking itself," which Gadamer cites at the outset of "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem" (1976a, 3). But rather than thought or *Geist*, it is language which encounters itself when we understand a work of art, or anything else, and which as it were frames our understanding and makes every act of understanding or particular experience a hermeneutical event. The most salient rules and conventions of language, however, are not "what constitute the hermeneutical event proper . . . ; it consists [rather] in the coming into language of what has been said in tradition" (*TM* 463). The traditions or historical horizons of meaning that arise in and thereby give life to language, moreover, are dynamic; they are shifted or reconfigured in every significant act of understanding, which is to say every time we understand something somewhat or greatly alien or unfamiliar. Were this shift or reconfiguration not to occur, we would be incapable of relating this alien or unfamiliar object to our worldview, to the horizons that enable us to understand, and it would, insofar, remain merely other, something that we experience merely at the edges or marginally. What we experience

within this holistic constraint as familiar therefore becomes such only after we change ourselves, which we do when we change the conditions whereby we experience.

It is only by referring to a change in these conditions--our unthematized or thematized, consciously held beliefs--that we can make sense of being seized by a work of art that is familiar. If a work remained thoroughly familiar, so that we understood its meanings exhaustively, it would scarcely hold our attention, let alone transfix us the way the subject is in Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" when confronted by the ancient statue (see appendix). Gadamer alludes to Rilke's poem in "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" (1976b) as a model or instance of the experience of "a familiarity that includes surprise" (101). The subject of the poem has been brought up short by a work of art that seems to eclipse everything familiar. He can only experience it at all within his worldview, i.e., if he translates its meanings into terms he understands, and so short of paradox he literally understands something familiar insofar as he understands at all. But the work of art "expresses [itself] in such a way that what is said is *like* a discovery, a disclosure of something previously concealed" (Gadamer 1976b, 101; emphasis added). This apparent disjunction in his experience occurs because the holistic constraint of his worldview, or of the language whereby he makes sense of the world, is both dynamic and open-ended. The rapidity with which he begins to reorientate his

worldview, and therewith his terms of understanding, comes as a shock, and if the artwork is to stay vital it must continue to bring him up short and cause him, through his own openness, to bring into focus and shift, or unconsciously shift, various beliefs and attitudes, and thereby the meanings of the work.

It may seem peculiar to speak in this way of the work itself changing. Much of this peculiarity, however, will be dispelled if we bear in mind that meanings are, as Dagfinn Føllesdal (after Quine) puts it, man-made (Føllesdal 104). The only question is whether the meanings anyone or any group constructs are theoretically unrecoverable by outsiders; in other words, whether there are incommensurable or ontologically distinct worldviews; in other words, whether our language restricts the range of meanings that can be brought into it or entails a semantic outer limits. Gadamer's theory of the "temporality [and changeability] of aesthetic being, its having its being in the process of being presented" (TM 134) and received, assumes that we reject such possibilities. This theory also assumes that understanding is dynamic in that it reconstructs unfamiliar meanings, instead of absorbing them unchanged or substituting for them terms with which they are interchangeable or synonymous. Only if we save the idea that our language imposes semantic limits on understanding or believe that a "theory of substitution" (1976c, 86) can explain how we accommodate unfamiliar or alien meanings in

our language should the notion that an artwork's meaning changes with its reception seem peculiar.

The rejection of this idea and of any such theory of meaning generation is what seems to underlie Gadamer's statement that "*all encounter with the language of art is an encounter with an unfinished event and is itself part of this event*" (TM 99; Gadamer's emphasis). Two crucial implications of this statement are that (1) aesthetic meanings are indeterminate (in this context an *unfinished event* is an *indeterminate event* because the language prescribing meaning is not fixed), and (2), our very understanding of a work of art (or anything) can contribute to its identity, to the generation of these meanings. (1) in fact follows from (2).

Quine suggests a similar implication in "Three Indeterminacies" (1990), when he sums up his position on indeterminacy of translation by saying that "[w]hat the indeterminacy thesis is meant to bring out is that the radical translator is bound to impose fully as much as he discovers" (1990, 5). Quine's discussions of indeterminacy and radical translation were the point of departure for Davidson's developments in these areas, and thereby perhaps influenced his recent position on language. In any event, Davidson and Gadamer have developed remarkably similar views of linguistic understanding, which similarly shed light on (2).

Near the end of a "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (1986), Davidson urges this provocative conclusion:

that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases.

(446)

Without giving up altogether the semantic relevance of language, Gadamer similarly abandons the notion that linguistic communication can be explained by the mastery and use of a language, i.e., conceived as a means (the means being a given body of conventions and rules):

"One masters one's tools," it is said, that is, one applies them purposively. And certainly we would say in a similar fashion that one must master a language, if one is to express oneself to another in that language. But actual speaking is more than the choice of means to achieve some purpose in communication. The language one masters is such that one lives within it, that is, "knows" what one wishes to communicate in no way other than in linguistic form. (1976c, 87)

The language "that one lives within" is not, for Gadamer, the language that Davidson dispenses with, i.e., a "shared structure" or body of conventions wherein various words or expressions correspond to various meanings. Rather, "the

word is the word only because of what comes into language in it" (*TM* 475), not "because it is a particular type of language (in the way that linguists view language)" (*TM* 441). Actual speaking adapts words and expressions to meanings according to the demands of what one is trying to make meaning for or interpret (as opposed to relying exclusively on ready-made conjunctions of expressions and meanings to make oneself understood, or to understand). Of course one may need recourse to little or no adaptation of conventions when writing or understanding, say, a neatly written grocery list. Gadamer I trust would not deny that our conventions often are quite adequate in such scenarios, nor moreover the limited usefulness of conventions in more demanding linguistic scenarios (e.g., when we try to understand a poem which seems everywhere to undo or twist conventional meaning). His emphasis on living within (as opposed to using) a language, rather, is meant to assert the primacy of interpretation over conventional meaning in linguistic communication.

Gadamer, accordingly, regards his notion of the language of art as an unfinished and participatory event as paradigmatic of the production and understanding of linguistic meaning in general. Notwithstanding our reliance on a body of linguistic conventions--both when it proves sufficient in a given instance and when it proves inadequate but lets us at least make a start at understanding--linguistic understanding neither requires the interpretive

adequacy of convention (as opposed to its *limited usefulness* in anticipating meaning) nor can rely on it very far outside the most rudimentary exchanges of information. Moreover, even when faced with utterances as seemingly straightforward as the instructions on a grocery list, we are not compelled to interpret them straightforwardly or literally, even should their author intend that we do. We might, for example, decide to hang them, or read them aloud, in an art museum (in a gesture similar to Duchamp's toilet-seat exhibit in the Louvre); by such an act we would open up their literal meaning to reinterpretation, and therewith multiple competing interpretations (in chapter 5, I discuss this possibility of multiple interpretations and its relativistic implications and problems). The insufficiency, and dispensability, of a shared structure or body of conventions when applied to making sense of aesthetic objects also extends to ordinary cases of linguistic understanding, where we simply want to understand what a speaker intends to say and, in turn, make ourselves understood, i.e., carry on a conversation in which we do not talk past each other. The insufficiency of conventions and need to dispense with convention-rooted anticipations of meaning as we proceed merely shows up faster, more frequently, and more obviously, when we try to interpret, say, Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." But in any case Gadamer does not conceive of language as a body of conventions that a language-user uses to communicate and

understand. He regards language, rather, as a dynamic, open-ended structure, forming, re-forming and developing "the more it expresses its experience of the world" (TM 457). As such, a language hinges on, or derives its semantic significance from, acts of interpretation. Even when understanding an utterance in a completely conventional way, one still interprets it; one is assigning an interpretation to this utterance that one shares with all speakers of the same language who similarly understand it according to conventional usage. And just as a deviant interpretation might miss the mark, so might this conventional interpretation. One might, for example, have not observed the speaker wink his eye, missed his preceding explanation of how he is using certain key terms, missed parts of a previous conversation from which one might have guessed or roughly inferred the use of certain terms, or picked the wrong conventional usage (by choosing the wrong side of an ambiguous term, or perhaps by referring to a certain noun when the speaker, it turns out, was referring to a phonetically identical proper name). There are as many ways conventional interpretations can fail as there are situations whereby an utterance can be understood. This is true because, as Cadamer argues, "no statement simply has an unambiguous meaning based on its linguistic and logical construction as such" (1976c, 88-9). For such reasons as the foregoing, words or phrases *per se* have no given meaning

but, rather, have their meaning relative to a particular situation or occasion.

The occasionality of speech is the feature of meaning that is the crux of Gadamer's and Davidson's theory of linguistic understanding (see Gadamer 1976c, 88; and Davidson 1986, 441). The ubiquity of this feature entails that linguistic understanding requires interpretation, the construction of an interpretation to understand what is meaningful. In the case of a highly conventional *and successful* construction, meaning seems to be something simply there, and understanding utterly unmediated. In the case of a radical construction, whether successful or not, meaning seems intransparent, and understanding an elaborate act. But in either case meaning can only be made apparent by an interpreter's construction of meaning,² and understanding, as an activity whereby one constructs this meaning, thereby always mediates. The quickness and smoothness of understanding in the first case tempts or leads us to ignore the fact that the hearer has constructed the sense of the utterance (constructed even though in this case the constructed sense is virtually interchangeable with the speaker's intended meaning and neither is especially original with respect to the match between occasion and convention). But quickness and smoothness of understanding hardly work against the idea that a hearer has constructed

²Even the speaker does this insofar as he understands his own utterance, and may even construct competing interpretations of his utterance.

or interpreted the sense of the utterance he understands. Indeed, the ease with which a great deal of communication in one's native language succeeds, over a range of situations that continually (subtly or dramatically) shifts conventional usage, surely counts in favour of Gadamer's notion "that one lives within [one's language] . . . in self-surrender to the subject matter made present in [it]" (1976c, 87). Gadamer forestalls, or can be made to forestall, two related objections here. The first is that "interpretation" entails a semantic distance between utterance and interpretation such that one must, in principle, refer an interpretation to a body of conventions to see if it checks out with conventional usage. Where conventions, however subtly, are individualized, a successful interpreter in effect has "surrendered" himself or become open to "the subject matter made present in" his language, and this subject matter could only have been made present, at this point of individualization, by some interpretation. Where speech is even remotely individualized, therefore, smoothness of communication shows that precisely because "one lives within" one's language-- i.e., reinterprets, or constructs new meanings from, conventions--one is able to communicate and understand. The second objection that Gadamer forestalls is that interpretation (as opposed to *understanding* if one wishes to create such a distinction) is a deliberate activity, that one must not only construct a theory or interpretation of

the meaning of an utterance but become aware that one is formulating this theory. In other words, one cannot *interpret* (one can only *understand*) an utterance quickly and prereflectively but must, insofar as one *interprets*, "thematize the utterance as something that need[s] interpretation, [as] something to think about and clarify or resolve" (Shusterman 1991, 115).

Richard Shusterman maintains the foregoing objection (among others) in his paper "Beneath Interpretation" (1991). He argues that by using "interpretation" to cover cases of prereflective understanding we deny "a useful distinction" between that kind of understanding and deliberate or interpretive understanding (Shusterman 114). Shusterman cites Wittgenstein's distinction between interpreting and seeing: "To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state" (Shusterman 114; Wittgenstein 1968, 212). But his own distinction does not rely on the suggestion "that we could see or understand without doing anything" (Shusterman 114). Indeed, in drawing it he takes pains to show that his objection to making all understanding interpretive does not presuppose the naive notion that understanding and perception are passive or neutral:

This is the premise I contest, the assimilating conflation of all active, selective, and structuring intelligence with the active, selective, and structuring of the interpreting intellect.

Understanding can actively structure and select without engaging in interpretation (Shusterman 115)

Having carefully avoided staking his position on a naive theory of understanding (and reality), however, Shusterman has left himself in a mere verbal dispute that could easily be avoided with a little charity or openness. Since the whole point of his objection is that we need to maintain a distinction between prereflective and deliberate, problematic understanding, we can accommodate it by referring to prereflective and deliberate, problematic interpreting, or by placing, as Bjørn Ramberg does in addressing a similar concern of Michael Dummett's, "[a]ll interpretation . . . on a spectrum between what asymptotically approaches homophonic interpretation and what we might call absolute translation" (Ramberg 1989, 109). We can further undo the tie Shusterman makes with his use of "interpretation" between prereflective and deliberate understanding if we consider that there are, on the one hand, an indefinite number of actual cases where conventional interpretation of conventional usage does not come, where the hearer does not simply get it, and on the other, actual cases where radical interpretation or translation comes readily. Instances of the former sort of case might arise when the hearer is tired, nervous, or harbours certain (perhaps over-elaborate) expectations of the speaker. Instances of the latter sort occur when radical interpretation comes quickly owing (perhaps) to

behavioural clues the interpreter picks up on, to his felicitous anticipation of what kinds of utterance might turn up next in conversation, or simply to luck.

The distinction that Shusterman mistakenly believes can only be upheld by a standard application of the word "interpretation" highlights the hermeneutic dimension of understanding for Gadamer. All understanding may be interpretive, but "hermeneutics is primarily of use where making clear to others and making clear to oneself has become blocked" (Gadamer 1976c, 92). At such junctures interpretation becomes problematic because the "preconceptions and anticipations . . . that we are guided by" (Gadamer 1976c, 92) have let us down. Of course we may still reach an understanding without lengthy, or virtually any, deliberation. But when understanding remains problematic, we will at that point likely need to disrupt, or thematize and bring into question, our guiding preconceptions. We might be tempted to say that at that point our understanding needs to become more heavily interpretive, as though a conventional interpretation somehow relies less on interpretation. It would be more clear to say that our understanding needs to work harder. Instead of constructing an interpretation from largely conventional materials, it needs to draw from broader linguistic resources (by reworking or restructuring conventional meanings) to restore communication. Understanding or interpretation at such a point is (to use

Davidson's, and more indirectly Quine's, term) radical. Deeply problematic attempts at understanding, then, require radical interpretation or are explicitly hermeneutical. But the distinction whereby we regard understanding as either prereflective or problematic and deliberative merely highlights the difference between easy and problematic cases of understanding; it does not entail Davidson's or Gadamer's notion, since a radical interpretation could occur with little fuss or deliberation (as suggested above) or without an interpreter explicitly bringing into consideration his failed preconceptions.

The light that the foregoing throws on (2) is that it is an understatement, as is Quine's analogous proposition "that the radical translator is bound to impose fully as much as he discovers" (1990, 5). Clearly all our understanding of meaning in a certain sense does not merely impose itself partially on, or contribute to the identity of, what it interprets. For beyond interpretation (our *language* in Gadamer's sense) there are no (inaccessible or incommensurable) meanings. But if we regard this conclusion in a subjectivist light, we risk embracing (at least) two enormities that come from superficial formulations of, or answers to, questions it suggests. One of these questions concerns the source and nature of the structure or language wherein interpretation occurs. A second question concerns the relationship between this interpreting structure and what it interprets. A third question (a variation of the

second) concerns the possibility of validity in interpretation.

In this chapter I have followed Gadamer's idea of the nature of this structure in claiming that it is holistic and dynamic. Of course, it is the holistic structure of understanding that raises the foregoing questions. The fact that this structure is dynamic, however, suggests that holistic understanding need not be locked into itself. I develop this suggestion in chapters 3 and 4. I have characterized the source of this structure (and thereby the interpreter who "lives within it") as historical, which is hardly very helpful. In the following chapter I show how Gadamer fleshes out the bond between interpreter and history through his Hegelian notion of historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*). This notion also affects how we approach the second question. If we think of radical interpretation merely as a kind of imposition of meaning, or equal parts imposition and discovery (if we extend Quine's remarks to the home language), we might wonder whether an interpreter does not misunderstand more than he discovers. Gadamer's discussion of historically effected consciousness replaces imposition with dialectical conditions for understanding the other. Nonetheless, the spectre of misunderstanding cannot thereby be dispelled, and will have to be dealt with directly, in connection with problems of relativism (chapters 4 and 5).

The enormities which I will try to address when I undertake the foregoing discussion are, first, that an interpreter's horizons are individual or unique, and sufficient in themselves--so that particular, subjective interpretations by themselves build a legitimate text--and second, that (a) contrary or incompatible imposing interpretations can each be valid or true, or (b) interpretations merely impose meaning--so that interpretation works outside truth and logic (at least ordinary two-valued logic), or when faced with an alien utterance must be a case of imposition rather than understanding. These propositions are sometimes taken to be consequences of the indeterminacy which earlier (p. 22) I suggested follows from (2), or from the more strongly holistic variant of (2) I made above, i.e., that there are no meanings beyond our theories or interpretations, that meanings are theory-bound. Indeterminacy follows because theories or language can vary over the same utterance; as Davidson points out, there is not "a unique language to which a given utterance belongs" (Ramberg 90). Indeterminacy, however, does not entail that a particular reader's interpretation builds a text or is the arbiter of textual meaning (Stanley Fish's position or former position), nor that the distinctions true/false and valid/invalid are undermined (Derrida) or in need of repair or addition (Joseph Margolis), nor that misunderstanding of

the other, rather than understanding, is primary (again, Derrida).

I finish with another of Richard Shusterman's arguments "for distinguishing interpretation from more primitive or basic understandings and experience" (Shusterman 127), an argument in which he tries to dissociate interpretation from varieties of meaningful experience that he regards as ineffable by making interpretation an explicit linguistic performance:

[a] A criterion for having an interpretation of some utterance or event would be an ability to express in some explicit, articulated form what that interpretation is. [b] To interpret a text is thus to produce a text. [c] Understanding, on the other hand, does not require linguistic articulation. [d] A proper reaction, a shudder or tingle, may be enough to indicate one has understood. [e] Some of the things we experience and understand are never captured by language, not only because their particular feel defies adequate linguistic expression but because we are not even aware of them as "things" to describe. [f] They are the felt background we presuppose when we start to articulate or to interpret. (Shusterman 127; letters added for reference)

As an attack on hermeneutic universalism this passage is puzzling in that it makes an (invalid) inference on behalf of the universalist position (from [a] to [b]) which

Shusterman accepts but which is not required by that position (moreover, [a] becomes incompatible with the universalist position advanced by Gadamer if, in keeping with Shusterman's argument *and to save his inference*, we subtract the phrase "an ability" from [a] to make [b] follow); it raises objections in [c] and [d] which the universalist can readily accept without compromising his position; and it infers a substantive difference ([e]) from the universalist on the basis of just the sort of statement ([f] if we subtract "felt") which the universalist assumes.

What bears stressing in Shusterman's attack is, first, the notion that certain things we understand or experience cannot be captured by language, and second, that these things form the background that lets us articulate or interpret. The idea of the ineffable is worth engaging because it imposes a significant limitation on the hermeneutical project. However, the fact that interpretation proceeds from an unthematized (or not wholly thematized) background does not let us infer but, instead, helps us abandon this idea, unless we question beggingly assume that this background consists of things that are ineffable.

Shusterman enlists the authority of the early Wittgenstein for his position. The passage he quotes from the *Tractatus*, however, suggests what is fishy about the idea of the ineffable:

There are . . . things that cannot be put into words.
They *show* themselves. They are the mystical.

(Shusterman 127; *Tractatus* 6.522)

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein casts an enormously wide net to cover what cannot be said--namely, over all the "problems of life" (Wittgenstein 1961, 73; 6.52). These include literally everything except "propositions of natural science" (Wittgenstein 1961, 74; 6.53). The propositions of the *Tractatus* itself cannot be said; as Wittgenstein points out, "anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical" (Wittgenstein 1961, 74; 6.54).

Shusterman seems not to want to extend the ineffable so far, but his ground for extending it at all, even for making sense of this concept, disappears unless he can uphold this assumption: that we cannot in principle thematize, or give linguistic meaning to, "the felt background we presuppose when we start to articulate or to interpret" (Shusterman 127). Of course, in describing this background as something *felt*, Shusterman defines it too narrowly; one will, after all, be wholly unaware of much of the background presupposed by any interpretation one has. In any event, the question of whether one senses or feels, or is altogether unaware of what lies beneath one's interpretation or experience leaves untouched the prior issue of whether the language we live within imposes semantic limits on the sense we can make of our experiences. Shusterman presumably wants to speak of the *felt* background of experience because he believes that

certain feelings are impervious to semantic construction. What falls within our horizons or interpretive background that cannot be characterized as *feelings* in this sense are, I take it, beliefs, attitudes, interests, preconceptions, in a word, things for which language can construct meaning.

For the moment let us not assume anything about whether we can make sense of the idea of ineffable feelings. Let us consider, instead, how background beliefs, attitudes, etc., might come into language when we are unaware of them. In his discussion of the hermeneutics of radical interpretation, Ramberg makes the point that "the occurrence of incommensurability is . . . an essential part of [the] hermeneutic process" by which the radical interpreter identifies background beliefs, attitudes, values, etc., of which he is unaware:

For incommensurability is . . . a signal of a conflict of prejudgements and preconceptions. And it is only through conflict, through disruption, that it is possible 'to become conscious of these prejudices as such'. We remain unaware of our basic assumptions until faced with someone who does not share them.

(Ramberg 140)

We might not pick up on this signal if we fail to realize that we are misunderstanding someone, or uncharitably make the misunderstanding an error of the other person. But the sort of disruption that sometimes occurs when we encounter incommensurate speech provides an opportunity to make

explicit the background presupposed by some bit of language (a word or expression) that we use.

When we make explicit presupposed values and interests, we might bring into language original meanings that enlarge our language significantly, or learn to associate some bit of language with other bits that previously we believed were not conceptually related. In this case, the bit of language and (at least part of) the background presupposed by its use (i.e., other bits of language) are both obviously linguistic. On the other hand, when our conventional use of language does not begin to capture the background values, interests, and perspectives presupposed by our use of this bit of language, we use words or expressions in more or less unconventional ways in order to make explicit these background meanings. These background meanings obviously are linguistic when thus made explicit by some unconventional construction of words. But unless we locate language simply in combinations of sounds or marks, we should not assume that background meanings only become linguistic when we discover some words that can be bent (unconventionally) to our purpose, i.e., when these meanings have been made explicit. To construct meaning is already to live within a language. Assigning meaning to sounds or marks merely makes meaning explicit.

This may be part of what Gadamer has in mind when he says:

the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it. Its own physical being exists only to disappear into what is said. (TM 475)

The only content we can give language conceived as meaningful words arranged in meaningful sentences derives from the content language has as an interpretive activity wherein we construct this meaning (Ramberg 109-10). Whether this activity shows itself diachronically in a body of conventions or synchronically in actual conversations or texts that twist conventional meanings (Ramberg 111), words "disappear into what is said" because they only express whatever interpretation they have been given. What they express, accordingly, is already linguistic, already a construction of meaning with an interpretive system. The only thing of semantic relevance beneath the meaning of a particular word or sentence are meanings of other words and sentences, or of this presupposed interpretive, linguistic system or language in Gadamer's sense when he speaks of living within a language. The concept of meaning, in other words, does not extend beyond or beneath language.

Resistance to this proposition comes from viewing language primarily as a body of conventions and rules. From this view, one wonders how we bring into language meanings for which we have no words. The answer comes straightforwardly when we realize that meanings are already linguistic, i.e., before being instantiated in some word or expression. When a disruption in our semantic expectations

leads us to thematize and articulate beliefs and interests of which we were entirely unaware, we can readily shift or altogether reinterpret and displace meanings of familiar words. These beliefs and interests may take on different meanings simply by being made explicit in this way, but they do not magically become linguistic at that point. Their linguisticity or semantic significance derives--just as the linguisticity of meaningful words or sentences does--from the interpretive role they play in a network of meanings.

If we assume that one can only become aware of such beliefs and interests through bits of language (which one adapts to express their content), the idea of ineffability seems to dissolve (assuming also of course that we are not entitled to posit beliefs and interests, or anything, which in principle we can never become aware of). But what if we give up this assumption and allow that one could become aware of beliefs and interests through some mode of expression other than words and sentences, or through words and sentences that do not express but in some sense evoke the meaning of these beliefs and interests. For instance, an archaic representation of a god, or Marvell's line "we cannot make our sun/ Stand still" may make one become aware of the paltriness of our life in a way that is not captured by the sentence "Our life is paltry."

I think we should allow that our awareness need not be framed in words and sentences. In cases where we reach for

the wrong words, i.e., ascribe meaning to words that do not quite fit our intention, we are aware of our intended meaning at least to the extent that we know these words fail to accommodate it, notwithstanding the fact that we have not yet found the right words. Obviously much of our meaningful experience of the world is not framed in words. The idea of ineffability, though, cannot be saved on the concession that we can in some measure or sense be aware of meaning outside words. It can only be saved if we cannot in principle give words to our awareness or some meaning.

This possibility seems remote once we realize that words can escape their conventional constraints and be used as fluidly as we like. Of course, when we give words to meaning we need to fit them semantically into a language. Words that jar with, or seem not to fit, our intention have not found a place in our broader usage. But we do not face any theoretical obstruction to giving our meaning words, because we have already accommodated it semantically among the beliefs, attitudes, preconceptions, etc., by which we make sense of the world. We can see this process in our response to an instance of incommensurate speech. Before we can interpret a sentence whose meaning is incommensurate with our linguistic expectations (e.g., the sentence "Pride . . . seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and is not found without them" [*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1124b] if we believe pride to be a deadly sin) we first need to accommodate this meaning by

shifting certain of our values and interests. This accommodation amounts to finding a semantic role for this meaning within the whole network of meanings by which we make sense of things. Only when we have done this can we ascribe meaning to the sentence; and once we have, nothing more is required. Nothing more is required because all meaning that we ascribe to words and sentences--whether conventional or unconventional--draws exclusively from this network, from our understanding in a very broad sense (a sense that includes all our pre-reflective beliefs and interests). So long as we understand (have situated in our understanding) the meaning we wish to ascribe to some sentence, we are free to do so. The thesis of ineffability seems to assume that our giving meaning to words faces a semantic obstruction imposed by the words themselves. Once we realize that meaning (even conventional meaning) derives from interpretive activities, we can reject this assumption.

To save the idea of the ineffable, then, we have to assume a semantic obstruction underlying not merely our use of words but our understanding. We have to posit, in other words, meanings wholly outside understanding (which is simply absurd) or outside our awareness. Of course we are not entitled to speak of things which we cannot be aware of in any sense, since the inference to something outside our awareness stretches our awareness as far as the inference goes. Presumably this is why Shusterman wants to say of these things that "we are not even aware of them as 'things'

to describe" (127). He is right to avoid biting the bullet with regard to positing a kind of experience outside our awareness, but he leaves unanswered some pressing questions concerning these "things" of which we are unaware under any description. Are they wholly undifferentiated? Obviously not, since in that case we would have nothing to be aware of. Can we, then, describe their qualities or features? We might want to say that our conventional language offers little help here. Having said that, though, we have not made much progress towards the ineffable. For the expressive power of language clearly does not come from exclusively conventional usage. We might want to add that no (unconventionally interpreted) words or sentences ever could describe these features. But if we do, we will have merely returned to the assumption that our giving meaning to words faces semantic obstruction in the words themselves, which leans on the shaky notion that all meaning is conventional. If we are aware of certain felt features of our experience, nothing prevents us from characterizing these features, and thereby this experience, with some bit of language. Nothing more is required in order to interpret or ascribe meaning. If we also ascribe various other meanings to the same bit of language, we will need to be careful that we understand which interpretation we are using on a particular occasion, so that we are not conflating languages. But we often make the same bits of language take different meanings, and sorting out which meaning is being

used in a particular situation is hardly a singular activity for competent language-users. Naturally some language-users are more competent than others, so that they more readily sort out meanings from context, or more impressively, ascribe new meanings to bits of language in ways that help those to whom they are making themselves understood have an easier time. But questions of language competency raise no theoretical (semantic) issues on which to save the idea of the ineffable.

The issue of ineffability is especially relevant to Gadamer's anti-postivist project, because if we fail to "legitimate [the] hermeneutical conditionedness of our being in the face of modern science" (Gadamer 1976a, 10), we might be tempted to follow the early Wittgenstein and assign all "meanings" outside the propositions of natural science to the mystical, to what we must "pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 1961, 73-4; 6.522-7). Gadamer's theory of language lets us resist any such temptation, but also the temptation to extend the ideal of scientific objectivity and its methodological orientation very far beyond normal science. Where nothing resembling a scientific paradigm can be found, our recourse to objectifying methodologies provides a false sense of interpretive security. More importantly, by such recourse we begin to limit the meaning of what we are trying to understand, because we underestimate the fluidity with which we can ascribe meaning in our language. Problems of validity in interpretation,

however, seem to arise. If we can fluidly interpret and make meaning outside methodological constraints, one wonders what, if any, constraints operate, and how arbitrary our interpretations will be. By drawing back and looking at Gadamer's general theory of understanding we can begin to see how interpretation can be constrained short of some objectifying methodology, and in what sense objectivity and validity can be retained as theoretical ideals.

***Hermeneutical Validity and Historically Effected
Consciousness***

Fundamental to Gadamer's theory of understanding is our "anticipation of meaning" in whatever we try to understand. In the case of literary understanding an interpreter needs continually to anticipate the meaning(s) of the text she understands, as her understanding is never complete. "[A]s soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text," she projects further meaning, developing this initial meaning in a certain direction, to the point of projecting "a meaning for the text as a whole" (TM 267). This "initial meaning [moreover] emerges only because [she] is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning" (TM 267). But of course this meaning is provisional; her projections at this point are "fore-conceptions that [will be] replaced by more suitable ones" (TM 267). That these fore-conceptions can be more or less suitable, and that the whole process of interpretation requires the replacement of less for more suitable fore-conceptions, entails a notion of validity whereby certain interpretations should be rejected and others endorsed. Without such a notion, all interpretations and controversies thereof will be arbitrary and the movement from one interpretation to another, or any attempt to improve an interpretation, will be pointless.

In the same section to which I was referring above--on "the Fore-structure of Understanding"--Gadamer presents this practical basis for his notion of hermeneutical validity:

The only "objectivity" [in interpretation] is the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. Indeed, what characterizes the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings if not that they come to nothing in being worked out? (TM 267)

On this basis the decision an interpreter makes to replace or retain her fore-meanings rests on how successfully or productively they can be applied. As important as this emphasis on application is, however, it sends little theoretical light. For we need to know what it means for fore-meanings to be applied successfully, or to "come to nothing in being worked out." What seems crucial in this passage is how far or in what sense we can ascribe "objectivity" to the text against which the interpreter is working out her fore-meanings. Gadamer's limited or qualified recourse to objectivity suggests the subtlety of, and possible tension in, his distinction between a text and some interpretation. For Gadamer to sustain a notion of validity, he must in some sense separate the meaning of the text from the interpreter's projected meanings; otherwise, were these the same, the interpreter would not need

continually to revise her meanings as she more fully encounters the text.¹

Gadamer describes the experience of discovering a difference between "the actual meaning of the text" (TM 269) and one's fore-conception as "the experience of being pulled up short by the text" (TM 268). At this juncture of an interpretation, where the interpreter recognizes that her fore-conception tends in a different direction from the text's meaning--as the text "does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what [she] had expected" (TM 268)--Gadamer prescribes greater openness to the meaning of the text. This prescription might seem to emphasize the independence of the text's meaning from the understanding of the interpreter. In line with his holism, though, Gadamer regards this meaning as essentially inseparable from the interpreter's understanding; it must always be situated "in relation to the whole of [her] own meanings or [she] in relation to it" (TM 268). Meaning in other words must be mediated by some set of fore-conceptions or already held meanings. Still, while there are no free-floating or independent meanings, we can speak of the interpreter's projected meaning tending in a different direction from "the actual meaning of the text." This opposition is not an opposition between mediated and

¹Without this separation we come close to Stanley Fish's position "that interpretation is the source of texts, facts, authors, and intentions" (Fish 1980, 16).

unmediated meanings--between an interpreter's fore-meanings and meanings which somehow lie outside her horizons. The text does not, as it were, present uninterpreted meaning to her. Rather her openness entails that "the whole of [her] own meanings" is continually susceptible of change, of being revised, and does not simply, i.e., without interruption, provide her with fore-meanings with which she builds an impervious interpretation of a text. Such a one-directional interpretation could conform to a hermeneutical model, as it may be finite, nonsubjective (since the *source* of her interpretations is an open question), and present an inexhaustible text (if interpretation goes on indefinitely, generating more and more meaning), but it would not amount to much of an encounter. Gadamer's hermeneutical model by contrast allows for an encounter between interpreter and text in which a conflict of meanings can occur, in which the interpreter's expectations can be disappointed.

This possibility of conflict and disappointment presupposes a notion of validity--at least if the conflict is such that it can direct an interpreter to see the inadequacy of some meaning or there are non-arbitrary grounds for her being disappointed with her fore-conception; she does not, e.g., simply praise at morning what she blames at night (Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, l. 430). Not surprisingly, then, Gadamer is adamant that a text has an actual meaning and that this meaning can interrupt the flow of interpretation. His use of the phrase "actual meaning,"

though, does not signal a retreat from his general theory of understanding, in which meaning is confined within holistic constraints, since the actual meaning of a text which disappoints or confirms an interpreter's fore-meaning has been generated within the same interpretive horizons as the meaning it opposes. This actual meaning obviously does not refer to the same act of understanding which generated the fore-meaning it disrupts. But it nonetheless does refer to an act of understanding on the part of the same interpreter whose fore-meaning it opposes and whom it "pulls up short." At a more fundamental level, the actual meaning of the text and the fore-meaning of the interpreter derive from the same conditions which make possible the interpreter's activity of theorizing and thereby generating meaning.

Since the meaning of a text always is made sense of through, and thus quite literally produced by, these conditions, they will in the final analysis underwrite any notion of validity whereby we might decide on the adequacy of an interpretation. Since these conditions--all the meanings by which we experience the world--ultimately come from our tradition, we can say that tradition underwrites validity in interpretation, or that tradition is authoritative in judging our fore-meanings. With such general statements, however, we have not made sufficient room for a very satisfying notion of validity. We need further to show, if we can, that our tradition-grounded

interpretive activities are in some way self-corrective and do not simply spew out arbitrary meaning.

Gadamer suggests that "it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy--i.e., the origin and validity--of the fore-meanings dwelling within him" (*TM* 267). This reflexive activity is not mere navel gazing. It comes from an encounter with the text, which through the interpreter's openness directs her to this self-examination, which is an examination of meaning produced by her tradition(s). This encounter occurs, moreover, because the interpreter takes an interest in what the text has to say to her, and thus questions after it, putting her expectations, so to speak, on the line. Her interpretive orientation, then, is objective inasmuch as its locus is not self-consciousness *per se*; her self-questioning arises from an encounter with meaning in the world, in this case a text, and really is a questioning of the meaning of her tradition. The text's actual meaning, in any case, is the touchstone for revising interpretations. Such revision occurs by means of the interpretive resources of our tradition, which allow us to accommodate a text that pulls us up short, i.e., interrupts our projected meaning, by generating new meaning and thereby changing our understanding, and perhaps our tradition.

The validity of an interpretation, then, will depend on the richness and scope of the interpretive resources of our tradition and on the capacity of the interpreter to make use of--more fundamentally, to be shaped by--these resources. Where these resources are meagre, or called on sparingly, the interpreter's encounter with the text will be poor; in an extreme case, she might merely repeat the text's sounds as a sort of incantation of which nothing comes, or she might appropriate the text by "direct interpretation," i.e., without stretching the terms of her language to make sense for this text. The encounter of an interpreter who uses the resources of her tradition extensively will likely be correspondingly richer. Richness of interpretation, however, does not guarantee validity. If she does not in addition use these resources reflexively, and the values and interests of her tradition are incommensurate with the text she encounters, she will misconstrue and in some sense rewrite the text's meaning.

Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* 185 suggests the need for yet another condition of validity; it reveals a rich and reflexive interpretation of Aristotle's *megalopsychia* passage (in the *Nichomachean Ethics*) that skirts between openness and disagreement in a way that shows an unwanted tension between these two attitudes. In this *Rambler* piece Johnson plies a complex argument against pride in favour of Christian forgiveness. His argument relies on Aristotle's notion of *megalopsychia* (often translated by "pride"), but

Johnson's own notion of greatness of mind or soul, though influenced heavily by Aristotle's, is incommensurate with it on account of their differences over how far and on what grounds the great-souled self should be elevated. Johnson clearly is aware that his Christian interest in forgiveness (as a "law of [his] Redeemer") is incommensurate with the ethical and metaphysical interests informing Aristotle's discussion of *megalopsychia* (which nonetheless includes a kind of forgiveness or willingness to overlook injury), and apparently he wants to resist any conflation of fundamental interests. His interpretation, then, is not obtuse but deliberately unresponsive at certain points, and thereat aims at a corrective parody of Aristotle's discussion. We can hardly challenge the validity of Johnson's interpretation on the basis that he disagrees with Aristotle on fundamental points of interest. But had he not merely examined his own fundamental presuppositions but accommodated more of Aristotle's, he might have captured more of the sensibility underlying Aristotle's sense of *megalopsychia*, without jeopardizing the rhetorical strategy by which he urges forgiveness.²

In the first two paragraphs of *Rambler* 185, Johnson makes pride the primary obstacle to forgiveness, describing

²We should keep in mind during this discussion that Johnson did not have time to dwell over his *Rambler* pieces, and "that many of these discourses, which we should suppose had been laboured with all the slow attention of literary leisure, were written in haste as the moment pressed, without even being read over by him before they were printed" (Boswell 1980, 145).

it as an "opinion of dignity" that results in an excessive intolerance of injury at the hands of others, and as a prejudice that mistakenly infers pusillanimity from forgiveness (Johnson 1986, 181-2). This sense of pride corresponds closely to a certain use of *megalopsychia* in book II.13 of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*--in fact more closely than it does to any of the eight senses of "pride" that Johnson would list in the *Dictionary*. In this passage, Aristotle describes one type of *megalopsychia* (G. R. G. Mure uses the word "pride" in his translation) as an "intolerance of insult" or "impatience of dishonour," and claims that it was this quality which "drove Alcibiades to war, Achilles to wrath, and Ajax to suicide" (Aristotle 1947, 99). Johnson appears to have the same quality, and perhaps this passage, in mind when he claims that "[m]any who could have conquered their anger, are unable to combat pride, and pursue offenses to extremity of vengeance, lest they should be insulted by the triumph of an enemy" (1986, 182). In the same passage above, Aristotle refers to Lysander and Socrates as exemplars of what he says may be a distinct kind of *megalopsychia*, characterized by a certain "equanimity amid the vicissitudes of life" (1947, 99). In book IV.3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives a far fuller description of *megalopsychia*, elaborating more this second kind, and in fact opposing the first by claiming that the *megalopsychos* is not "mindful of wrongs":

[Ross's translation:] for it is not the part of a proud man to have a long memory, especially for wrongs, but rather to overlook them. (1980, 94)

[Rackham's translation:] for it not a mark of greatness of soul to recall things against people, especially the wrongs they have done you, but rather to overlook them. (1947, 225)

In this passage, Aristotle goes beyond affirming his suggestion that there are two sorts of *megalopsychia*, to the position that *megalopsychia* and "intolerance of insult" are actually incompatible. The sort of pride that Johnson identifies with a refusal to "be insulted by the triumph of an enemy" is therefore not the sort that Aristotle describes and extols in book IV of the *Ethics*.

Still, Johnson is not altogether happy with Aristotle's revised understanding of this concept. In book IV.3 of the *Ethics*, Aristotle introduces the idea that the truly great-souled or "proud man must be good" and describes greatness of soul as a kind of "crown of the virtues . . . [which] makes them greater, and is not found without them" (1980, 91). Toward the end of his *Rambler* article, Johnson, echoing--and beginning to parody--Aristotle, states that "Nothing can be great which is not right" (1986, 184). In the previous paragraph, Johnson had "laid down as an unailing and universal axiom, that 'all pride is abject and mean . . . and proceeds not from consciousness of our attainments, but insensibility of our wants" (1986, 184).

Johnson apparently is directing his remark against Aristotle's definition of the proud or great-souled man as one "who thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them" (Aristotle 1980, 89). But while Johnson appears to counter Aristotle's definition with his sweeping condemnation of "all pride . . . [as an] acquiescence in a false appearance of excellence" (1986, 184), he accepts Aristotle's joining of greatness of soul and virtue. Moreover, notwithstanding his "unfailing and universal axiom" against "all pride," Johnson opposes to the sort of pride which he disparages one of the synonyms for "pride" which he would include in his *Dictionary*: "Nothing which reason condemns can be suitable to the *dignity* of the human mind" (1986, 184; emphasis added). In opposing dignity to this sort of pride, Johnson uses "dignity" somewhat as Aristotle uses *megalopsychia*, and follows Aristotle in arguing that dignity entails (i) virtue and (ii) an indifference to "the approbation of men, of beings whose superiority we are under no obligation to acknowledge" (1986, 185).

In the final analysis, though, Johnson does not follow Aristotle very far. The virtue of forgiveness, which Johnson conceives--in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount--as a "great duty" on which his "eternity is suspended" (1986, 185), is quite absent from the *Ethics*. Moreover, Johnson's very conception of virtue and of a virtuous life differs from Aristotle's, even while it bears

a certain formal resemblance. Johnson states that the "utmost excellence at which humanity can arrive, is a . . . pursuit of virtue" (1986, 184), which resembles Aristotle's position that the end of life is found in virtuous activities (1980, 261-63). But Aristotle claims that the most virtuous activities--viz., contemplative activities--elevate us to a kind of kinship with the gods (1980, 266-9). Were Johnson interested in trying to reconcile the Sermon on the Mount with the *Ethics*, he might have linked his own prescription to pursue virtue to the statement at *Matthew* 5.48--"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"--which sounds similar to Aristotle's aspiration for kinship with the gods. Instead, he keeps to the spirit of *Matthew* 5-7 and *Luke* 6, which is contrary to the kind of self-elevation which Aristotle praises, and thus counsels his reader to make "a continual reference of every action to the divine will" (1986, 184). The dignity which Johnson esteems raises us above the need "to suffer the opinion of others to rule our choice, or overpower our resolves," but in order to attend to "the commands of the universal Sovereign" (1986, 185), not with a view to attaining a kinship with the deity of the sort Aristotle envisions for his contemplative great-souled man. Johnson, rather, maintains that human dignity requires subservience to "the divine will" and an absolute dependence on "the Throne of Mercy" (1986, 185), which in turn requires that we practice forgiveness.

It may seem odd for Johnson to stress dignity, and not to mention meekness or humility at all, in a piece on forgiveness and fidelity to the message of the Sermon on the Mount--but only if we miss his parody of Aristotle's great-souled man passage. Johnson wishes to disparage anyone who is tremendously concerned with the approbation and opinion of others, and show that such a person "has little reason to congratulate himself upon the greatness of his mind" (1986, 185). He could do so by referring his reader to book IV.3 of the *Ethics*, where Aristotle shows at length why greatness of soul and an immoderate concern with approbation are incompatible. He could, as we have seen, also have recourse to the *Ethics* on the subject of forgiveness. But since Johnson has no wish to accept Aristotle's ultimate elevation of the self, he uses some of the central premises of the *Ethics* to provide a contrary conclusion: (P1) "Nothing can be great which is not right" (1986, 184); (P2) "The utmost excellence at which humanity can arrive, is a constant . . . pursuit of virtue, without regard to present dangers or advantage" (1986, 184); (P3) virtue requires "a continual reference of every action to the divine will" (1986, 184). The first two premises place us in the *Ethics*; together with the third, which clearly does not, they invite us to conclude that greatness for humanity requires adherence to the guidance of "the divine will." But this guidance is located in the message of the Sermon on the Mount, which stresses meekness of soul and humility, not *megalopsychia*.

Johnson of course appreciates the irony his parody has produced; he does not seriously maintain that we should practice forgiveness in order to obtain greatness, even if we understand greatness to entail "a continual reference of every action to the divine will." Johnson leaves his parody behind, and concludes that it is "superfluous to urge any other motive" to practice forgiveness than the hope "to be forgiven . . . [at] the Throne of mercy" (1986, 185).

Johnson's understanding of the origin of his deeper conceptual interests in this piece is extensive, and thereby aligns nicely with Gadamer's hermeneutic model. On the other hand, Johnson's scruples in avoiding fusion of these interests with anything incommensurate forestall the process of accommodating the other which for Gadamer is the mainspring of hermeneutic understanding. Johnson draws the line on openness to differing worldviews at points of fundamental disagreement, where failure to disagree requires giving up or adjusting one's own deepest values and interests. Gadamer dissolves this line, and thereby the tension between openness and disagreement which Johnson maintains, by bringing all presuppositions or underlying interests into the act of understanding, where in principle all one's attachments are therefore at risk. Risking these attachments is what Gadamer intends when he suggests that we examine and question the fore-meanings we absorb from tradition (*TM* 267).

Without the kind of fundamental questioning which involves such risk, a problem of circularity of meaning production arises which seems to threaten the idea of validity; the linguistic or meaning-generating structure of tradition, after all, is always present at some level in the production of meaning. If the most fundamental values and interests of tradition remain inviolable, understanding between worldviews which are incommensurate with respect to these would seem to founder. Openness for Gadamer cannot overcome the circularity of meaning production (the hermeneutic circle), but it entails the possibility of self-correction, and thereby validity, at any level in interpretation. Gadamer's idea of openness, however, does not come at the expense of disagreement over fundamental interests. Disagreement or conflict is embedded in every encounter between incommensurate worldviews, including (perhaps especially) those which typify hermeneutic openness or accommodation and thereby allow for a notion of validity.

We can begin to see the role of conflict in Gadamer's description of the sort of interpretive encounters that typify hermeneutic openness. Such encounters on Gadamer's account include these features: an interpreter who projects anticipatory meanings onto the text as she encounters it; a text which must be appropriated by such anticipatory acts of the interpreter's understanding to become meaningful; the resilience of the text to smooth appropriation or interpretation, owing to the inadequacy of the interpreter's

appropriating meanings; the interpreter's questioning of the direction of her projected meanings and presuppositions as she faces this resilience; the resourcefulness of her traditions in accommodating this reflexive questioning with meaning whereby she can make sense for this text where it is resilient; and the interpreter's shifting of the fundamental values and interests her questioning brings to light, and of those underlying the text. These features are not necessary, since they may only characterize encounters where the interpreter's language is incommensurate with the text's or where interpretation is problematic. But the value of hermeneutic openness is nowhere clearer than in such encounters. The value of conflict also is nowhere more clear. Indeed, the kind of conflict which operates through hermeneutic openness is more genuine or far reaching than in cases where fundamental values are simply opposed to one another, where entrenched disagreement (i.e., without any shifting of background values) is the only conflict.

The sort of encounter above only gives a rough sketch of Gadamer's account of hermeneutic openness. The function of tradition or history is much more involved. Not only does an interpreter question the values and interests she absorbs from tradition, but her questioning itself is determined by that tradition. In fact, her entire consciousness is historically effected, or produced by historically conditioned, thematized and unthematized, meaning. This fundamental fact of her interpretive

situation shows a very general sense of what Gadamer means by his term "historically effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*).

Gadamer understands by this general sense of his term that the horizons whereby we view the world derive from history, and that our acts of understanding are further conditioned by, and condition, that history. These horizons are not static, but since some configuration or other of horizons is inescapable and these horizons are never a direct window to a given world or world-in-itself but continually mediate our experience, we can just as well speak of them as allowing us to make--rather than view--or determining us to make, the meanings of the world. Moreover, since these horizons and our understanding in effect are history--the meaning generating process that is history--our consciousness is not only brought into being and continually conditioned by history; it is consciousness of a world that itself is historically effected, in its general features and in our every encounter with it. For these reasons we can regard our situation in the world as thoroughly historical. Historically effected consciousness, however, does not simply refer to this fundamental aspect of our situation, i.e., that our consciousness of, and relation to, the world is thoroughly historical. More narrowly, it refers to our consciousness of this situation--our reflexive understanding that our consciousness is historical through

and through. This understanding is the basis of hermeneutical consciousness.

In elaborating this narrower sense of the term, Gadamer distinguishes hermeneutical consciousness from Hegel's concept of absolute consciousness, but only after defending this concept against lines of criticism which he believes fail in their attack on Hegel. What these criticisms have in common is their resistance to the radically anti-realist claim to which Hegel commits himself in his "polemic against Kant's 'thing-in-itself'" (TM 342) and in his entire enterprise--viz., the claim that all being is mediated by consciousness, which is entirely consonant with the qualifying claim he makes in the *Logic* that everything contains both immediacy and mediation (Kaufmann 1978, 190-1). In Hegel's system, accordingly, concepts such as being-in-itself or independent reality, which ordinarily are taken to refer to something intrinsically other than consciousness, refer to something other for consciousness--to something which, while other, is mediated by consciousness and, moreover, in which consciousness increasingly recognizes itself as it moves toward absolute knowledge, toward complete recognition of its self-identity with all otherness. Against this ontology of absolute consciousness, Hegel's critics have made (from ignorance of the section referred to above in the *Logic*³) an "appeal to

³Gadamer surprisingly does not refer to this section in defending Hegel against such critics. Hegel anticipates their line of attack when he

immediacy--whether of bodily nature, or the Thou making claims on us, or the impenetrable factualness of historical accident, or the reality of the relations of production" (*TM* 344). Gadamer regards any such appeal as "self-refuting, in that it is not itself an immediate relation, but a reflective activity" (*TM* 344). But Hegel's philosophy of consciousness cannot be saved, or made to seem very satisfying, on such formal grounds. We may still have serious doubts whether any philosophy in which consciousness determines our experience of the world can adequately account for the seeming independence and otherness or alienness of what we experience--which is a considerable shortcoming if our experience of the world is, as it seems to be, largely and perhaps paradigmatically characterized by these qualities.

What seems particularly worth noticing in such doubts is (i) the distinctiveness or uniqueness of the alien; (ii) its recalcitrance within our normal way of seeing the world; and (iii), as a result of (ii), the problematic nature of our encounter with it. The very basis of Hegel's ontology, however, is informed by an insight into the structure of experience which addresses what is perhaps most important in our realist intuitions. This insight is that "experience

declares "that there is nothing, nothing in the heavens or in nature or in the spirit or anywhere, which does not contain both immediacy and mediation; so these two determinations are seen to be *undivided* and *indivisible*, and this opposition something vain" (Kaufmann 1978, 191).

has the structure of a reversal of consciousness and hence . . . is a dialectical movement" (TM 354).

In one sense this reversal would seem simply to deflate realism, as it refers to the experiencing mind's self-recognition in its object. But this mind is simultaneously experiencing the otherness of its object, which is a constant feature of the dialectic in which it becomes immersed in experience. This means that consciousness does not simply unravel itself in experience, showing aspect after aspect of itself. Rather, in the most fruitful experiences, consciousness encounters something which is distinct from itself--from its content and orientation--and which cannot be immediately and unproblematically accommodated. If consciousness is to accommodate this alien object--whether this is an artwork, a concept, another horizon--both the object and consciousness itself must change. Aspects of both will be canceled, others preserved, and together they will be lifted up, so to speak, into something new (Hegel's sense of *aufhebung* succinctly captures this description). Consciousness here experiences its object as independent and alien, and yet in this object recognizes itself. It does not, however, realize what occurs in this dialectic where it comes, through reversal, to recognize itself; only "the philosophical mind realizes what the experiencing mind is really doing . . ." (TM 354)--viz., generating itself through these encounters where it reverses and thereby recognizes itself. Our realist

intuitions, then, are in Hegel's view sub-philosophic, in the sense that they operate solely on the level of experience and miss the temporal structure of that experience, which can be characterized by these reversals whereby consciousness generates itself in a unity with its object.

The experiencing consciousness, however, while distinguishable from the philosophical mind reflecting on the structure of experience, is not to be equated with a realist mind-set, which would eschew the notion of self-recognition in the objects we experience in the world. While similarly sub-philosophic, as it does not reflect on its own dialectical nature--its self-conflicting, self-generating unity with its object--experiencing consciousness does not encompass the position of realism, and excludes this position--though by including (i), (ii), and (iii) above preserves aspects perhaps implicit in realism--when it undergoes a reversal, when it turns back on itself by recognizing "itself in what is alien and different" (*TM* 355). Nonetheless, in Hegel's phenomenological project "conscious experience" is incomplete and necessarily leads "to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself [i.e., it leads to absolute knowledge]" (*TM* 355).

This requirement is perhaps the most significant point of departure from which Gadamer leaves that project. Gadamer rejects the notion that consciousness ever can, let

alone necessarily will, become perfectly self-transparent or absolute. For Gadamer "the complete identity of consciousness and object . . . attained in absolute knowledge" (*TM* 355) can never occur, as the temporal structure of being determines that "being is never fully manifest" (Gadamer 1976d, 38). The identity of being can never be confined by any finite set of descriptions; new events of understanding, new interpretations, break through any such confinement, ever expanding what can be said of its object. An object situated within this ever changing tradition of interpretations can therefore never be finally or completely revealed.

This ontology which situates the identity conditions of being in history is an important part of what lies behind Gadamer's claim that being or meaning always exceeds consciousness. This claim in effect disallows Hegel's claim that the object of consciousness will, in history, become absolute--i.e., reveal all its aspects--and obviously thereby disallows Hegel's concomitant claim that consciousness itself can become absolute--i.e., fully aware of all aspects of its object (itself). One way to state Gadamer's opposition to these claims is this: in the notion of the absolute, Hegel has withdrawn the identity conditions of being from history and confined these within the mind of the absolute knower, who at this rate need only reflect

within herself to understand her object entirely.⁴ With respect to her object (viz., what knowing essentially consists of), history has no further meaning to effect or generate. And since this object is herself, as knowing consciousness, she is in an important sense immune from further historical effects. The complete explication of what her knowing consists of fundamentally alters her being, the nature of her consciousness, by thematizing all the meaning which generates her worldview, or bringing into conscious reflection all the content of history which makes up what Gadamer would call her horizons were they not thus thematized and thereby taken from history into absolute knowledge.

The most dreadful consequence of all this for Gadamer is that Hegel curtails the effects of history in consciousness--the susceptibility of consciousness to being changed in such a way that it can accommodate new experiences.⁵ What consciousness is changed by here is its historically determined horizons so far as they generate the meaning required by the demands of a new experience.

⁴We should bear in mind that this object is *what knowing or consciousness knowing essentially consists of*, not everything that this absolute consciousness knows. We can thereby save ourselves from imputing to Hegel the enormities that absolute knowledge entails the end of history and that consciousness at this stage has discovered all there is to know.

⁵This view of Hegel should be tempered, and is perhaps refuted, by his insistence that "Spirit is indeed never at rest but always engaged in moving forward" (1977, 6), and by his adaptation of Schiller's lines at the very end of the *Phenomenology*: "Only 'from the chalice of this realm of spirits/ foams forth for Him his own infinitude'" (1977, 493).

Without this susceptibility to being changed in this way--to being continually historically effected--consciousness cannot remain open to experience, as it will not receive or have generated for it the meaning sufficient to satisfy these demands of experience, which amount to meaning tending in a different direction from the expectations or fore-conception consciousness has of that experience. Gadamer, however, states that "openness to experience . . . is made possible by experience itself" (TM 355). To make sense of this statement we need to remind ourselves that the meaning of experience--even at the most preliminary stage of an encounter--has been generated by our historically determined horizons, no less than the fore-conception with which we meet and which we try against experience. The structure of experience, then, is such that it continually turns us back on our horizons and the tradition(s) from which these arise. Experience may make possible our openness to experience, but we understand no meaning in experience which ultimately is not drawn from or generated by the interpretive resources of our tradition. Our openness to experience, then, is also our openness to our tradition or "to the experience of history" (TM 376).

Gadamer describes this openness as having "the structure of a question" (TM 362). What Gadamer wants to suggest is that understanding which is open works as a kind of dialogue or conversation in which the meaning of, say, a text and our expectation of it modify one another through

the mediation of our shifting horizons or the successive acts of understanding to which they give rise. The expectations or fore-meanings we venture toward a text, at any point in our interpretation, represent such acts of understanding. The text's actual meaning occurs as a result of other acts of understanding by the interpreter. Because this actual meaning differs from the fore-meanings which were ventured against it, making an impasse of sorts, it refers to a separate horizon. But this separate horizon, like the meaning it generates, is not independent of the experiencing interpreter. For the impasse between the interpreter's fore-meaning and the text's actual meaning to be overcome, for understanding to take place, a fusion of the informing horizons must occur. Such a fusion of horizons is achieved by the *aufhebung* or cancelling, preserving, lifting-up dialectic referred to earlier (P. 66), and thereby mediates between "the text and its interpreter" (TM 378).

Since the historical effects in interpreter and text (or whatever she understands) alike are meanings, Gadamer not surprisingly describes the fusion of horizons which mediates between these in her understanding--by generating new meanings--as "the achievement of language" (TM 378) in the sense outlined in the last chapter. Consciousness therefore is essentially linguistic, and the linguisticity of consciousness is such that meaning cannot be completely captured or permanently confined by a language--i.e.,

conceived as a body of specifiable rules and practices or conventions, or as distinct from the effects of history which eventually modify such conventions. And since history is never finished, since there is always more that can be said of anything, and more significantly, different ways of saying it, meaning cannot be wholly captured or confined by particular interpretations.

Bridging and constraining the different ways of interpreting or constructing meaning are the problems I turn to in the next two chapters.

4

Relativism (1): Incommensurability and Openness

In a section of *Truth and Method* entitled "Language as experience of the world," Gadamer remarks that "the multiplicity of languages presents for reason . . . [a] genuine riddle" (444). This riddle is that there is one world and yet many seemingly incommensurable ways of construing it, none of which can maintain a claim of superiority over the others. This riddle can be answered--or an answer can be given--by considering what it is for languages to relate to the world. On the face of things, though, this riddle suggests the problem--or eventuality--of "truth-dissolving relativism" (TM 344).

For Gadamer, the problem of relativism is tied to a conception of the world as being-in-itself, or as ontologically independent. Accordingly, he regards this problem as a carry-over of Cartesian dualist metaphysics which does not coherently arise in a non-metaphysical, hermeneutic ontology. To enter the spirit of the problem, then, we must begin with the metaphysical assumption of a substantive, independent reality to which any correct language or worldview will refer. Within this assumption, a multiplicity of incommensurable worldviews entails cognitive relativism, unless one of them is in touch with and underwritten by--contains a correct description of--the

world-in-itself. Thus Gadamer's rejection of the notion of a superior worldview--a worldview which entails the right theory of the world--on the surface commits him to "truth dissolving relativism." After all, if no worldview can claim to be in touch with the world-in-itself, there seems to be no touchstone for truth. If in principle no such claim can be maintained, the world itself--at least conceived as in-itself--dissolves; only a multiplicity of different perspectives remains. But no dire consequences follow from this result without our original assumption, and without therein imagining the loss of a world in which our theorizing plays no part. No genuine drama therefore occurs when a realist accuses the hermeneutic perspectivist of permitting a multiplicity of worldviews of which none can ever be held up above the rest as the right view of reality. Failure to connect through a correct description a worldview with reality is only a failure on the presupposition of a world-in-itself--a "world . . . different from the views in which it presents itself" (TM 447). Since (perspectivist) hermeneutics fundamentally rejects this presupposition, any charge of relativism which rests on it is misdirected and needs to challenge the hermeneutic project at a more fundamental level--where the project develops its non-realist conception of "world" and "truth." So far as the problem of relativism depends on a charge thus burdened, it can only intelligibly arise within a much more comprehensive realist challenge of hermeneutic ontology.

But perhaps a less involving assertion of relativism can be found in a non-realist, non-metaphysical viewpoint. From such a viewpoint one would not accept or maintain relativism out of despair of finding a language which correctly pictures the present or given world, and which thereby serves as a model and corrective for recalcitrant, incommensurate languages. This sort of reification of language (Ramberg 99¹) and objectification of the world would be replaced by a non-metaphysical thesis such as this: understanding between incommensurable worldviews is irremediably discontinuous.

Such a thesis takes a thrust at Gadamer's concept of openness and thereat the universality of hermeneutical understanding. If interpretation cannot in principle build bridges between incommensurate worldviews--if radically different horizons cannot be fused--the interpreter's fore-meanings must either dominate or be withdrawn when she ventures them in radically alien territory, in, say, a text or conversation. Where she does not withdraw her expectations of the radically alien other--perhaps out of blindness or ignorance, or, whether knowingly or not, from allegiance to certain deep values (religious in Johnson's

¹This reification results from an abstraction of language from the ongoing interpretive activities which generate it. For a fuller discussion and debate on this issue, between Donald Davidson, Ian Hacking, and Michael Dummett, see chapters 24-6 in *Truth and Interpretation* (ed. E. LePore, 433-76). Bjørn Ramberg makes the point about reification and discusses this debate in chapter 8 ("What is a Language?") of *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language* (99-113).

case)--her fore-conception in effect masks or misses its object. Within certain parameters it is not difficult to make sense of such an encounter. We only need to make a scenario in which the interpreter sees no difficulties in her misconstruing interpretation, or expands the context wherein she structures meaning away from the alien values and interests on account of which she is misconstruing. In this latter case we approach what Derrida seems committed to by his use of the expression "discontinuous re-structuring" in "Three questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer" (53). In either case she either wills, or (more likely) unwittingly grafts, incommensurate conditions of meaning onto her object. That is, she creates a new and incommensurate context for the alien object she misconstrues, a context that cannot be merged with some significant part of this object's backdrop of meaning. In such a scenario, her re-structuring of her context does not overcome its discontinuity with the other.

I take it that the problem this scenario points to is practical and not theoretical--i.e., there are no theoretical reasons why her re-structuring efforts should result in discontinuity--and therefore that the idea of incommensurability of worldviews or contexts--or the idea that these can be (ontologically) distinct--does not arise. (I will say more about this position below.) The practical problem that suggests incommensurability, however, is obstinate and pervasive, and seems to have a kind of semantic import. Moreover, practical barriers to

understanding which seem something like incommensurability may be difficult to detect. We might therefore want to look at the idea of a kind of practical incommensurability, which possibly verges on theoretical or semantic issues. To consider this idea I extend my discussion of *megalopsychia*--this time by focusing on similar and distinct concepts--viz., *authedeia*, *hamartema*, and *hybris*. I look at what I take to be the prejudices behind mistranslations or misunderstandings of these and similar concepts, and then I apply these misunderstandings to Euripides' *Bacchae*--to see whether they draw lines of incommensurability.

I'll begin with a comment Cedric H. Whitman makes in his *Sophocles* (1951), in a chapter entitled "Scholarship and Hamartia":

hybris, generally translated "pride" and interpreted according to St. Paul, has been very useful in this context [i.e., in discussing the so-called *hybris* of Euripides' Pentheus]. Originally it meant assault and battery, and it never quite lost the overtones of physical violence, even when it later was associated chiefly with the overweening arrogance of the rich and mighty. In any case, it is too serious a matter to qualify as *hamartia*, though the two are often equated in an effort to make the tragic hero deserve his fall, and save the moral order. (29-30)

While Whitman wishes to resist the claim that *hybris*--interpreted as entailing the Christian notion of pride--can

"qualify as *hamartia*," and moreover, the very relevance of *hamartia* in analysing Attic tragedy, his concession concerning Pentheus leans on a few of the prejudices that he argues we need to abandon (41). In an amending footnote to the passage above, Whitman points out that St. Paul's or "[t]he Christian conception of pride differs from *hybris* in that it directly relates to one's attitude toward God" (254). The theoretical issues at stake in Whitman's concession and amendment are fundamental, and central to our larger discussion, i.e., concerning hermeneutical validity and interpretive relativism. On the one hand (to suggest a conclusion I draw or concede in chapter 6), there seem to be few theoretical grounds on which to oppose a Christian construal of *hybris*. Interpreters are free to assign whatever meanings they like in their own scheme, i.e., to speak what language they will. On the other hand (to suggest a point Bjørn Ramberg makes, which I outline below), we need to be careful to recognize what is occurring when we are speaking different languages, i.e., we need to avoid conflating languages. Whitman's concession and amendment show remarkable hermeneutic dexterity. He concedes what seems must be conceded in allowing "pride" ("interpreted according to St. Paul") to translate *hybris*; and then he immediately implies that this translation and conception entail a disruption in usage. Whitman's concession, though, is more dramatic than his conciliatory tone suggests. His remark that the revised or Christian sense of *hybris* "has

been very useful" in discussing Euripides' Pentheus obscures the extent of the revision, and the semantic mess that threatens if we try to read this revision into the *Bacchae*.

If we make *hybris* mean pride anywhere in this text-- i.e., replace any of its conventional meanings (insolence, wantonness, violence, outrage, etc.²)--it seems we need to make sweeping changes in our translation manual, or in the meaning of the text. Revised and unrevised translation manuals, however, may be quite similar. The revised translation need not extravagantly incorporate its change wherever *hybris* occurs, but may instead modestly confine itself to a single instance, as, e.g., G. S. Kirk does when he renders *hybristai* "arrogant" at line 743:

Bulls that were arrogant before, with rage
in their horns, stumbled to the ground (ll. 743-4)
(*taûroi d' hybristai kâs kâras thumôúmenoi*
tò prósthen esphállonto pròs gaîan démas)

"Arrogant" may not be the most suitable word to describe the disposition of a bull about to charge, and seems a little odd when various conventional or dictionary definitions³ work well enough, but the deviation is slight and

²For a more complete list, and a discussion of why "pride" should be excluded, see Richmond Lattimore's *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (1964), pp. 23-6. Walter Kaufmann adds considerably to this discussion in *Tragedy and Philosophy* (1968), pp. 64-8.

³William Arrowsmith's more conventional choice has the advantage of stressing the resonance between *hybristai* and *thumôúmenoi*, which he translates as "fury" and Kirk translates as "rage":

And bulls, their raging fury gathered in their horns,
lowered their heads to charge, then fell, stumbling
to the earth

unsystematic; i.e., it is not applied throughout the text. Had Kirk's deviation been sizable, had he, say, made the bulls coy, instead of arrogant, then perhaps incommensurability would threaten. We would either have to regard this reference to their disposition as an anomaly of his translation, or as a discovery about the conventional range of *hybristai* or the extent of Euripides' deviation therefrom. Were we to opt for either of the latter, we might begin to wonder how far we are misunderstanding *hybris*, and perhaps all Attic Greek. We might consequently wonder how far Attic texts are incommensurate or incommensurable with our translations. Of course in this particular case--viz., *hybristai* translated as "coy"--we would opt for the view that the translation contains an anomaly, and so reject it outright.

At what point we face incommensurateness or incommensurability presumably depends partly on how far our expectations have been upset, and partly on whether we can find some clever way of accommodating the new usage we have discovered: We might, e.g., interpret Euripides' usage as ironical, or as inexplicable but exceptional. Clever accommodations begin to weaken, however, when our discovery applies throughout the text. At some point the issue of whether we face an incommensurable text arises, and is presumably settled once we make sense of the text, if we can, or decide that its meaning is theoretically unrecoverable.

This decision would mean we are resigned to the position that our horizons and those of the text, whatever adjustments we might make, endure a breach, not an expansion, and so are incommensurable. The metaphor of different horizons (or contexts, worldviews, or languages) by which we would make sense of this position, however, points to a problem raised by Davidson, in his landmark paper, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1984a, 66-80). Davidson discusses *points of view*, rather than *horizons*. His discussion nonetheless suggests certain constraints on how we can intelligibly understand the metaphor of horizons. The problem he finds with different points of view, when used to clarify the idea of incommensurability, is that

Different points of view make sense . . . only if there is a common coordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability. (67)

Davidson does not conclude what we might expect--that we need a common system. He takes the more radical position of abandoning both the idea of different points of view and the idea of a common conceptual system, which this idea paradoxically presupposes. Agreeing with Davidson here would not require that we abandon the metaphor of horizons--only that we reject the idea of distinct horizons, and therewith the incommensurability thesis. We can only make sense of different or distinct horizons within a broader

(ever broader) set of horizons wherein we can distinguish differences. But the broadness and instability of this set forces us to give up talk about established and distinct horizons.⁴

Whatever position we take on the theoretical issue of incommensurability, some less theoretical notion of incommensurability may survive. If we abandon the idea of distinct horizons, we may still wonder how far we should carry Gadamer's idea of a fusion of horizons. Obstinate patches of misunderstanding can, and do, crop up owing to variances in our fundamental linguistic commitments. While these patches may fade in cases where we discover these variances, we may continue indefinitely blind to their existence and therefore incorrigible in our misunderstanding. If we entertain Whitman's concession-- that "hybris . . . translated 'pride' and interpreted according to St. Paul, has been very useful" in discussing Euripides' Pentheus--we can see how patches of misunderstanding may be woven seamlessly into an otherwise faithful interpretation. The obstinacy of these patches is a function of their smoothness or invisibility.

William Arrowsmith translates Dionysus' speech at line 1347--*kaî gâr pròs hymôn theòs gegòs hybristómen*--as "I am a god. I was blasphemed by you" (218). This translation is

⁴Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons, developed independently of Davidson (and from a different point of departure in the tradition), similarly entails a rejection of the idea of distinct horizons or languages (see *TM* 306 and 378).

not pernicious if we understand "blasphemed" not to entail more than it directly describes--i.e., the act of having insulted a god (unwittingly in this case)--though it adds a new emphasis inasmuch as *hybristómen* by itself does not contain this meaning. If we go along with Whitman's concession we might find it "useful" to regard the *hybris* or "blasphemy" of the Thebans as rooted in the sin of pride. This approach strains when applied to Cadmus, whom Dionysus is responding to, but it works quite smoothly with Pentheus. Nonetheless, conceptually linking pride and *hybris* in this way creates an incommensurate interpretation. Pentheus' pride, or his *authedeia* or willfulness and stubbornness, certainly amplifies his unwitting *hybris*, but construing his pride as sin shifts one of the thematic centres of the *Bacchae*--Pentheus' blindness and one-sided or extreme rationalism--and virtually reverses Greek moral sensibilities. The ease with which this semantic dislocation can occur--i.e., without creating incoherence--accounts for the obstinacy of what, in some sense, is a misreading of the text.

The source of this misreading is a disparity in linguistic commitments to the concept of pride. One might be tempted to dispose of this problem by saying that variances in linguistic commitments entail variances in linguistic conventions, and in the concepts which these describe--so that alleged cases of misreading of the sort above are simply cases of distinct usage. Pentheus' pride,

given a Christian use of "pride," is a sin, or in secular (but still Christianized) terms, a moral failing. Conversely, Pentheus' willfulness and pride are an indispensable part of virtue conceived in an heroic scheme (viz., in the *Illiad*), in Attic tragedy, and even in Aristotle's revision of *megalopsychia* in the *Ethics*. Attempting to dispose of the problem in this way, however, ignores a relevant semantic overlap in linguistic commitments. "Pride" picks out the same behaviours--and the same attitudes--regardless of whether we construe these as sinful or virtuous. To distinguish between conventions in such a way that Pentheus' pride (from a Christian perspective) is a flaw in character, while his *authedeia* is a virtue, does not hide the fact that in the context we are considering these conventions converge in all respects relevant to deciding whether his self-assuredness, willfulness, and stubbornness are a flaw--barring of course those that beg the question being decided. This convergence or overlap suggests that a disagreement between Christian and classical or pre-classical interpretations of Pentheus' character is not what we might call "merely verbal"--i.e., arising from slightly different language games, wherein participants in each resort to distinct conventions at the point in question. There is a verbal disagreement, and this disagreement does signify differences in conventional usage. But these are symptomatic of deeper differences, coming from fundamental commitments and a more genuine disagreement.

This more genuine disagreement describes the respective beliefs, values, interests, and prejudices on which these incommensurate interpretations are founded.

Incommensurateness of conventions is ultimately a surface issue because we can, and often do, modify conventions, or create or learn new bits of language, without much trouble. Our facility shows a similarity of commitments between interpreter and interpreted to the interests and preconceptions whereby we interpret language. Conversely, our inability to give words meaning, to establish communication, may show a significant difference in these commitments. In this latter case, success in interpretation requires a shift or change in our fundamental commitments. Gadamer's notion of openness describes this need, but does not seem to handle well cases of misunderstanding which stem from self-deception (if this is an intelligible concept), obtuseness, or blindness.

In the foregoing discussion of the *Bacchae*, I simply assume the constraint that openness theoretically places on the idea of incommensurability, and advance a weaker idea of practical incommensurability, i.e., of obstinate (as opposed to permanently incommensurate) patches of misunderstanding. The problem with describing these obstinate patches as a kind of incommensurability is that they are obstinate only so long as we remain blind. If we remain blind, though, we are not in a position to speak of a misunderstanding. Only so far as we see how we are misusing some piece of language

can we say how far we misunderstood it. But with this insight the spectre of practical incommensurability is unimpressive; for now, on practical grounds, there is no incommensurability. Earlier? Retrospectively, we should speak simply of corrigible blindness or ignorance. Even when we face incorrigible blindness or ignorance, we do not need to suggest a problem of practical incommensurability of schemes of meaning (i.e., combine practical and theoretical considerations); we need only speak of the limitations of interpreters or groups of interpreters--their inability or unwillingness to extend themselves by examining and adjusting their fore-conceptions.

Up to now I have more or less skirted around, or not argued against directly, the incommensurability thesis construed as intranslatability, partly because the Davidsonian argument I use against Shusterman's ineffability thesis (in chapter 2) in effect dispenses with the idea of intranslatability, and partly because this idea seems to have faltered or never to have been maintained seriously (i.e., when pressed) by alleged advocates such as Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. Weaker versions of the incommensurability thesis, however, remain. Feyerabend, e.g., defended the thesis (against Hilary Putnam's characterization) within two qualifications:

First, incommensurability . . . is a rare event. It occurs only when the conditions of meaningfulness for the descriptive terms of one language (theory, point of

view) do not permit the use of the descriptive terms of another language (theory, point of view); mere difference of meanings does not yet lead to incommensurability . . . Secondly, incommensurable languages (theories, points of view) are not completely disconnected--there exists a subtle and interesting relation between their conditions of meaningfulness. (1987, 272)

These qualifications, with which Feyerabend intends to make the incommensurability thesis more palatable by distinguishing it from "Putnam's [uncharitable] version" (Feyerabend 1987, 272), cannot save it from attacks made from a Gadamerian or Davidsonian theory of language and meaning. Moreover, Feyerabend himself (indirectly) affirms the feature of language and the relation between language and communication which undermine the thesis--viz., the changeability of language and the primacy of interpretation over language conceived as a "particular set of rules" (Feyerabend 1993, 189).

In defending the incommensurability thesis against Putnam's inflexible attack,⁵ Feyerabend enlists for his defense precisely what makes this thesis unviable. In his response to Putnam's charge that, "To tell us that Galileo has 'incommensurable' notions and then to go on and to

⁵Feyerabend's recapitulation of Putnam's criticism is in *Farewell to Reason* (1987, 265-6). Putnam's criticism is in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981, 114).

describe them at length is totally incoherent," Feyerabend points out that this situation is "defused, for the English with which we start is not the English with which we conclude our explanation" (1987, 265 and 268). In the third edition of *Against Method*, he makes this same point about the adaptability of a translating language, and in addition, argues against the primacy of rule-governed language in understanding:

In the course of [comparing a native society and his own background, an] anthropologist may rephrase certain native ideas in English. This does not mean that English *as spoken independently of the comparison* already contains native ideas. It means that languages can be *bent* in many directions and that understanding does not depend on any particular set of rules. (1993, 188-9; Feyerabend's emphasis)

These considerations help Feyerabend defend against a misconstrual of the incommensurability thesis, but they in no way bolster the thesis. Once we abandon the idea of fixed monadic languages (or worldviews), and see that communication is not bound by conventional rules and meanings, there no longer appears to be an interesting thesis to bolster, defend, or explain. Once we accept that languages can "bend" indefinitely, and that communication does not fundamentally take place owing to the harmony of pre-established systems of communication, we appear to be

left with no notion of a semantic obstruction between languages, schemes of meanings, or worldviews.

Against this conclusion, Ramberg offers a more promising account of incommensurability. Ramberg takes a Davidsonian stance against incommensurability construed as intranslatability, but argues further that this construal misses or overstates the thesis as (implicitly) maintained by Kuhn (Ramberg 1989, 128). In accommodating Kuhn, Ramberg introduces an incommensurability thesis which includes the idea of a semantic obstruction other than intranslatability—but which nonetheless comes "precariously close to intranslatability" (128). On Ramberg's account incommensurability is not a relation between languages, but a symptom of a disruption in language that goes unnoticed. When the conventions of a language change, or are used in novel ways, incommensurability may occur; if it does, it will be "the result of an attempt to speak two (or more) languages at once" (Ramberg 1989, 133). Language-users who do not embrace, or accommodate, the changes in convention will either be stymied outright if they attempt to communicate with those who do, or find themselves in an incommensurable discourse (assuming of course that users of the new conventions are themselves unaccommodating). We could invert the position of subjects in the scenario, to emphasize the plight of the new language-user, and get the same result. Or, for that matter, we could imagine incommensurability arising in a single individual, as he

vacillates between different languages in the same sentences.⁶ What is required at all events is that someone is confused over what language he speaks, or conflates languages.

Incommensurability refers to a semantic issue because it is the product of "a breakdown of linguistic conventions" (Ramberg 1989, 130), and our continued reliance on these conventions after such a breakdown. Misunderstanding comes with such a breakdown. Intranslatability (and therewith an irremediable misunderstanding), though, does not follow; for, as Davidson puts it, "linguistic communication does not require, though it very often makes use of, rule-governed repetition [i.e., convention]" (Davidson 1984b, 279-80). After a breakdown in communication a language-user will presumably still make frequent use of conventions, including in some way those that he can no longer count on. But in order to restore communication he will need to realize or sense the inadequacy of parts of his language, and begin reflexively and critically to change it by revising his "own beliefs and assumptions" (Ramberg 1989, 140). Restoring

⁶This possibility is implicit in Nietzsche's qualification of the incommensurate predispositions described by "master morality" and "slave morality":

There are *master morality* and *slave morality*--I add immediately that in all the higher and more mixed cultures there also appear attempts at *mediation* between these two moralities, and yet more often the interpenetration and mutual misunderstanding of both, and at times they occur directly alongside each other--even in the same human being, within a *single soul*. (*Beyond Good and Evil*, section 260; Nietzsche 1966, 204)

meaning to a language--i.e., reinterpreting it--in this way is the activity described by radical interpretation or hermeneutic openness. The fact that we cannot make sense of a theoretical limit to this activity rules out the idea of permanent semantic obstruction entailed by intranslatability. On Ramberg's account, in other words, the semantic obstruction we find in incommensurable discourse can in principle always be overcome--by radical interpretation.

In showing this, Ramberg may have dissolved the incommensurability thesis he tries to accommodate. The incommensurability which results over a confusion between interlocutors who mistakenly take themselves to be speaking the same language, or in an interpreter who mistakenly believes he is constructing a coherent text, vanishes with the confusion. It does not offer the radical interpreter a special obstruction in his attempts to understand a text, or an interlocutor with whom he is attempting discourse. He might after all experience a harder time trying to translate a set of utterances governed by conventions which he knows he has no understanding of.

Ramberg himself is prepared to "do without the concept."⁷ That we *should* do without the concept would seem

⁷When faced with remarks similar to the ones in the foregoing paragraph, Ramberg responded with this note: "I agree--a description along the lines I suggest of the typical sorts of cases of incommensurability collapsed. I can do without the concept entirely" (Personal note from Bjørn Ramberg; July 23, 1993). After a few more gracious comments, Ramberg asked, "Will the problem really go away?" (same note). The

to follow if we can, but only under a facile application of Occam's razor. Even though we can explain the sorts of confusion liable to occur in a fragmented language simply as cases of semantic misunderstanding, such a straightforward description minimizes the obstinacy of these cases, and the extent of the fragmentation that causes them. We could describe any discourse where misunderstanding occurs as semantically fragmented--momentarily at the point of misunderstanding. Incommensurability in Ramberg's sense refers to discourse which is fragmented along radically divergent interests and beliefs. A language-user in such discourse does not merely mistake what convention is being used, and then use the right one; he must adapt a convention, and learn to use it in a singular or novel way. He might, as I suggest in the previous paragraph, experience more difficulty learning the conventions of a foreign language than discovering, and reinterpreting, discrepant conventions in his own. This scenario, though, is not especially troublesome. The difficulty of mastering a foreign language is beside the point insofar as it arises from demands placed on one's memory by the sheer number of conventions to be learned and interrelated. This difficulty is merely a contingent feature of the efficiency and capacity of one's memory. Mastery of a foreign language

problem he refers to is, I believe, the problem Gadamer raises concerning "the multiplicity of languages" (see the first paragraph of this chapter).

poses a *theoretical* problem when it requires one to adjust one's thinking about the world, which happens when foreign conventions presuppose commitments radically divergent from one's own. And this disruption in one's way of thinking, I take it, is mainly what the incommensurability thesis is meant to bring out.

Confusion over what language one is speaking guarantees and prolongs incommensurability. We should extend the concept, however, to cover cases where an interpreter realizes that he is missing certain conventions, and is unable to discover why. The interpreter in such cases is perhaps confused, but as over a puzzle to which he cannot find a solution--not over whether there is a problem. Ramberg in effect extends the concept in this way, when he describes "incommensurability . . . [as] a signal of a conflict of prejudgements and preconceptions":

[I]t is only through conflict, through disruption, that it is possible 'to become conscious of these prejudices as such'. We remain unaware of our basic assumptions until faced with someone who does not share them.

(1989, 140)

As a hermeneutic signal, the confusion over what language is being spoken is less relevant than what the confusion reveals when it is discovered--namely, different languages that are difficult to sort out and reconcile; and, as Ramberg suggests, this difficulty points to the underlying conflict of prejudices that makes communication problematic.

So long as the linguistic confusion remains intact, there is no signal, and certainly not of "a conflict of prejudgements and preconceptions" of which we are not yet aware. Even when we become aware that something is wrong in our discourse, there may not be a signal (a signal of what?). There is only a signal when we begin to become aware of semantic fractures in our discourse (though our awareness may not come in so many words, i.e., as an instance of hermeneutic reflection). We only have a signal in the sense that Ramberg appears to mean in the passage above when we become aware that these fractures can be traced to "a conflict of prejudgements and preconceptions." We can therefore describe incommensurability as a signal even when those involved in the discourse are not blind or confused.

Translators who adopt a Christian interpretation of Dionysus' charge of *hybris* at line 1347 of the *Bacchae*, or interpreters who see Pentheus' pride as a sin or moral failing, have made an incommensurate text, and apparently are blind or confused. On the other hand, Samuel Johnson's discourse on pride and forgiveness is incommensurate with the section of the *Ethics* to which it alludes, and yet Johnson is hardly unaware of the conflict between the central ethical motifs of the great-souled man passage of the *Ethics* and the Sermon on the Mount. Rather his inviolable (and existentially intense) commitment to

Christianity defines how far he is prepared to accommodate a Greek conception of ethics.⁵

Semantic accommodation need not involve consent to principles which violate one's own, or to the elimination of disagreement; as Davidson argues, "its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible" by creating some common foundation on which particular disagreements may be had (1984a, 196-7). But it may be said for Johnson that no precise line can be drawn between the large scale agreement or accommodation which "is forced on us . . . if we want to understand others" (Davidson 1984a, 197) and particular disagreements which work against the spirit of this aim. That is, there are scant theoretical considerations to make us confident that a particular difference of opinion does not really point to a misunderstanding of some sort. Wherever our common sense, or knowledge of the world, constrains accommodation or charity and describes the other

⁵The existential dimension of Johnson's commitment may be seen in the seriousness with which he maintained his conviction that "[n]o man can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation" (Boswell 1980, 950). There are numerous references in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* to the singularity of Johnson's own horror of death and uncertainty of salvation. Boswell's entry for 12 June, 1784, gives a sense of the vehemence of Johnson's conviction, and reveals one of the unique theological considerations behind his anxiety:

'That [God] is infinitely good, as far as the perfection of his nature will allow, I certainly believe; but it is necessary for good upon the whole, that individuals shou'd be punished. As to an individual, therefore, he is not infinitely good; and as I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned.' (looking dismally.) DR. ADAMS. 'What do you mean by damned?' JOHNSON. (passionately and loudly) 'Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly.' (1296)

as in error, we find ourselves with this problem. To understand the other as far as possible, we need to make most of her beliefs, or the sentences held by her as true, come out true. But we cannot give her epistemic carte blanche without creating confusion in our own language. Johnson's "solution," in Rambler 185, is partly to make an Aristotelian conception of pride come out false where it violates the precepts of Sermon on the Mount (i.e., limit the scope of semantic confrontation or *aufhebung*), and partly to shift his discussion entirely from this problem (i.e., avoid confrontation). Johnson may thereby treat Aristotle's conception of greatness of soul uncharitably. But if there is little theoretical guidance when we try to decide whether our imputation of error brings about misunderstanding--instead of, merely, disagreement (it may do both)--we will need to involve ourselves wholeheartedly in our attempts to understand the other, and will thereby risk confusion in our own way of seeing the world. I suspect that Johnson's singular reflexivity and perceptiveness would continually remind him of the risk to his theological/existential commitments. The hermeneutic ideal of a theoretically unguided *aufhebung* which purports to generate new meaning by letting confusion loose on one's deepest (and dearest) commitments would be anathema to Johnson--whose life frequently was already made miserable by sceptical and existential doubts. It is surely also

anathema to any of us in some area of commitment, which is why we need to regard it as an ideal.

Feyerabend gives a clear, if extreme, description of the contrast between interpretive resistance and accommodation, or between the sort of "guided exchange" which (partly) determines Johnson's Rambler 185 and the hermeneutic ideal of "an open exchange":

A guided exchange adopts a well-specified tradition and accept[s] only those responses that correspond to its standards. If one party has not yet become a participant . . . he will be badgered, persuaded, 'educated' until he does--and then the exchange begins. A rational debate . . . is a special case of a guided exchange. In the case of an open exchange the participants get immersed into each other's ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving to such an extent that their ideas, perceptions, world-views may be entirely changed--they become different people participating in a new and different tradition. (Feyerabend 1993, 269)

Feyerabend's claim that "the participants [of an open exchange] get immersed into each other's ways of thinking, feeling [and], perceiving" shows that he does not intend for them to leap out of the prejudicial structure of understanding, or leave their fore-conceptions aside, as a condition of such an exchange. He does not appear to want them to abandon their traditions, except insofar as these are theoretically "well-specified." But (the rest of his

sentence) his claim that "their world-views may [thereby] be entirely changed--they become different people participating in a new and different tradition" would over-dramatize any exchange, and is either gross hyperbole or sheer nonsense. Feyerabend's implication that we cannot carry over criteria of rationality in an open exchange is slightly more plausible--but as one-sided as the counter-position that we can know in advance that certain of these criteria will prove to be indispensable in every exchange. Feyerabend contends that "there is no logic [in an open exchange] though new forms of logic may emerge in its course" (1993, 269; my emphasis), and accordingly describes "an open exchange . . . [as] part of an as yet unspecified and unspecifiable practice" (1993, 269).

While Feyerabend accepts the fore-structure of understanding (and construes it, with Gadamer, as tradition), as a condition of openness he prescribes that we root out of our tradition (a) any well-specified approaches, and (b) any theory or "general terms" which purport to describe interactions between traditions (1993, 269). Regarding (a), Feyerabend's prescription is similar to Gadamer's argument that we curb the methodological orientation of the Enlightenment and modern science, where it extends beyond normal science into the life-world. Our methodological practices have, as Gadamer suggests, impeded openness and thereby alienated us from much of our own tradition. Feyerabend's first prescription, (a),

accordingly is salutary. But his second prescription, (b), describes a fanciful ideal if taken seriously.

Before seeing why this is so, we should first note that (b) discriminates unfairly against theoretical commitments. For Feyerabend, theoretical conceptions and judgements are dispensable (indeed, must be dispensed with in open exchanges), while some configuration of preconceptions and prejudgements is not (at least as a starting point in understanding). Feyerabend fears the intransigence of theory. But it is an open question whether, in a given exchange, a piece of theory will obscure understanding more than an unseen particular commitment.⁹ At the outset of an exchange there is no reason to purge our understanding of theory, and thereby deprive ourselves of all general footholds and lifelines as we build common foundations; nor is there any reason to suppose that we would be more successful than Descartes in his analogous and similarly fanciful venture.¹⁰ In practice we can no more suspend the totality of our theoretical commitments than our preconceptions--especially since many of the latter turn out

⁹For instance, a modern interpreter of Attic drama is liable to experience less trouble accommodating the violation of his physical theory represented by the existence of gods than the violation of many of his moral sensibilities and preconceptions embodied in the Greek life-world which created these gods.

In the first fifteen sections of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche (alongside his larger discussion) provides a sustained discussion of the sorts of problems which crop up in our attempts to understand the Greek life-world(s). Parts of his discussion (in particular section 3) inform the last part of the remark I make above.

¹⁰I.e., in his *Discourse on Method and Meditations*.

to be theoretical, and all, or virtually all, the former at one time were preconceptions. If we commit ourselves to the *general principle* of purifying exchanges with the other of general commitments (a self-refuting commitment?), should we not expect similarly puritan behaviour of the other? The resulting foundations we build would not be impoverished if we could discover theoretical principles in the exchange. But how exactly do we get started if both parties are diligently coy at the outset--and remain so? Feyerabend need not, and cannot plausibly, oppose to one another the ideals of guided and open exchanges. He would do better to emphasize the finitude (over the freedom) of interpreters--and therewith the fact that all interpretation is guided. Admittedly, his distinction is not absolute, as it only rules out, (a), methodologically and, (b), theoretically guided open exchanges.¹¹ But in ruling out (b) it is nonetheless extreme and naive.

Feyerabend's distinction suggests an area of considerable neglect in Gadamer's hermeneutical project. Gadamer clearly does not want to restrict theory in general--only the misapplication and dominance of methodology. In opposing the ideal of an enriching tradition-rooted understanding to impoverishing methodologies, though, Gadamer emphasizes the preconceptions and prejudgements which the fore-structure of understanding describes at the

¹¹(a) is of course a subclass of (b); methodology is a theoretical apparatus, but not all theoretical commitments are methodological.

expense of explicitly theoretical parts of understanding; in particular he tends to ignore certain principles of logic which are neither as intrusive (or alienating), nor as dispensable, as methodologies outside the practices of normal science. But to solve the riddle of "the multiplicity of languages" we need to turn to limiting concepts and principles in logical theory. Rather than attempt defending a list of these, I will resist Feyerabend's claim "that there is no logic" in an open exchange simply with the principle or law of excluded middle--which is that every sentence is either true or not true. At the risk of committing an inverted version of the sin of which I accuse Feyerabend, I propose that we need to preserve this principle when we describe interactions between, or within, traditions; without it, I argue in the next chapter, openness to incommensurate interpretations (of texts and other phenomena) leads to problems of relativism (other than intranslatability) which Gadamer does not deal with. To avoid sin or a conspicuous one-sidedness I concede that we cannot make the principle of excluded middle *indispensable*. In some area of discourse we may need to revise or abandon it. But I follow Quine when he suggests that this possibility is remote, and that the returns for undertaking a deviant logic had better be good.¹²

¹²In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," Quine argues that even the law of excluded middle is not "immune to revision" (1961, 48). Balancing this acquiescence, in later pieces he argues on pragmatic grounds against the

In this chapter I regarded incommensurability construed as intranslatability as a dogma of relativism. Any number of leading subscribers to the incommensurability thesis may not construe it as involving intranslatability (Ramberg 1989, 125); but that may be because their positions on this thesis have not been adequately worked out. Feyerabend in any event commits himself to the idea of partial intranslatability, even while redefining or qualifying his position (viz., the passage I quote on pp. 86-7), though his ideal of openness appears to dissolve the concept. Ramberg's construal picks out what is worth saving of the incommensurability thesis; but since the semantic obstruction he describes is impermanent, I will drop "incommensurable discourse" for "incommensurate discourse"-- to avoid confusion.

In the next chapter I connect incommensurate discourse and indeterminacy of meaning. Indeterminacy produces a resilient species of relativism, when it leads to the sort of incommensurate discourse that involves irresolvable conflicts of interpretation. Ideally we settle such conflicts by rejecting one or more contrary or contradictory interpretations; and when we settle matters, at most we save one interpretation. To many theorists this prospect is unsavoury when applied to culturally produced meaning (I leave aside the issue of whether the truth-claims of normal

likelihood of our ever having good reasons to suspend this law. See *Philosophy of Logic* (1986), 83-9, and *Pursuit of Truth* (1992), 90-3.

science escape this classification). Aesthetic and literary meaning in particular make the prospect of satisfying the demands of noncontradiction and noncontraity¹³ hard to swallow. What these theorists hold or assume is indeterminacy of the sorts of meaning which they feel should be left free of the constraints of ordinary or canonical logic. Not surprisingly, many theorists who accept the ideal of settling or logically constraining disputes in literary interpretation are loathe to admit indeterminacy of meaning. And those who reject this ideal are, or should be, willing either to abandon or fundamentally to revise logic. In chapter 5, I oppose both groups of theorists. I argue for indeterminacy of meaning (I could hardly refuse at this point, given that I rely on Gadamerian and Davidsonian theories of meaning to attack intranslatability), and for the need to retain the law of excluded middle and to make adjustments elsewhere.

¹³By "noncontraity" I simply mean to extend the law of noncontradiction, which is that any assertion of contradictory sentences is false (i.e., for any sentence *p*, '*p* and *-p*' is necessarily false). So, noncontraity would say that any assertion of two or more contrary sentences is false.

Relativism (2): Indeterminacy and Excluded Middle

The indeterminacy thesis sheds some light on a central issue of communication. If we construe the concept of language as a system of conventional meanings and rules, this thesis highlights Davidson's point about the dispensability and insufficiency of such a concept for explicating understanding. It does so by emphasizing cases where we need to interpret outside conventional confines to obtain or construct meaning, and our ability to do so. We can take from this that indeterminacy involves the primacy of interpretation over language construed in the foregoing sense. But we should not make much of this inference. Indeterminacy, like language, is a contingent feature of our hermeneutic condition: of our epistemic need to interpret to understand meaning, and of the vicissitudes of interpretation. Given indeterminacy, it is true that language is neither sufficient nor indispensable. But interpretation would be primary in any event. Even if everyone happened, through miraculous pre-established harmony, to interpret utterances in precisely the same way all the time, so that no utterance ever attracted or had

imposed on it variant meanings, interpretation would remain indispensable--though determinate.¹

This scenario brings to light the implausibility of a fully determinate language. One thing indeterminacy accordingly describes is the fact that we never apply *exactly* the same language, i.e., construed not in the sense above but as the actual language we speak in any situation (Ramberg 1989, 90). Understood in this way, as a description of our plight as language-users, indeterminacy is difficult to resist--short of supposing a pre-established system of communication which disallows the emergence of alternative languages.

Having always to communicate across (greatly or slightly) different languages would be an unfortunate plight were partial or wholesale intranslatability a genuine problem. But that we never apply exactly the same language does not raise this problem. For we can (as suggested in chapter 4) always achieve a more complete fusion of

¹This scenario says nothing of the adequacy of conventions, since speakers may only rarely recur to the same utterances; they may, much as we do, continually be saying something (subtly or dramatically) new. If we evolve the scenario to make everyone less innovative, and have them rely on conventions exclusively (once they discover these), we will appear to have collapsed interpretation into language--but only coincidentally. We *in effect* will have made conventions sufficient, but not indispensable. If everyone relied exclusively on conventions that would not preclude the possibility of someone meaning something different by a convention, and someone else understanding her intent--developing a "passing theory" (Davidson 1986, 442). Among these perfectly conventional language-users, conventions would be indispensable in practice only. Moreover, they would only be sufficient in practice, since anyone who would understand the innovating language-user's intent would not be able to rely on the suspended convention.

disparate linguistic horizons; no particular meaning of another language is in principle unrecoverable in our own. For this reason, the plight described by the indeterminacy thesis is not one of being incapable of constructing valid interpretations, or being prevented from having "knowledge in interpretation" (Hirsch 1976, 1). I would accordingly argue that E. D. Hirsch's efforts to resist relativism of interpretation should not be applied to making meaning determinate (1976, 1); he should, rather, begin his argument for "knowledge in interpretation" by appealing to the commensurability of languages.

Beyond this appeal remains (seemingly) the problem of irresolvable conflicts of interpretation, which I referred to at the end of the last chapter. Indeterminacy of meaning appears to deprive us of the sort of well-formed sentences we need to apply the law of excluded middle. This would concern Hirsch because he holds that the (fundamental) logic of inquiry "is the same for all subject matters" (1976, 155), and is a precondition of the health of any discipline (1976, 151-4). Joseph Margolis, on the other hand, is unconcerned. Margolis advocates waiving the law of excluded middle, and revising fundamental principles of logic to suit the demands of inquiry (presumably also for the health of the affected disciplines). For Margolis, indeterminacy of meaning of literary texts demands such revision. I will take issue with Margolis on this point, but first I will try

to accommodate, and take issue with, some of the claims Hirsch makes in defense of determinacy.

As noted Hirsch fixes the very possibility of hermeneutic knowledge on the determinacy of meaning. Hirsch argues that successful interpretation requires reproducibility of meaning (i.e., that an interpreter reproduce a text's meaning--though not its linguistic form), and that reproducibility in turn requires determinacy of meaning. Hirsch defines determinacy as, jointly, (i) self-identity and (ii) immutability or changelessness. Meaning which does not have (i) and (ii) cannot be reproduced, and therefore cannot "be understood or interpreted" (Hirsch 1967, 44). Hirsch's argument depends on both (i) and (ii). To focus discussion, I will take issue with the requirement of determinacy through (ii), which if it can be waived disables the whole argument.

To do so (in a roundabout way), I draw attention to Hirsch's distinction between meaning (which is permanent) and significance (which is variable), on which he leans to defend determinacy. Hirsch regards his distinction as a means of satisfying the intuition which most of us have that meaning is independent or alien, "something meant by an implied author or speaker who is not ourselves" (1976, 6). As seen, Gadamer accommodates this intuition without abandoning his holistic theory of understanding or the so-called hermeneutic circle (chapter 2, 18-22, and chapter 3, 49-54 and 61-7). He does so by construing the holistic

constraint of understanding or language as dynamic and open-ended. The apparent disjunction in experience between (alien) meaning and our reception of meaning disappears when we recognize the temporal structure of understanding or the network of meanings in which we fit new meanings. The matter can be put simply by saying that meaning exists exclusively in such a network or language, and languages are commensurable. Hirsch by contrast describes the process of accommodating unfamiliar meaning as a rupture in the hermeneutic circle; since we can accommodate unfamiliar meaning, he says that the "magic circle is breakable" (1976, 6).

The hermeneutic circle as understood by Gadamer would indeed be breakable by the *reductio* just hinted at if it constructed semantic barriers or entailed semantic limits. But Hirsch has misconstrued Gadamer's position (apparently by understanding Gadamer's acceptance of the hermeneutic circle apart from his theory of language). Hirsch takes Gadamer's position that we cannot understand outside our historical horizons to mean that these horizons are semantically fixed, and that within them original meaning is theoretically unrecoverable (Hirsch 1976, 253-5). Hirsch accordingly is puzzled by Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons:

once it is admitted that the interpreter can adopt a fused perspective different from his own contemporary

one, then it is admitted in principle that he can break out of his own perspective. (1976, 254)

Of course an interpreter never really breaks out of his perspective, as Hirsch himself recognizes when he acknowledges that "meaning is simply meaning-for-an-interpreter" (1976, 79); an interpreter, rather, understands a new perspective within his own expanded horizons, which is what Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons describes.

In *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), Hirsch identified meaning exclusively with authorial intention, or as he would later (more accurately) say, with "constructions where the interpreter is governed by his conception of the author's will" (1976, 79). This later formulation suggests a problem with the principle (of authorial intention) which it reformulates. On what basis do we distinguish constructions "governed by [an interpreter's] conception of the author's will" (meaning) from those guided by other considerations (significance)? The meaning/significance distinction is supposed to uphold a distinction between unchanging and variable meanings. But once we see that meanings are constructed (the contrast would be the idea that they are immediately apprehended or simply taken in²), we may wonder whether interpreters guided by concepts of what an author

²As Hegel would suggest, in some sense this might also be true. We would, however, have to understand "immediate" to refer strictly to a temporal concept. We could then say that one sometimes constructs instantaneously, though never unguided by preconceptions or without the mediation of the past.

intends construct more durably than those guided by, say, an attitude of suppressing or subverting transgressions of orthodoxy, or on the other hand of reinterpreting orthodoxy to make it richer, more relevant, or more appealing. If a text is obscure, perhaps interpreters who impose on it the clarifications of a widely held, or conversely highly idiosyncratic, scheme will prevail--depending I suppose on whether the deciding community leans towards edification, transparency, continuity, shareability, or suggestiveness, originality, eccentricity, disruption, complexity, difficulties. If a text on the other hand is clear, a community's leanings or approach may be different. Hirsch would refuse the status of meaning to constructions guided by any of the general attitudes, approaches, leanings suggested above. Such commitments *and the interpreters' particular application of them* after all are variable, and meaning is supposed to be unchanging. For the same reason, though, it turns out that Hirsch's reformulation of authorial intent will not let it do its work--of providing an unchanging or stable condition of meaning. If we could make sense of the ultra-realist notion of an original meaning which is somehow independent of interpretation (including the author's if we are to be strict), we would have such a condition. But once we give up such a notion in favour of "constructions where the interpreter is governed by his conception of the author's will," we also give up the possibility of an unchanging condition of meaning, or, more

simply put, of unchanging meaning. This is because the authorial intent/original meaning commitment is as variable as other interpretative commitments, and because particular applications of it will, like applications of any ideal, vary.

In *Aims of Interpretation* (1976), Hirsch extends his earlier definition of meaning to include "constructions where authorial will is partly or totally disregarded" (79). Hirsch recognizes that his construal of original meaning as "meaning-for-an-interpreter," as an interpreter's construction, opens the door to competing constructions; what he fails to recognize is that construing meaning in terms of interpretive construction also opens the door to indeterminacy of meaning, and thereby collapses the meaning/significance distinction.

Hirsch opens the door wider, or looks through further, eight years later in his paper "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted" (1984).³ In this paper, Hirsch declares himself to be "now very much in agreement with Gadamer's idea that application can be part of meaning" (212). What Hirsch is saying he now agrees with is that the concept of meaning may include future applications of an author's intended text which exceed its author's intentions. This

³Hirsch has more recently written on the issues of applicability which he raises in "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," in a paper called "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory" (*New Literary History*, 1994, 25, 549-67). This later paper restates, more sparingly, the discussion of his 1984 paper, which seems to provide Hirsch's fullest current position on meaning and interpretation.

means, Hirsch observes, that he rejects his "earlier claim that future applications of meaning, each being different, must belong to the domain of significance" (1984, 210). Rather than abandon the meaning/significance distinction, though, Hirsch creates a greater area of overlap between its two terms by splitting, as he says, "the realm of application between meaning and significance" (1984, 215). He does this with a principle of exemplification: meaning entails only those applications which exemplify authorial intent. What Hirsch wants to acknowledge is "the wide [indeterminate?] scope of the original textual intention" (1984, 209). The scope of original intent, wide or narrow, follows from this claim: "a speech-intention directed to a listener is always, to that minimal extent, a future-directed intention" (1984, 206). This scope is wide because we cannot foresee all future applications that fall within it. There are in other words areas of meaning which remain inexplicit (or, as we could say, indeterminate): "A future-directed intention is an explicit plan with areas of inexplicitness" (1984, 206).

From this, it would seem to follow that meaning, as it evolves in unpredictable ways through future applications, changes. Hirsch wants to resist this inference, and needs to if he is to retain his distinction. He does so by taking "a more generous and capacious view of what remains the same" in meaning (1986, 210). On this view, meaning remains the same even when it changes in unpredictable ways, so long

as these changes are "exemplary and not unique" (1984, 209). If we were to try to make sense of Hirsch's revised concept of meaning, then, we would need to make sense of a distinction between exemplary and unique meaning, which purportedly establishes the meaning/significance distinction on a sounder footing. It might be tempting to try if we could construe "unique meaning" simply as unrelated, or wholly unique, meaning; but this construal would altogether dissolve Hirsch's notion of significance--which, he says, "has not changed at all" (1984, 216)--and, moreover, a meaning/significance distinction which remains interesting. Insofar as significance continues to describe applications of a text which change its meaning, Hirsch has no way to distinguish in his theory between exemplifying meanings and significance--other than to insist, cryptically, that exemplifying applications change meaning in a way which leaves meaning unchanged, or, unhelpfully, that they remain "bounded by original intention" (1984, 215), which is the concept he is trying to clarify.

Hirsch's attempts to stave off indeterminacy fail. His concession concerning application in "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," though, is not the cause; it is not as striking as his earlier concession in *Aims of Interpretation*, where he accepted the holistic principle that meaning is always an interpreter's construction (which entails the idea of application) and the practical corollary of this principle, that an interpreter's constructions need

not be guided "by his conception of the author's will."⁴ In his later piece, Hirsch falls back on the idea of authorial intention insofar as he regards meaning as unchanging (i.e., insofar as he retains his meaning/significance distinction). To stave off the indeterminacy he finds in Gadamer's notion of historically effected consciousness (which Hirsch dubs the principle of historicity), Hirsch reaffirms his idea of intentionality in what he calls the principle of historicity. This principle states that "an original communicative intent . . . can determine forever the permanent, unchanging features of meaning," and further, that "meaning can be stable only if it has been stabilized by a historical intention [i.e., by this original intent]" (1984, 216). Hirsch provides a principle of exemplification to reign in particular constructions or applications of this original intent. With little more than a proliferation of principles, however, we are back at the beginning of the problem which Hirsch has tried to solve. The only access to original intent is through the constructions of some language, and languages and constructions vary in unforeseeable ways. We do not need to reiterate that this

⁴In *Aims of Interpretation*, Hirsch qualifies his expanded definition of meaning with the explicitly ethical claim that "authorial intention should be the norm of interpretation" (1976, 8; Hirsch's emphasis). In "On Justifying Interpretive Norms" (1984), Hirsch declines "to justify a particular ethical norm of interpretation," since his views "about ethical relativism are in flux" (89; Hirsch's emphasis). He provides a pragmatic justification of the exclusivity of the "intentionalist claim for the professional practice of interpretation" (91), which, however, does not advance the case for determinacy of meaning.

is only a cause for pessimism if a case can be made for incommensurability of languages, nor the reasons why this case cannot be made.

If, as suggested earlier, language-users never apply exactly the same (actual) language, indeterminacy abounds; yet it may be minimal between interpreters' respective languages at various points of an exchange, or throughout, and may grow more minimal, or increase, as the exchange goes on. Meaning may not be identical at all points, nor unchanging. But communication does not collapse without these requirements. Hirsch's ideal of unchanging meaning is therefore unnecessary.

There is a residual problem. If we reject Hirsch's ideal of determinate, unchanging meaning, we are left with his concern that incompatible interpretations of the same text may be true, which seems to collapse the concept of truth, and therewith the possibility of correct or valid interpretation. This concern appears to be well-founded, especially when the text in question is foreign to our way of seeing the world. When, as Gadamer suggests, we explicate an unfamiliar meaning "within [our] own horizons within [our] own concepts," we give it "a new form," even when we defend it against, and so adjust, our own way of thinking (1976c, 94). The sorts of adjustments we can make are various, and not always compatible with one another. For this reason, a single interpreter might within himself arrive at competing interpretations of what he takes to be

the same text (I suggest this point in the sentence to which I affix footnote 6 in chapter 4), or compete with other interpreters. Moreover, there may ultimately be no way to decide which adjustments and interpretation to favour or reject, and thus seemingly no way to settle the impasse he creates within himself, or with other interpreters. I think we should learn to live with the idea of such impasses, even though we should try to make progress toward resolving particular disputes, or determining whether there is a dispute. But if we accept in our theory the idea that at times nothing favours, or could favour, any one interpretation of incompatible interpretations, we need to accept the consequences of this idea, or describe it in terms that let us see what remains theoretically possible in our interpretative practices. We need in other words to decide where our practice, or description thereof, is legitimate, and where it amounts to self-deception.

Of the many ways out of the foregoing problem some may be dispensed with immediately--namely, any relativism which entirely dispenses with the concept of truth. There is no need to rehearse at length (not that much length is required) the argument from self-contradiction that is typically directed against any such extreme relativism. It suffices to say that without a concept of truth we are no longer entitled to make any claims whatever, including any claims which would support relativist positions, or undermine positions contrary.

Joseph Margolis advocates a relativist solution, but from a position which allows a more subtle (which is not saying much) way out of the problem. Instead of dispensing with the concept of truth, Margolis argues that we need to develop a three-valued logic, which would add, to 'true' and 'not-true', a third distinct truth-value, say, 'indeterminate'. This third truth-value would take up the slack which indeterminacy seems to permit between the two truth-values of ordinary logic. Margolis call his position *robust relativism*, to distinguish it from relativist positions which cannot resist "certain well-known fatal paradoxes of self-reference" (Margolis 1991, 8). These less robust relativisms make themselves vulnerable by restricting or suspending all truth-values. By contrast, robust relativism, as suggested above, merely restricts the application of true and not-true, by including a third truth-value, which (not incidentally) changes the function of the first two (we shall look at this particular point more closely below). Margolis at all events claims that the robust relativist does not abandon the very concept of truth; instead he "merely makes a formal selection among possible truth-values" (Margolis 1991, 10). By not simply abandoning, but replacing, the two truth-values of ordinary logic with the three truth-values of a deviant logic, the robust relativist makes himself immune to all the usual charges against relativism, unless "the mere advocacy of

many-valued truth-values is already self-contradictory" (Margolis 1991, 10).

What advocacy of a three-valued (or many-valued⁵) logic lets the robust relativist do is reasonably accommodate "truth-claims that, on a bivalent model, would yield inconsistency and self-contradiction" (Margolis 1991, 10); he may do so because (perhaps instead we should say, when) on his alternative three-valued model these truth-claims are consistent (Margolis appears simply to assume that any truth-claims found inconsistent by ordinary logic will be redeemed by a deviant logic, which would make that deviant logic pretty vacuous). What is relativistic about this accommodation is that by it "incongruent judgments or claims may be jointly validated" (Margolis 1995, 4). What makes it reasonable for Margolis is that "the relevance of consistency, coherence, and noncontradiction does not, as such, implicate a bivalent logic" (Margolis 1995, 4).

The benefit of a three-valued logic for Margolis is that we may reasonably welcome (many, all, of?) the logically incompatible interpretations to which indeterminacy of meaning potentially gives rise. This tolerance presumably would instill greater confidence in areas of inquiry where interpretations we favour are cognitively no more impressive than ones we are required to

⁵Margolis appears to leave open the possibility of a proliferation of truth-values, since at one point in a recent article he refers in one breath to "three-valued and many-valued logics" (1995, 4; my emphasis), which suggests that he distinguishes between the two.

reject on pain of inconsistency. In this respect, Margolis' relativism would appear to help Gadamer's efforts to make a clearing for the truth-claims of the life-world, and of any truth-claims which do not fit into a methodological scheme. But the cost of this help may be exorbitant. Along with interpretations which are as impressive as the ones we favour, but contrary, the sort of deviant logic Margolis envisions would seem to make room for the least impressive interpretations. As a particular criticism of Margolis' proposal, though, I think this consideration should be put aside. Insofar as one can imagine a three-valued logic working, I suppose one must imagine it excluding some truth-claims. Beyond this (bit of charity), we need to recognize that what is problematic in this regard for Margolis remains problematic for us if we decline his proposal and yet maintain, as we intend, the indeterminacy thesis. What is uniquely costly about Margolis' proposal of a three-valued logic (let alone a logic more proliferating) is the change in function of truth-values, of negation, and consequently, of truth itself it brings. As Quine points out, the notation '~' or 'not' ceases "to be recognizable as negation" (1986, 81) in a three-valued logic, and "the terminology 'true', 'false', and 'negation' carries over into it from our logic only by partial analogy" (Quine 1986, 84). At this juncture, I would impute to robust relativists (but not to all dissident logicians, some of whom after all may envisage their logic as a provisional or limited

experimental tool without truth implications) the charges of incoherence which Margolis insists properly accrue to all other cognitive relativists. For it does not appear that a three-valued logic, whatever it provides, offers a concept of truth on which to fall back once the law of excluded middle has failed. That it may, as Quine concedes, be a genuine logic" (1986, 84) is beside the point; what we need to consider is whether it preserves, or even begins to refer to, truth. This is an issue which Margolis ignores.

In this respect Quine is perhaps more helpful. He suggests that our defense of classical negation relies on the very thing, 'not', the (assertive) dissident logician denies, and that therefore we should "give the dissident his due" and "face up to the [possible?] rejection" of excluded middle (1986, 84-5). Here I resist Quine, and my decision near the end of chapter 4 not to be "one-sided"--by holding to the indispensability of excluded middle. The dissident logician also relies on what he denies, whether he intends to or not. In this, we have something in common in our exchange; this much foundation, whatever is brought out by our mutual reliance on classical negation, we have in common. The law of excluded middle would seem thereby to come. The fact that negation is an indispensable feature of excluded middle obviously does not bring the law. But let us assume that the dissident logician also needs sentences and connectives, 'v' or 'or' at least. The law of excluded middle presumably follows. The fact that classical negation

must be relied on by its defenders is hardly surprising if it is indispensable; that would be the peculiar feature of any term or principle which is indispensable. That its defenders have to rely on it would only be a genuine liability if its detractors could avoid it. Dissident and ordinary logicians alike, however, are in the same position with regard to negation. Its collapse in three-valued logic is a *reductio* whereby we have to give up the idea that such a logic concerns truth.⁶ The robust relativist's alethic strategy therefore fails. The new conception of truth he intends to fall back on is nowhere to be found.⁷

Even if we could intelligibly have recourse to Margolis' pragmatic relativist proposal, we have no need for it, and there are two interrelated *pragmatic* reasons to avoid it. We have no need for Margolis' proposal because we can handle the problem of logically incompatible interpretations which the indeterminacy thesis permits with

⁶Quine shows this collapse, though with the contrary intent of showing the dispensability of excluded middle. He suggests that we call the deviant (so-called) truth-values 1, 2, 3, and runs the following *reductio*:

value 1 is truth, and negation is to lead from the values 2 and 3 to 1 and from 1 to 2 or 3. But, if negation is to be a truth function at all, we must make up our mind: it must lead from 1 always to 2 or always to 3. Then, however, we forfeit the law of double negation. For, say negation leads from 1 always to 2; then double negation leads from 3 to 1 to 2 rather than back to 3. Thus we nominally salvage the law of excluded middle only by forfeiting double negation. Try what we will, three-valued logic turns out true to form: it is a rejection of the classical true-false dichotomy, or of classical negation. (1986, 84)

⁷For a more comprehensive discussion of the law of excluded middle, and a different set of considerations and arguments why it cannot be abrogated, see Raymond D. Bradley's *Logic, Physics & Metaphysics: An Inaugural Address* (1967).

a much simpler proposal within the thesis itself, i.e., without suggesting problems of logic. I will state this simpler alternative below. The two pragmatic reasons are Quine's. The first he directs at the complexity and "cumbersomeness of three-valued logic" when it revises or abandons negation and other truth-functions:

Alongside 'not', which sends truths into falsehoods, falsehoods into truths, and now limbo into limbo, there would be a truth function that sends truths into limbo, limbo into falsehoods, and falsehoods into truths; also three more one-place truth functions, playing out the combinations--as contrasted with a single one, negation, in two-valued logic. When we move out to two-place truth functions (conjunction, alternation, and their derivations), proliferation runs amok.

(1992, 92)

This sort of proliferation, and consequent unwieldy complexity, at the level of logic is behind a second, related consideration of Quine's, which he calls "the maxim of minimum mutilation" (1986, 85). One of the objectives of this maxim (or pragmatic strategy) is to solve problems in our total understanding of reality at the level where they arise, so to leave deeper areas, i.e., areas which have a more far-reaching influence, untouched. The maxim of minimum mutilation appears to be a passive version of the procedure Quine noted in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" of continuing "the common-sense expedient of swelling ontology

to simplify theory," which "has as its objective the simplicity of laws" (1961, 45). The ontological items Quine describes in this early paper include physical objects, forces, and "the abstract entities which are the substance of mathematics--ultimately classes and classes of classes and so on up" (45). The spirit in which we posit these items of ontology should stay us from tampering with our logic in order to make sense of the messy area of semantics and interpretation, and so such awkward things as meanings and texts. As Quine reminds us, our "classical logic of truth functions and quantification is free of paradox, and . . . a paragon of clarity, elegance, and efficiency" (1986, 85). So, if problems of the kind we have looked at arise in semantics and interpretation (including the paradox of irreconcilable and correct interpretations), we should follow Quine's advice over a similar choice: We should try to resolve them where they arose, "and not lay fairer fields waste" (1986, 85).

On this advice, Hirsch's intention to resolve the problem of validity of irreconcilable interpretations by denying indeterminacy of meaning would seem to recommend itself over Margolis' deeper ambitions. Whether in some sense it does, though, is irrelevant, since its weaknesses are interminable. Hirsch's and Margolis' contrary attitudes to validity in interpretation should be put aside. Perhaps what should also be put aside is something they share: a spectacular but limited sense of the relativistic drama of

indeterminacy. The practical consequences (the allowances of misunderstandings) of the indeterminacy thesis may be dramatic, and the thesis appears far from demure the closer it nears questions of logic. But if we accept the full implications (the full drama) of indeterminacy at the level of texts, or of whatever other phenomena it describes, we can resist temptations to foreclose on the thesis, or to let it cause us to revise logic. First, though, we need to be clear about what a text is: viz., simply a collection of interrelated meanings; and meanings are, as Føllesdal reminds us, man-made or "totally of our own making" (Føllesdal 1990, 104). They are in other words exclusively the product of semantic construction and coordination, or, in a word, of interpretation. (We can deflect charges of subjectivism which this formulation might attract by making explicit Gadamer's Hegelian point that the consciousness which makes meaning is historically effected through and through.) From this, we can resist the reification a text undergoes when we construe it as being (somehow) separate from some interpretation. If the interpretation which generates the text's meaning is waived, meaning evaporates, and there is then no longer a text. The obviousness of all this should make it easier to see why Hirsch's fears are exaggerated, and why Margolis' motive for revision of logic is unjustified. For if we situate the drama of irresolvable conflict between (well-justified) interpretations at the level of the contested text where it belongs, the drama, and

therewith the conflict, disappears. Instead of logical conflict between interpretations, we have different interpretations, different languages (at the point where conflict would arise), and as a result (slightly) different texts. Unless we choose to reify these texts, to isolate them from the actual languages in which they have meaning, the conflict resolves itself--in the splitting of the text. To speak bluntly (and a little misleadingly), logically incompatible interpretations define different texts.⁸

This resolution relates, like much of our discussion hitherto, to reification of meaning, which Gadamerian and Davidsonian holistic conceptions of meaning production avert. It is not surprising then that, once these conceptions have "soaked in," we should find ourselves in a position where we can hardly refuse the resolution, short of embracing an unwarranted reification of meaning. After having decided on this resolution, I was therefore gratified to (re)discover a discussion of reification in Ramberg

⁸Rom Harré and Michael Krausz suggest a similar approach to Margolis in their recent book *Varieties of Relativism* (1996), which I was unaware of when I arrived at the foregoing proposal. When Margolis argues that incompatible imputations to the same work can sometimes be jointly defended, Harré and Krausz wonder "whether or not the results of such imputation are sufficiently divergent that one no longer has a basis for talking about different interpretations of one work as opposed to interpretations of *different works*" (144-5). However, they do not wonder very long, and nowhere press Margolis on the issue. They permit Margolis "a 'soft' notion of identity, of 'unicity' . . . [so] that under different imputations we may still talk of one work" (145). This resolution only works if we reify the meaning of the work at the point of differentiation its so-called unicity obscures, by separating interpretation (imputation) and meaning. Using Ramberg's Davidsonian discussion of reification of meaning as my basis for the same point Harré and Krausz make, I am forced to take it more seriously.

(1989, 90) which seems both to entail and strengthen it (which the last footnote suggests). In addition, Ramberg's discussion alerted me to this passage in Davidson, which states the problem and resolution in clearest terms:

how can two theories of truth both be acceptable if one theory makes a certain utterance true and the other does not? Isn't this a contradiction? It is not a contradiction if the theories are relativised to a language, as all theories of truth are. Our mistake was to suppose there is a unique language to which a given utterance belongs. (Davidson 1984d, 239)

It would presumably also be a mistake to suppose that we are any longer talking about the same utterance or text. At the point of logical incompatibility, we have in effect split or multiplied it. This is both what indeterminacy helps bring out, and what shows the thesis to be innocuous.

6

***Conclusion: Excluded Middle and the Inclusion of
Multiplicity***

One motive behind the resolution to multiply texts was to save the indeterminacy thesis from logical embarrassment, or the law of excluded middle from those not easily embarrassed. But in fact a two-valued logic is what saves the wider hermeneutic enterprise within which these, or any, attitudes have a basis for their expression. Without being able to consider claims as true or false by the terms and functions of ordinary logic we cannot regard them as concerning truth at all; the law of excluded middle therefore becomes indispensable, since it describes the minimal terms and functions required. What is more, it is ultimately why we need to relativise incompatible interpretations, and therewith utterances or texts, to different languages. However, even if one is convinced that the law saves the possibility of intelligible discourse, one cannot be confident that it saves much. When constrained only by excluded middle indeterminacy allows proliferation of an indefinite number of incompatible interpretations of what often we take to be the same text. That these interpretations actually construe different texts saves truth and intelligibility. But in multiplying texts, or in seeing texts multiply, we are left to wonder which, if any,

texts we should take as canonical, or as the proper subject of inquiry, dispute and reinterpretation. Within constraints of coherence after all every interpretation positing a distinct text is correct; dispute between such interpretations is empty. Whether we want them or not, then, we are left with as many texts as can be posited within these constraints. And no text appears to have anything to recommend itself above the rest.

Consequences like these are behind Lorenzo Peña's rejection of Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis and similar less explicit views on translation and interpretation he finds in Gadamer. One consequence which Peña regards as appealing on the surface but ultimately fatal raises and elaborates Hirsch's concern:

No unique sense is to be gathered from [,e.g.,] Plato's writings independently of our respective hermeneutical tools and keys. So, it turns out to be fine and alright for you to say that Plato countenanced states of affairs, but not for me. We thus leave each other in peace. Henceforth we can keep on debating, but more . . . [agreeably]. After all it is no longer a question of one [of] us being right and the other wrong. It is a question of finding out which way of recreating Plato's texts is, say, more suggestive, or more interesting. (Peña 1988, 223)

This description approximates our hermeneutic situation given the indeterminacy thesis, but it diverges when we

include two of Gadamer's ideas: viz., (i) the idea of historically effective consciousness and (ii) the idea of openness. Including (i) lets us resist Peña's construal of hermeneutic understanding in subjectivist terms, as a matter of implementing "hermeneutical tools and keys." This construal ignores Gadamer's view that our linguistic horizons are richly and unpredictably historically effected. Perhaps we can try to confine the unpredictable effects of the enormously complex historical fore-structure of our understanding by (I take it unresponsive) "hermeneutical tools and keys," but the sort of fusion with an author's culture Gadamer has in mind involves one in communication which at some point "flows forward in forgetfulness of oneself and in self-surrender to the subject matter made present in the medium of language" (Gadamer 1976c, 87).

In pointing this out we have only resisted Peña's formulation, not his criticism. But we have taken a first step. By describing our understanding of the other as immersion in a history which influences us in unforeseeable ways on the basis of meanings far richer in scope and variety than any specific hermeneutic approach, we escape a simple imputational/methodological model. Gadamer's model at least gives a sense of how we avoid (as in some measure we almost always do) being mired in an approach which is insufficiently resourceful to capture (through partial analogies) the subtleties whereby the other differs from our thinking, and which settles or completes interpretation.

However, we have not avoided the sorts of varied imputations to Plato's metaphysics Peña suggests we are forced to permit, nor as I suggested much earlier the sort of misreading which is liable to arise within a Christian/Greek fusion over Euripides' *Bacchae* and other Greek texts. In accepting (ii), the ideal of openness, we take a second step in resisting Peña's criticism. For we include in our model an ideal whereby all the partial analogies with which we try to create an understanding may be expanded, revised, and made more commensurable. Our optimism for this ideal should not be unbounded, but (to revisit now familiar ground) our pessimism is held in check by (a) the general corrigibility of understanding or recoverability of meaning, and (b) the fact that we would not be able to make so much as a start at understanding, or have enough ground to misunderstand, if our analogies and anticipations did not by and large succeed. We can affirm (a) because it is unintelligible to posit an object, or aspects of an object, which we must permanently misunderstand. (b) follows as a fact of communication--namely, that for communication to take place at all a great deal of understanding is presupposed--and as a special case of (a)--namely, disallowance of the supposition of a text or utterance utterly beyond our understanding.

Notwithstanding such constraints we cannot limit the multiplicity of distinct texts; and while languages to which we relativise meaning in these texts are commensurable, they

can be kept distinct at points of deep contention, where certain underlying commitments are at stake. Thus, on the one hand, we might persuade interpreters of Attic drama to limit their conflation of *hybris* and arrogance, not to conflate *kakous* (bad, ill; useless; mean, vile; shameful; wretched) and pride (as John Moore does at *Ajax* 133¹), and generally to avoid construing willfulness, stubbornness, pride, and kindred concepts as character flaws because behaviour they describe turns out to be imprudent or catastrophic. We might persuade them if we expand the range of our discussion of Greek texts where such conflations create anomalies or incommensurate discourse and locate the source of our conflicting commitments to make the incommensurateness in question apparent. Yet, on the other hand, our attempt to fuse linguistic horizons or languages might fail after all deep conflicts of commitments have been shown. This can occur directly through the resilience, not obtuseness, of the interpreter. He might find himself unable to abide Greek sensibilities and choose to understand the *Bacchae* quite differently than, he concedes, Euripides and most of his contemporaries would. Or, perhaps more problematically, he might insist that his interpretation captures the original spirit of the text. Moore, e.g., might resist Kaufmann's censure of his translation of *kakous* as pride at *Ajax* 133. With this impasse we have Moore's

¹Kaufmann provides this example in a footnote on pp. 63-4 of *Tragedy and Philosophy* (1968).

Ajax and Kaufmann's, and few prospects for unifying these distinct texts. At the end of the day we may have to live with (slightly) different texts.

But this conclusion is hardly singular; it merely emphasizes a particular sort of case in which similar texts at certain points are especially intractable when we try to unify them. Our hermeneutical situation, our plight as interpreters, is Heraclitean: we never twice experience the same text, as the actual language wherein we construct meanings is never exactly the same. Our task as interpreters would consequently take on Herculean proportions were actual languages always radically divergent. But our situation is not that dire; generally we share or come to share more or less the same text or utterances when we try to understand or make ourselves understood. Heraclitus' radical student, Cratylus, or his modern equivalent, might suggest that meaning is so much in flux that we never experience a text even once. This elaboration is unlikely, though, since the hermeneutic conditions of a text and our experience of it are identical. A Cratylean proposal is yet another instance of reification. By positing an inaccessible text we suggest mysterious conditions of texthood. Perhaps something like the logos interrupts here, to prevent us from going too far. Were we to adopt such a proposal we would need to rely on precisely what (an inaccessible/noumenal text) we are no longer afforded. Our very reasons for taking a Heraclitean view of

textuality prevent us from accepting a Cratylean elaboration.

With this view we may wonder why we should want to emphasize among a multiplicity of similar texts those which can only be unified at the cost of logical inconsistency. If all texts are different anyway, why should we single out for special treatment texts divided on logical grounds? In fact, we do not apply the special treatment we have in mind --designating two or more such texts distinct--quite so readily. In the fusion of values, interests and perspectives which occurs in productive conversation over similar, what we take to be the same, texts there is no reason to suppose that would-be logical differences cannot arise and then be forsaken by one or more interlocutors. Conflict after all is the essential source of the *aufhebung* whereby interpreters question their preconceptions and prejudices, and of semantic fusions or fusions of texts which consequently occur. The power of the negative may, as Hegel suggests, be portentous (Hegel 1967, 93); it need not merely obstruct. However, we should avoid Hegel's, and perhaps to some extent Gadamer's, optimism. Short of affirming a concept of absolute knowledge wherein all disputes, potentially or actually, will be resolved, indeterminacy requires us to accept at times the actuality of distinct texts where we might prefer to feature in our ontology one, or many ever converging within commensurate parameters. We have little more cause for alarm, though, at

the prospect of, say, the *Bacchae* and a persistent *Bacchae** (the *Bacchae* according to the followers of St. Paul) than we do at the persistent mutual exclusion of more thoroughly and obviously distinct texts. In any event, by allowing for a multiplicity of very similar texts, and not forcing unity or "unicity" in all cases, we preserve our concept of truth and therewith the possibility of hermeneutic knowledge.

Appendix

Archaic Torso of Apollo

We did not know his high, unheard-of head
 where his eyes' apples ripened. Yet his torso has
 retained their glowing as
 a candelabrum where his vision, not yet dead,

only turned low, still shines. For else the breast
 could not blind you, nor could we still discern
 the smile that wanders in the loins' faint turn
 to that core which once carried manhood's crest.

Else would this stone, disfigured and too small,
 stand mute under the shoulder's lucid fall,
 and not gleam like a great cat's skin, and not

burst out of all its contours, bright
 as a great star: there is no spot
 that does not see you. You must change your life.

Archaischer Torso Apollos

*Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
 darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
 sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
 in dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,*

*sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
 der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
 der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
 zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.*

*Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
 unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
 und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;*

*und bräche nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
 aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
 die dich nicht sieht. Du musst dein Leben ändern.* (Rilke
 1975, 230-33)

Bibliography

- Aristotle (1934). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. (Revised) H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard.
- _____ (1947). "Posterior Analytics." Trans. G. R. G. Mure. *Introduction to Aristotle*. Ed. Richard McKeon. New York: Random House.
- _____ (1980). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. (Revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson) David Ross. London: Oxford.
- Bradley, Raymond D. (1967). *Logic, Physics & Metaphysics*. Auckland: The Dobbie Press.
- Boswell, James (1980). *Life of Johnson*. Oxford: Oxford.
- Davidson, Donald (1984a). "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford.
- _____ (1984b). "Communication and Convention." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford.
- _____ (1984c). "Reality Without Reference." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford.
- _____ (1984d). "The Inscrutability of Reference." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford.
- _____ (1986). "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." *Truth and Interpretation*. Ed. Ernest Lepore. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Derrida, Jacques (1989). "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer." *Dialogue and Deconstruction*. Trans./Eds.

Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. New York: State University of New York Press.

Descartes, René (1968). *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*. Trans. F. E. Sutcliffe. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Dummett, Michael (1984). "'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs': Some Comments on Davidson and Hacking." *Truth and Interpretation*. Ed. Ernest LePore. Oxford: Blackwell.

Euripides (1913). "Bacchae." *Euripidis Fabulae*. (Second Edition). Ed. Gilbert Murray. London: Oxford.

_____ (1959). "The Bacchae." Trans. William Arrowsmith. *Euripides V*. Eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

_____ (1970). *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Trans. G. S. Kirk. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Feyerabend, Paul (1987). *Farewell to Reason*. London: Verso.

_____ (1993). *Against Method* (Third, Revised Edition). London: Verso.

Fish, Stanley (1980). *Is There a Text in the Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge: Harvard.

Føllesdal, Dagfinn (1990). "Indeterminacy and Mental States." *Perspectives on Quine*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1976a). "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem." *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans./Ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley: U. of C. Press.

- _____ (1976b). "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics." *philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans./Ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley: U. of C. Press.
- _____ (1976c). "Semantics and Hermeneutics." *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans./Ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley: U. of C. Press.
- _____ (1976d). "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection." *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans./Ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley: U. of C. Press.
- _____ (1989). *Truth and Method* (Second, Revised Edition). Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall. New York: Crossroad.
- Hacking, Ian (1984). "The Parody of Conversation." *Truth and Interpretation*. Ed. Ernest LePore. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harré, Rom, and Krausz, Michael (1996). *Varieties of Relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1967). *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Trans. J. B. Baillie. New York: Harper & Row.
- _____ (1977). *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. London: Oxford.
- Hirsch. E. D. (1967). *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale.
- _____ (1976). *The Aims of Interpretation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- _____ (1984). "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted." *Critical Inquiry*. 11 (December): 202-25.

- _____ (1985). "On Theories and Metaphors: A Comment on Mary Hesse's Paper." *New Literary History*. 17 (Aut.): 49-55.
- _____ (1994). "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory." *New Literary History*. 25: 549-67.
- Johnson, Samuel (1755). *A Dictionary of the English Language*. London: J. and P. Knapton.
- _____ (1986). *Samuel Johnson: Selected Writings*. Ed. Patrick Cruttwell. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Kaufmann, Walter (1968). *Tragedy and Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton.
- _____ (1978). *Hegel: A Reinterpretation*. Indiana: Notre Dame Press.
- Kuhn, Thomas (1991). "The Natural and the Human Sciences." *The Interpretive Turn*. Eds. D. Hiley, J. Bohman and R. Shusterman. New York: Cornell.
- Lattimore, Richmond (1964). *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.
- Margolis, Joseph (1991). *The Truth About Relativism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- _____ (1995). "Plain Talk about Interpretation on a Relativistic Model." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. 53.1 (Winter): 1-7.
- Marvell, Andrew (1993). "To His Coy Mistress." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Vol. 1 (Sixth Edition)*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1966). *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House.

_____ (1967). *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House.

Peña, Lorenzo (1988). "Indeterminacy of Translation as a Hermeneutic Doctrine." *Hermeneutics and the Tradition*. Ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Washington: The American Catholic Philosophical Association.

Pope, Alexander (1993). "An Essay on Criticism." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Vol. 1* (Sixth Edition). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Putnam, Hilary (1981). *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge.

Quine. W. V. (1961). "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." *From a Logical Point of View* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Harvard.

_____ (1986). *Philosophy of Logic* (Second Edition). Cambridge: Harvard.

_____ (1990). "Three Indeterminacies." *Perspectives on Quine*. Ed. Ernest LePore. Oxford: Blackwell.

_____ (1992). *Pursuit of Truth* (Revised Edition). Cambridge: Harvard.

Ramberg, Bjørn (1989). *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Rilke, Rainer Maria (1975). "Archaic Torso of Apollo." *Twenty-five German Poets*. Trans./Ed. Walter Kaufmann. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

- Shusterman, Richard (1991). "Beneath Interpretation." *The Interpretive Turn*. Eds. D. Hiley, J. Bohman and R. Shusterman. New York: Cornell.
- Sigal, Clancy (1962). *Going Away: A Report, A Memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Sophocles (1913). "Ajax." *Sophocles II*. Ed. F. Storr. Cambridge: Harvard.
- _____ (1957). "Ajax." Trans. John Moore. *Sophocles II: Four Tragedies*. Eds. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Whitman, Cedric H. (1951). *Sophocles: A Study of Heroic Humanism*. Cambridge: Harvard.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1961). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- The King James Version of Matthew and Luke.