PREJUDICE AND UNDERSTANDING:
GADAMER'S ONTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

by

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Prejudice and Understanding: Gadamer's Ontological Hermeneutics

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of prejudice and the role it plays in understanding. Whereas the Enlightenment considered prejudices as impediments to understanding, Gadamer reveals how prejudices are necessary to and productive of understanding. Today, critics of Gadamer, such as Jurgen Habermas, advocate the development of some sort of method that can free our understanding from prejudices. Gadamer presents an ontological view of hermeneutics that asserts that the circular and dynamic aspects of understanding are fundamental to our very being: there is no prejudice-free understanding.

My first chapter introduces the way in which Gadamer's hermeneutic project provides a response to earlier Cartesian and Enlightenment emphases within hermeneutics. Just as Descartes had searched for a context-transcendent truth, so Schleiermacher and his followers hoped to come up with a method that guaranteed an indubitable and ahistoric method of interpretation.

Chapter Two shows how Heidegger effected an ontological turn within hermeneutics by introducing the temporal, circular, and contextual aspects of understanding, and how Gadamer directly builds upon these concepts. Chapter Three explicates Gadamer's resuscitation of the notions of prejudice, tradition, and authority in terms of the role they play in understanding. Gadamer's refusal to produce a method in order to achieve a

tradition-transcendent critique of understanding causes opponents such as Habermas to impute Gadamer's hermeneutics with conservatism.

In Chapter Four I give a summary of Habermas's critique of ideology. Habermas insists that hermeneutic experience must be supplemented by theory in order to locate and remove hidden elements of power that threaten our understanding with ideology. In Chapter Five I examine four specific criticisms Habermas makes against Gadamer, and I draw secondary sources into the debate. The debate focuses on the degree to which scientific method can free us from our situatedness within tradition. Gadamer maintains that the hermeneutic experience is universal and that any critique we provide of our tradition necessarily remains informed and motivated by that tradition itself.

I conclude this thesis by arguing that, far from relegating our understanding to a vicious circle condemned to distortion, Gadamer's hermeneutics provides the incentive for a continual examination of prejudices and thus is more likely to evade distortion in that it does not look for a final, complete understanding. The acknowledgment of the embedded, dynamic, and temporal aspects of understanding ultimately opens a way to a more praxis-oriented understanding.

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CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HERMENEUTICS

Hermeneutics as Epistemology

In the opening sections of Discourse on Method, Descartes describes how, wearied by the bookish knowledge of the academy, he set out to learn "first hand" from the experiences and customs of his day. But he soon found contradictions and confusion in the customs and traditions of the day--just as he had found in his academic learning. His frustrations intensified: if he could not find truth through academic pursuits, nor through life experience, where else was he to search? Because his many teachers, rulers, friends, family, and traditions had failed to lead him to the truth, he concluded:

> It is therefore impossible that our judgements should be as pure and firm as they would have been had we the whole use of our mature reason from the time of our birth and if we had never been under any "control". . . . The first rule was never to accept anything as true unless I recognized it to be certainly and evidently such: that is, carefully to avoid all precipitation and prejudgment, and to include nothing in my conclusions unless it presented itself so clearly and distinctly to my mind that there was no reason or occasion to doubt it. (Descartes 1983, 11,15)

Now, most of us who claim to be rational adults strive to examine our beliefs to some degree or another. On one level, Descartes's aim is a worthy one: we need to be deliberate about living the examined life. But to what degree is this possible? This tension gets at the concern of my thesis which explores the prejudices that give rise to our beliefs. This thesis asks the following questions. What is the nature of these prejudices? Is it desirable to purge our understanding of them? Can we have unprejudiced beliefs? If so, how do we go about achieving this?

I began with a reference to Descartes in order to highlight the way in which the contemporary hermeneutical exchange between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas grew out of seventeenth century epistemology. The subsequent Enlightenment ideal demanded that one rid oneself of the impediments of prejudice, tradition, and authority in order to have access to one's own internal, "pure and firm" reason. In this way, Enlightenment thinkers reformulated the Cartesian aim by maintaining a "prejudice against prejudices." Descartes's dream became the Enlightenment goal: if we could just clear away enough of the cultural, religious, and historical flotsam then we would be more likely to achieve indubitable truth. Even though most of us today do not aim to imitate Descartes's method of attempting to rid oursevles of the influences of tradition, none-the-less, in our day-to-day conception of understanding it seems

commonplace to consider that prejudice, tradition, and authority play a distorting role. If this is the case, then should not those of us who are committed to thinking critically attempt to come up with a means for identifying and eradicating insidious prejudices that threaten to distort our knowledge? This thesis explores an answer to these questions in terms of a hermeneutics-as-ontology, particularly as espoused by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

What do I mean by 'hermeneutics-as-ontology'? A preliminary answer requires a brief history of hermeneutics leading up to the work of Gadamer. This history reveals the way in which hermeneutics began as fundamentally influenced by the Enlightenment. Although nineteenth-century hermeneuticists attempted to move beyond the Cartesian quest for certainty, they ultimately did little more than to merely reformulate the Cartesian quest for foundations. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher brought a new emphasis to hermeneutics. Prior to this, hermeneutics had primarily meant the practice of interpreting legal, biblical, and other historical texts. Schleiermacher was the first to put forth a **generalized** or, to use Paul Ricoeur's term, **de-regionalized** theory of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's generalization of hermeneutics maintained Cartesian influences. He sought to explicate the universal principles of understanding and, having isolated them, hold them up as the norm for the

interpretation of all types of texts. Ricoeur observes another influence on Schleiermacher's search for universal rules:

> This subordination of the particular rules of exegesis and philology to the general problematic of understanding constituted an inversion fully comparable to that which Kantian philosophy had effected elsewhere, primarily in relation to the natural sciences. In this respect, it could be said that Kantianism constitutes the nearest philosophical horizon of hermeneutics. The general spirit of the Critique, as we know, is to reverse the relation between the theory of knowledge and the theory of being; the capacity for knowing must be measured before we confront the nature of being. (Ricoeur 1991, 55-56)

Ricoeur locates a key conflict running throughout the history of hermeneutics, namely, the struggle over whether hermeneutics should be addressed in terms of epistemology or ontology. According to Ricoeur, Schleiermacher exacerbated this tension by extending hermeneutics beyond the particulars of the exegesis and philology of texts in order to put forth a general theory of understanding. Schleiermacher not only extended the practice of hermeneutics beyond the traditional two realms of legal and biblical texts, but sought to transcend the particularities of the interpretation of all texts in order to grasp, in a Kantian endeavour, the universal rules for understanding. Richard Palmer describes Schleiermacher's aim:

> Certainly there are differences among these various kinds of texts, and for this reason each discipline develops theoretical tools for its peculiar problems, but beneath these differences lies the more fundamental unity. The texts are in language and thus grammar is used to find the meaning of a

> sentence; a general idea interacts with the grammatical structure to form the meaning, no matter what the type of document. (Palmer 1969, 84)

Schleiermacher's hope of coming up with a generalized method for the hermeneutics of texts also comprised another dimension. By analyzing understanding in terms of a dialogical relationship between two people, Schleiermacher introduced the impetus for the psychologization of hermeneutics. Again, Schleiermacher extended the Cartesian belief that the private and internal fundamentally characterize an individual. The key to understanding lay in grasping what the communicator meant. In order to understand another person, one had to be able to inquire into the mental processes going on in the dialogical communication between hearer and speaker. Palmer summarizes Schleiermacher's view:

> All of this presupposes the goal of hermeneutics as the reconstruction of the mental experience of the text's author, a point that is especially clear in [Schleiermacher's] statement of 1819: "The art [of interpretation][sic] can develop its rules only out of a positive formula, and this is: the historical and divinatory, objective and subjective reconstructing of a given utterance." (Palmer 1969, 89)

It was no longer enough just to get clear about the facts or the actual words used in communication, one also had to divine why they were chosen and what the author intended by them. Although Schleiermacher based his concept of understanding on dialogical interaction, this process of 'divining' (as he called it, or intuiting) what was in the mind of an author became more complicated in the case of

understanding texts. Attempting to get at the author's intended meaning brought into play the 'problem' of the historical distance between the interpreter and text. Ricoeur comments:

> The question of how to understand a text from the past is preceded by another question: how is a historical interconnection to be conceived? Before the coherence of the text comes the coherence of history, considered as the great document of mankind, as the most fundamental expression of life. (Ricoeur 1991, 58)

The thinker who first dealt explicitly with the questions of history in terms of a general theory of understanding was Wilhelm Dilthey, who asked: ". . .how is historical knowledge possible? or more generally, how are the human sciences possible?" (Ricoeur 1991, 59). Dilthey considered the overcoming of historical distance as the main hurdle of the historical sciences, which were seen as dealing not just with 'facts' (as the physical sciences were), but with intended meaning. In order to facilitate the grasp of a text as filtered through historical understanding, Dilthey introduced the principle of Nachbilden, literally, 're-building' or 'reproducing'. Reproducing the intentions of the author became the key hermeneutic principle. Furthermore, influenced by the positivism of his day, Dilthey sought to establish such reproduction in terms of scientific method.

However, in trying to raise the integrity of the historical and human sciences to that of the physical sciences, Dilthey actually increased the antagonism between

them. The historical sciences had no distinctive way of knowing and therefore, according to Dilthey, they must conform to the kind of methodological requirements demanded by the physical sciences. The elevation of the methodology of the physical sciences as the sole guarantor of true understanding firmly entrenched the epistemological conception of hermeneutics. The Cartesian dream of finding a method that guaranteed access to universal and ahistorical truth triumphed. Scientific method could be applied to all types of understanding in order to reveal indubitable truth. However, as Ricoeur notes, this triumph and its ensuing problems ultimately gave way to the ontological turn within hermeneutics.

This ontological turn in hermeneutics meant not just another improvement to the Cartesian pursuit but a fundamental change in the way these questions were addressed. The ontological emphasis revealed a more fundamental way of encountering the world than the Cartesian model allowed for: namely, that the embeddedness of experience precedes distanced and objective methodological understanding. From an ontological perspective, the contingent nature of understanding precludes an ahistorical method. For, it is precisely the historical and contextual aspects of understanding that give rise to and condition our knowledge. The ontological turn, pace Cartesian epistemology, seeks to establish that there is no unconditioned knowledge. Ricoeur

describes the turn in this way: "[it] would subsume questions of method to the reign of a primordial ontology. . . instead of asking, how do we know? it will be asked, what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding" (Ricoeur 1991, 64, emphasis mine).

Hermeneutics as Ontology

The turn away from epistemology and toward an ontological hermeneutics was ushered in by Martin Heidegger, who sought to reveal the mode of being that exists prior to, or behind, the pursuit of knowledge and the application of method. Heidegger attempted to change the focus, once and for all, away from arguments concerning the methods of epistemology toward ontological concerns regarding what constitutes the nature of existence within the world.

Heidegger claimed that the process of understanding can only be explicated in terms of Being, for, as he said, Being precedes knowledge. In making his case, which I develop in Chapter Two, Heidegger introduced three key components: circularity, temporality, and fore-meaning. Up to this point in human history, Heidegger insisted, we have become obsessed with isolating objects and facts in our pursuit of indubitable knowledge. Instead, we need to grasp how Being illuminates objects and facts--not vice versa; for, facts and objects are more fundamentally embedded in (and thus emerge out of) an environment, or a 'world', as Heidegger called it.

Gadamer explicitly takes up the ontological emphasis of Heidegger and addresses questions of the relation between the human and the natural sciences in order to highlight the way in which the hermeneutical experience is fundamental to all understanding, both communicative and scientific. The universalizing of hermeneutics initiated by Schleiermacher is completed by Gadamer. But does Gadamer's 'universalizing' of the hermeneutic experience push him into the transcendental mode of Kant? Descartes searched for absolute truth, the God's eye perspective. Kant asserted that as limited beings we can never know the mind of God, but that what is unchangeable is the framework by which we know. Gadamer's hermeneutics maintains that even the frameworks by which we know are up for grabs. Recall the previous pronouncement by Ricoeur in which he locates hermeneutics within the Kantian transcendental camp. Gadamer himself reflects on the Kantian influence on his work:

> [Kant] asked a philosophical question: what are the conditions of our knowledge, by virtue of which modern science is possible, and how far does it extend? [Truth and Method] also asks a philosophic question in the same sense. But it does not ask it only of the so-called human sciences . . . . Neither does it ask it only of science and its modes of experience, but of all human experience of the world and human living. It asks (to put it in Kantian terms): how is understanding possible? **This is a question which precedes any action of understanding on the part of subjectivity, including the methodical activity of the "interpretive sciences" and their norms and rules.** (Gadamer 1992, xxix-xxx, emphasis mine)

Here we observe Gadamer, who follows Heidegger's ontological turn, evoking the universality of the hermeneutic process. It is the universality of the hermeneutic process that provides a launching point for the criticisms by Habermas that this thesis addresses. I will say more about this in a moment, but first I want to mention another key component of Gadamer's project. Following Heidegger, Gadamer seeks to undermine the triumph of epistemology within hermeneutics that witnesses the Cartesian dream emerge with new force:

> The Cartesian dream or hope was that with sufficient ingenuity we could discover, and state clearly and distinctly, what is the quintessence of scientific method and that we could specify once and for all what is the meta-framework or the permanent criteria for evaluating, justifying, or criticizing scientific hypotheses and theories. The spirit of Cartesianism is evidenced not only by rationalists but by all those who subscribe to strong transcendental arguments that presumably show us what is required for scientific knowledge. (Bernstein 1983, 71)

Perhaps the best one-line summary of Gadamer's endeavour in Truth and Method comes from Hubert Dreyfus who remarks, ". . . one cannot have a theory of what makes theory possible" (Dreyfus 1992, 1). As I argue in this thesis, to attempt as much is both ontologically futile, as well as more likely to result in a distortive and power-susceptible conception of knowledge. In order to show the limitations of method and theory, Gadamer weaves together the concepts of circularity, temporality, and contextuality and gives new emphasis to the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle'.

I want to make clear from the start, however, that Gadamer is not against scientific method or theory in either the physical or social sciences, but insists on a humble use of them. Such a humble use acknowledges the embeddedness of scientific method within history and therefore does not demand that it raise us above our historical, traditional, and cultural contingencies in order to gain a less obstructed view of the truth. Gadamer aims neither to do away with method nor to invent a new and improved one. In his introduction to Truth and Method Gadamer writes ". . .it is not my intention to make prescriptions for the sciences or the conduct of life, but to try to correct false thinking about what they are" (Gadamer 1992c, xxiii). Gadamer wants to correct such false thinking by revealing how scientific method derives from a more fundamental hermeneutic process. This thesis supports the Gadamerian notion that only by grasping the way in which this circular, temporal, and contextual process gives rise to all understanding can we be free from dogmatic and distortive knowledge.

What are the key aspects of the concept of hermeneutic circle? First, throughout the history of hermeneutics (which extends back to ancient times) there has always been an emphasis on understanding as composed of the back-and-forth movement between the general and the particular. Gadamer certainly does not dispute this aspect but wants to avoid any formalization of it. For Gadamer, the circle

metaphor primarily connotes the continuous and dialogical nature of understanding. The hermeneutic circle extends temporally, it never finalizes, and it underlies all of our understanding, thus it is universal.

Gadamer calls into question the "prejudice against prejudices" in our pursuit of understanding that stands as the hallmark of the Enlightenment. Asserting that this Cartesian prejudice against prejudices blocks understanding, Gadamer attempts to reexamine the notion of prejudice in order to show both its inevitability and efficacy in the process of understanding. According to the Enlightenment conception of understanding, the right method ensures, in principle, a conclusive understanding. Such a view implies that there is, in principle, a point at which understanding ceases in finality and completeness--where prejudice is eliminated. For Gadamer, on the contrary, understanding is by its very nature continuous and temporal; the ubiquity of prejudice is at once a manifestation of its incompleteness and a condition of its possibility.

Ricoeur provides this summary of the Heideggerian project, which leads into the specific concern of this thesis: "For me, the question that remains unresolved in Heidegger's work is this: <u>how can a question of critique in general be accounted for within the framework of a fundamental hermeneutics</u>? . . . The concern with rooting the circle deeper than any epistemology prevents <u>repeating the</u>

epistemological question after ontology" (Ricoeur 1991, 69, 70). In light of Ricoeur's analysis, however, the question still remains: if understanding is embedded within and emerges out of our situatedness in the world and in history, is it necessary to re-introduce an epistemological emphasis of hermeneutics in order to ensure our understanding is a true and accurate one--free of the distortions, for example, of ideology? This question is articulated and developed by Jurgen Habermas who, it could be said in keeping with Ricoeur's scheme, attempts to re-introduce epistemological concerns into hermeneutics. It is important to note here that in re-developing an epistemological account of hermeneutics, Habermas does not want to do away with the ontological aspect altogether. He wants to avoid the snares of Cartesian foundationalism by subscribing to fallibilism.

Habermas's account of knowledge emerges from, and in reaction to, the neo-marxist and positivistic emphasis of the social theorists of the Frankfurt school. The Frankfurt school comprised a group of German sociologists, writing in the twenties and thirties, many of whom fled Germany under Hitler. According to Albrecht Wellmer, Max Horkheimer provided the most comprehensive articulation of the goals of the Frankfurt school. In Wellmer's words, Horkheimer

> realize[d] that only the political struggle itself and the corresponding process of transformation of the status quo, and of the political consciousness of those engaged in the conflict, can produce the instances of verification and falsification, and the possibilities of experience, that will

> ultimately decide the fate of critical theory. (Wellmer 1974, 10)

Habermas's introduction of hermeneutics into critical theory makes him a fascinating as well as a worthy critic of Gadamer: he attempts to stand with one foot in the hermeneutic tradition and the other foot in the tradition of critical theory. Along with Gadamer, Habermas rejects positivism, yet, pace Gadamer, he maintains that there are grounds for formalizing critical reflection. This notion of a formal critique implies that one can achieve a distanced, objective, vantage point from which one can distill out from the process of understanding an ideal pattern. This ideal pattern of understanding then serves as a tool or standard that one can apply to various forms of understanding, communication, etc. in order to detect any distortion that lies hidden. The incentive to abstract an ideal pattern of understanding presupposes that the ideal pattern remains completely separate from the contextuality of communication. To use a Heideggerian metaphor (which I explain in the following chapter): the tool presents itself as completely other than its context. It is the Cartesian dream applied to understanding: if we can just grasp the essential elements of healthy understanding then we can develop a test to detect unhealthy understanding, i.e., that which is based on power and ideology.

Habermas's perspective, then, proves important to this thesis for two reasons. First, he demonstrates from a

different perspective the efficacy and power of Gadamer's project; and second, at the same time, he articulates what I take to be the most trenchant critique of this project, namely, that if we only go as far as Gadamer does in describing the necessity of prejudice to understanding, we will too easily accept the status quo and remain dangerously open to the power and deceit of ideology. Habermas fears that merely describing the role of prejudice in understanding provides no incentive for clearing away false prejudices or for alleviating the source of false prejudices, namely, ideology. Habermas thus charges Gadamer with building an oppressive conservatism into his very conception of understanding.

In light of Habermas's criticisms and Ricoeur's scheme, this thesis asks the following questions. What unique vantage does Gadamer add to Heidegger's ontological turn within hermeneutics? And, is there a subsequent need to provide a return to epistemology--in the guise of a notion of a formalized critical method which may guard against distortive understanding? In formulating my response to these questions, I will first look at, in Chapter Two, the Heideggerian influences on Gadamer in order to highlight the ontological emphasis in Gadamer's thought. In light of the above discussion, I use Heidegger to elucidate claims made by Gadamer, as in the following:

> Hence the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the

> experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.
>
> Contemporary philosophy is well aware of this. But it is quite a different question how far the truth claim of such modes of experience outside science can by philosophically legitimated. (Gadamer 1992c, xx11)

Heidegger proves crucial in articulating how a truth that eludes the grasp of scientific method can be philosophically legitimated. In my third chapter, I explicate Gadamer's notions of prejudice, authority, and tradition and the role they play in the hermeneutic process. Gadamer maintains that the ubiquity of prejudices reveals understanding as initiated by prejudices and prejudices initiated by experience. Consequently, prejudices are not only inevitable, but necessary in that they are part of experience which precedes a more abstracted type of knowledge.

In Chapter Four, I examine Habermas's response to the Gadamerian project in which he argues that Gadamer must supplement hermeneutics with a conception of understanding by developing a notion of formalized critique. Habermas draws on aspects of reconstructive theory in order to get at an ideal model of communication. Reconstructive theory combines elements of philosophical hermeneutics and empirical science to allow for a fallibilist conception of understanding.

In Chapter Five, I address four specific criticisms Habermas makes against the Gadamerian project. In the first

of these points, Habermas accuses Gadamer of pitting truth against method--a common reading of Gadamer--which leads one to infer that Gadamer is searching for a method-transcendent truth. Habermas then faults Gadamer's view of tradition for failing to incorporate a self-critical aspect. In a similar vein, Habermas and Gadamer also disagree over the extent to which prejudices loose their hold on our beliefs once they are exposed. Finally, I look at Habermas's demand for the development of some type of frame of reference external to the hermeneutic process in order to ensure that we can escape the insidious influences of power and ideology on our understanding.

My thesis concludes by arguing that there is no need to return to an epistemological emphasis of hermeneutics. For, Gadamer's extension of certain aspects of the Heideggerian project reveals the embeddedness of the understanding process within experience. This embeddedness, or as Gadamer terms it "the universality of the hermeneutic experience," implies that to seek to develop a methodological critique that remains untouched by the primacy of experience proves futile. But far from leaving us in a morass of distorted understanding, Gadamer's hermeneutics provides us with the incentive for a continual self-critique that is rooted, ultimately, in <u>praxis</u>.

CHAPTER II

HEIDEGGER, GADAMER, AND THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

Introduction

In the previous chapter I alluded to the significance of Heidegger's ontological turn for the Gadamerian project: how Gadamer expands Heidegger's hermeneutics-as-ontology into a reflection on the relationship of method to truth within the hermeneutic experience. Gadamer, concerned about both method and truth as they function in the hermeneutical sciences, adopts the Heideggerian notions of circularity, temporality, and fore-meaning in describing hermeneutical activity. In this chapter, I describe how these notions emerge out of the Heideggerian thesis that Being is fundamental to understanding. As Heidegger writes, as long as philosophy considers epistemological concerns as fundamental to the pursuit of Being, philosophy will remain impotent:

> Basically, all ontology, no matter how rich and firmly compacted a system of categories it has at its disposal, remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not first adequately clarified the meaning of Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task. (Heidegger 1962, 11)

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss what Heidegger means by the circular, temporal, and fore-structural aspects of Being, looking in particular at his concepts of **being-in-the-world**, **projection**, and **fore-having**. Gadamer, as we shall see later, relies heavily on these terms to explicate the way in which theory (as a type of understanding) derives from a more fundamental hermeneutical understanding. I also touch on briefly Heidegger's discussions of interpretation and meaning, which draw these three concepts together and provide a segue to Gadamer's project. In the second part, I show how Gadamer develops the ontological nature of understanding in terms of circularity, temporality, and fore-meaning. This becomes essential for substantiating the claims Gadamer makes about the fecundity of prejudice and tradition to understanding, which I address in Chapter Three.

Being-in-the-world

I want to begin by considering the precise nature of Heidegger's ontological turn. Hubert Dreyfus describes how

> [s]ince Descartes, philosophers have been stuck with the epistemological problem of explaining how the ideas in our mind can be true of the external world. Heidegger shows that this subject/object epistemology presupposes a background of everyday practices into which we are socialized but that we do not represent in our minds. Since he calls this more fundamental way of making sense of things our understanding of being, he claims that he is doing ontology, that is, asking about the nature of this understanding of being that we do not know--that is not a representation in the mind corresponding to

> the world--but that we simply <u>are</u>. (Dreyfus 1992, 3)

Heidegger rejects the proposed starting place of the subject/object distinction in terms of the knower/known or the representor/represented dichotomies. Instead, he considers our initial starting point as already involved and caught up in the world: 'Being-in-the-world'. What does Heidegger mean by 'Being-in-the-world', and how can he make such a bold claim? In order to get at Heidegger's concept of Being-in-the-world, we might use the analogy of being in a family. What does it mean to say we are 'in' a family? The answer entails more than trying to grasp the necessary and sufficient conditions for 'being in' a family. For, to say that one is in a particular family is to refer to the practices that assert a degree of history and future with this family, as well as one's feeling towards one's family. One's family suggests certain future possibilities for its individual members, although not in a pre-determined way. To be in a family implies certain relationships, concerns, cares, attitudes, feelings, and behaviours. Our family, in this way, becomes a world we inhabit symbiotically: I am both an integral part of my family, and yet also an individual; I influence it, as it influences me as well; it colours who I will be in the future, and I colour its future. When we enter the world via our family, even though we are not aware of our being-in-a-family, we are none-the-less involved, and caught up, in our family.

Extending this analogy, we can see how our sense of individuation and separation is secondary to our already being-in-our-family. So, too, for Heidegger, Being-in-the-world is the primary mode of being for Dasein[1] out of which we come to understand ourselves as individuals. This conception of the individual as derivative stands in contrast to the Cartesian picture of the individual as fundamental. Dreyfus describes the significance of the Heideggerian ontological project:

> Western thinkers from Socrates to Kant to Jurgen Habermas have assumed that we know and act by applying principles and have concluded that we should get clear about these presuppositions so that we can gain enlightened control of our lives. Heidegger questions both the possibility and the desirability of making our everyday understanding totally explicit. He introduces the idea that the shared everyday skills, discriminations, and practices into which we are socialized provide the conditions necessary for people to pick out objects, to understand themselves as subjects, and, generally, to make sense of the world and of their lives. He then argues that these practices can function only if they remain in the background. . . . Critical reflection presupposes something that cannot be fully articulated. (Dreyfus 1992, 4)

This background of practices, which can never be fully articulated, enables knowledge. And therefore, on Heidegger's view, knowledge or understanding is not something we attain by just clearing away the flotsam of tradition, as Descartes suggests in his Discourse on Method. Heidegger wants to show the impossibility of attempting to remove

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[1]Meaning literally "there-being," the word Heidegger uses in order to get away from the dualistic connotations of the "subject."

oneself from the world one inhabits (i.e., trying to transcend one's stance of Being-in-the-world) in order to achieve knowledge. Knowledge, Heidegger maintains, results from one's primary stance of involvement and interaction within the world rather than from trying to supersede it, as Descartes attempted. If knowledge emerges out from the unarticulated background of being-in-the-world, what does this suggest about understanding? Dreyfus describes Heidegger's notion of the ontology of understanding:

> For Heidegger primordial understanding is know-how. . . . To understand a hammer, for example, does not mean to know <u>that</u> hammers have such and such properties and <u>that</u> they are used for certain purposes--or that in order to hammer one follows a certain procedure, i.e., that one grasps the hammer in one's hand, etc. Rather, understanding a hammer at its most primordial means <u>knowing how</u> to hammer. (Dreyfus 1992, 184)

The knowing-how/knowing-that distinction illustrates Heidegger's desire to wrest our view of understanding away from a conception of it as mere cognitive knowledge-that (as opposed to knowing-how). Turning away from the traditional view of understanding as knowing-that in order to emphasize the ontological nature of knowing-how, Heidegger develops the concept of projection. Projection, according to Heidegger, is a continuous forward moving in which Dasein comes to understand aspects of itself in terms of its own possibilities (<u>Being and Time</u> section 31). Projection is suggestive of, and ties together, the crucial concepts of temporality and circularity; for, projection connotes that

which is neither determinate nor static. But as Dreyfus points out (Dreyfus 1992, 186-189), projection is not a matter of merely setting, or being aware of, specific goals for the future; for this would be an instance of limiting projection to only those goals we can presently articulate. Projection comprises more. It is not a matter of the activity of Dasein, but of the goings on in the world Dasein inhabits. Thus Dreyfus proclaims: "I am thus defined not by my current projects or goals but by the possibility of being a father, teacher, etc." (Dreyfus 1992, 188).

Heidegger further expounds upon the crucial role projection plays in the process of understanding by showing the inseparability of understanding and interpretation. He writes:

> As understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities. . . . This development of the understanding we call "interpretation." . . . [I]nterpretation [is not] the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding. (Heidegger 1962, 148)

Here we see the fluidity of understanding that involves projection. We also learn that interpretation is not something distinct from understanding but an extension of understanding: interpretation is the concrete realization of the projected potentialities of understanding. Interpretation is not simply the realization of bits of information, any more than seeing is the mere processing of sensory data. Rather, it is continuous adaptation to the way

in which the world is affecting us. In other words, it comprises temporal, circular, and dynamic aspects.

Heidegger further illustrates the primacy of Being to understanding by demonstrating that the process of interpretation involves the 'available' revealing the 'occurrent':[2] what we were previously engaged in, caught up with, now reveals itself more explicitly. For instance, when we are engaged in the activity of hammering, we are not cognizant of what the hammer is as such, but when the head flies off the hammer, and our immediate intention of building a bird house is thwarted, the occurrentness of the hammer is revealed. That is, I become aware of, I direct my attention toward, the hammer in my hand as a distinct object composed of a wooden handle and a steel head that one uses for carpentry work.

According to Heidegger, any awareness of "something as something," e.g., awareness of the hammer as a tool, consists of interpretation. Recalling Dreyfus's quotation about understanding as our knowing-how and involvement, we might say that interpretation is the exposure and explication of my (previously) tacit involvement with the hammer in using it to pound nails into a piece of wood in order to build a

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[2]Throughout this thesis I will follow Hubert Dreyfus in translating **Vorhandenheit** as "occurrentness," and **Zurhandenheit** as "availableness" instead of the usual "presence-at-hand" and "readiness-to-hand" respectively. Contrary to Heidegger's intention, the latter translations imply a subject-object relation.

birdhouse. For Heidegger, the debate here turns on the question of which is the primary way of knowing: our involvement within the world or our awareness and articulation of our involvement. Traditional epistemology places the primacy on the narrowly focused perceiving, on our explication of our involvement. But Heidegger describes a reversed order. He writes:

> In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a "signification" over some kind of naked thing which is [occurrent], we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. (Heidegger 1962, 150)

Here we see that Heidegger, by describing understanding as our involvement within the world, places interpretation as the secondary experience of having something-as-something reveal itself to us, in a less contextual mode. Dreyfus clarifies: "Seeing a 'mere physical thing,' which Husserl holds is basic, is for Heidegger a private form of seeing, which itself presupposes everyday coping, which in turn gets laid out in interpretation" (Dreyfus 1992, 197).

Once we see understanding as our primordial way of being-in-the-world, we can grasp the importance of fore-having. Before interpretation occurs, we already have a situation, a context, a world, in which we are involved and inhabit. But, within this world, we also have a point-of-view, which is more narrow and focused, helping us to operate

within our world. But although this point-of-view helps us operate and get around in the world, it is not the God's eye view of the world attempted by Descartes. Rather, it is about something specific in the world. Heidegger avers:

> If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal to what "stands there," then one finds that what "stands there" in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption of the person who does the interpreting. (Heidegger 1962, 150)

The significance here for Gadamer lies in Heidegger's claims that this objective focusing on the hammer is not our most primary and productive mode of knowledge. Instead, Heidegger posits that it is a secondary, derivative form of knowledge. And once this type of knowledge is seen as derivative then it need no longer be held as the model of all true knowledge. We have here, then, an account of the process of understanding which yields meaning through contextual, relational, and symbiotic activities.

I want to outline briefly Heidegger's account of meaning for it brings together the key themes of I have discussed already of being-in, projection, and fore-having, which undergird the Gadamerian project. Heidegger gives this description of meaning:

> When entities with-in-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein--that is, when they have come to be understood--we say that they have meaning. . . . Meaning is the "upon-which" of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, a fore-conception. (Heidegger 1962, 151)

Meaning therefore occurs when there is a specific relation between "entities within-the-world" and Dasein. In other words, meaning occurs when something in the world comes to light as a result of our interaction with it. Meaning is not something inherent to either the entities themselves (as occurrent) nor in the world. Rather, meaning arises from the interaction of Dasein within-the-world which, as discussed earlier in Being and Time, involves intention, concern, care, being-towards--all the ways in which Dasein inhabits the world. Meaning is not established by a distinct subject trying to make sense of the occurrent, the world as an object. Rather, through our involvement and concern understanding occurs and meaning arises, presenting itself. This process occurs prior to, both ontologically and epistemologically, self-conscious inquiry into the nature of things.

Heidegger's insistence that meaning does not inhere either in the occurrent or in the world, does not imply that Dasein arbitrarily creates or makes up meaning. For whenever the occasion for interpreting and understanding occurs, Dasein is already within-a-world, acting within the world. More precisely, Heidegger conceives of the interaction between Dasein and the world (in terms of understanding) as a circular process. And just as in the process of becoming individuated from one's family it is futile to attempt to thoroughly reject one's family, so too in the Heideggerian

conception it becomes futile to attempt to escape the "circle of understanding." The nature of this futility results not from the fact that one never has enough time to sort through the endless influences--it is more fundamental than that. Every attempt one makes at disentangling oneself, regardless of the success, remains contingent. I.e., every new take I offer on my family itself emerges out of my familial engagement. Heidegger writes:

> What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. . . . In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. (Heidegger 1962, 153)

Heidegger emphasizes that we should not see this circle as "vicious" but as the very structure of understanding itself. Heidegger's notion of circularity fits in with his larger project of showing the futility of looking for Being by addressing the occurrent: Being is that which is prior to, and thus illuminating of, the occurrent. Only when we can see Being in this way does true understanding occur. According to Heidegger, the circular nature of understanding also implies its temporality. Recall the earlier quotation: "[I]nterpretation [is not] the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (Heidegger 1962, 148). Projection is a continuous process which reveals understanding as inherently temporal: it never solidifies or

finalizes but is an on going process. The continuous and incomplete nature of understanding implies its temporality. According to Heidegger, the dynamic nature of Being-in-the-world (which comprises projection) means that the facts are always being interpreted anew and seen from different perspectives.

This might seem to suggest that our understanding is thus condemned to incompleteness. But far from being a negative aspect, temporality actually fosters understanding: without the temporal aspect there would be no possibility for projection. As the quotation above reveals, to maintain that time is of no importance to understanding is to neglect the possibility of movement and change within the hermeneutic circle, and thus the very possibility of understanding. The goal of understanding becomes not to remove ourself from the hermeneutic circle but to figure out how to "come into it in the right way."

We are now in a place to examine directly Gadamer's own description of the circle of understanding. Gadamer draws on the Heideggerian themes of both the circular nature of understanding, in terms of the interaction between Dasein and the available, and the temporal nature of understanding, in terms of Dasein's projection. I turn now to examine how Gadamer develops these aspects of Heidegger in part II section II of Truth and Method in which he specifically

addresses "Heidegger's Disclosure of the Fore-Structure of Understanding."

Temporality, Circularity, and Fore-meaning: Gadamer's Appropriation of Heidegger's Ontology

The radicalness of Gadamer's project, as it impinges on this thesis, lies in the claim of the universality of the hermeneutic experience. Gadamer describes this claim:

> This claim [to universality] rests on the view that understanding and agreement are not primarily and originally a way of behaving towards a text acquired through methodical training. Rather, they are the culminating form of human social life, which in its final formalization is a speech community. (Gadamer 1990a, 277)

In developing the universality of the hermeneutic experience, Gadamer explicitly appropriates the Heideggerian notions of temporality, circularity, and fore-meaning. This section, then, serves as a link that elucidates Gadamer's reliance on the Heideggerian themes we have already looked at. At the same time, it suggest how they substantiate Gadamer's attempt to resuscitate the notions of prejudice, authority, and tradition. I will explore these concepts in more detail in the following chapter.

Echoing Heidegger's conception of fore-meaning, Gadamer writes that the hermeneutical experience is:

> the whole human experience of the world. . . There is always a world already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganization itself in upheaval. Misunderstandings and strangeness are not the first

> factors, so that avoiding misunderstandings can be regarded as the specific task of hermeneutics. Just the reverse is the case. Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world. (Gadamer 1977, 15)

Here we see Gadamer's insistence that we are already in a world before we feel the need to explicitly interpret or give meaning to our experience. Gadamer argues that there is no felt need for interpretation unless there is misunderstanding, and that there is no misunderstanding without some prior understanding. He insists that the sort of experience that gives rise to a felt need for interpretation (i.e., a sense of unfamiliarity or puzzlement) can occur only on the basis of a prior understanding. Such experiences of unfamiliarity, puzzlement, misunderstanding, are derivative, not basic; they do not represent a subject's basic relation to the world, nor indicate the primary role of understanding. In as much as understanding can overcome the sense of distance and strangeness toward that which is unfamiliar, this process itself presupposes a basic familiarity--a fundamental, though usually unthematized, knowledge of the world. (Later we shall see how this substantiates elements of a pragmatic turn in Gadamer's hermeneutics, i.e., that application and <u>praxis</u> comprise a more fundamental way of understanding than do appeals to theory or method.)

Gadamer uses the illustration of receiving a letter: as we read the letter we do not consciously or explicitly try to follow a prescribed method for understanding it (Gadamer 1992c, 294). Rather, we simply desire to learn more about what the letter implies. There is no deliberate 'trying to understand' involved in reading a letter, unless we come upon something that does not make sense to us. But, in this case, the mis-understanding only arises in the context of a prior understanding. Only when our attention is drawn to an opaque meaning, set against a general understanding of the whole, do we set out to figure out explicitly and consciously what is meant. Gadamer writes: "It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to 'understand' the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion" (Gadamer 1992c, 294).

As I mentioned earlier, this Heideggerian notion of fore-meaning, which Gadamer later develops into the concept of prejudice, refers to all those unarticulated conceptions we have, and, ultimately, rely on, in coming to understanding. In the next chapter, I show in more detail how Gadamer reveals fore-meaning, i.e., prejudice, as requisite to true understanding. Suffice it to say here that all understanding, as well as misunderstanding, is based on a shared world, shared experience--recall the above quotation on the universality of the hermeneutic experience.

In this way, our experiences in the past, the future, and time in general, are not hindrances to be avoided, but become vital to all understanding. Gadamer comments: "Contrary to what we often imagine, time is not a chasm which we could bridge over in order to recover the past; in reality, it is the ground which supports the arrival of the past and where the present takes its roots" (Gadamer 1987, 136). Hence the importance of the temporality of understanding for Gadamer, which, as I show in the following chapter, he calls on in pointing out the importance of tradition to understanding. Again, we see in his appropriation of temporality the claim to universality. Describing how the historic tradition confronts our present tradition through the process of understanding, Gadamer writes:

> this process of challenge mediates the new by the old and thus constitutes a communicative process built on the model of dialogue. From this I derive hermeneutics' claim to universality. It signifies nothing less than that language forms the base of everything constituting man and society. (Gadamer 1987, 87)

Before exploring hermeneutics' claim to universality in more detail in the next chapter, I want to look at the third theme Gadamer appropriates from Heidegger: circularity. Gadamer asserts how the notion of circularity concerns the "relation between the whole and its parts: the anticipated meaning of a whole is understood through the parts, but it is in light of the whole that the parts take on their

illuminating function" Gadamer 1987, 126). Gadamer notes how the notion of the circular aspect of understanding was formalized by the Romantics and can be seen implicitly in ancient rhetoric. Thus the concept of circularity is not new; but what is novel is the way Gadamer develops the Heideggerian notion of the informality of the circle. This will be a key theme in the next chapter. But I want to provide here a brief illustration of what it means to interpret a particular piece of vocal music. This illustration illuminates the informal aspect of the circle of understanding, and also ties in the themes of temporality and fore-meaning.

A vocal score exists apart from its performer, yet a score is not synonymous with music. The performance (or even private rehearsal) always requires interpretation. What does such interpretation entail? Both the singer and the score have their own 'worlds'. A successful interpretation occurs as the two worlds are brought together and reconciled. The singer figuratively, as well as literally, listens to the music, and allows herself to be influenced by it: its mood, rhythm, feeling affect the singer. Similarly, through the act of singing the singer influences the music: her voice, her style, her expectations of what the music should communicate affect the music. Her influence on the music occurs both prior to the actual singing--in that she has some idea of what this piece should sound like, and during the

performance of it--as it unfolds into a life of its own. The interpretation symbiotically emerges from this interaction: the process is circular, continuous. It is a false dichotomy that asserts either the singer and music are thoroughly independent from each other, or there is ultimately no difference between the two. In fact, in the performing arts, 'performance' and 'interpretation' are frequently used synonymously.

I have drawn on several examples that reveal the temporality, circularity, and fore-meaning involved in the process of understanding, which provide the backdrop for Gadamer's resuscitation of prejudice, tradition and authority. They also reveal another key theme that proves imperative in the debate with Habermas, namely, the universality of the hermeneutic experience. The universality of the hermeneutic experience maintains the futility of attempting to get behind, or out from, the hermeneutic experience that constitutes our Being. Gadamer, following Heidegger, argues that the shared experience of inhabiting a world precedes distanciation. And, therefore, he concludes that we need to get away from a view of hermeneutics that sees it as a method to overcome alienation and misunderstanding. "But," Gadamer asks anticipating the Habermasian challenge, "now the question arises as to how we can legitimate this hermeneutical conditionedness of our being in the face of modern science, which stands or falls

with the principle of being unbiased and prejudiceless" (Gadamer 1978, 11). How Gadamer answers this question serves as the focus of my next chapter.

CHAPTER III

PREJUDICE, TRADITION, AND TRUTH: LEGITIMATING THE HERMENEUTICAL CONDITIONEDNESS OF OUR BEING

Introduction

Having introduced the way in which the themes of circularity, temporality, and fore-meaning underlie the Heideggerian/Gadamerian response to traditional dualistic epistemological approaches, I am now in a position to focus my explication of the unique claims of Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics. In this first section, I detail Gadamer's ontology of reason, and how this drives his resuscitation of prejudice, tradition, and authority as necessary components within the hermeneutic process. Gadamer's hermeneutics stands in contrast with the Enlightenment view which considered these as impediments to true understanding. While Gadamer does not deny that a particular prejudice, tradition, or authority may play a distorting role, he aims to show how, in general, the process of understanding relies on prejudice, tradition, and authority--that these concepts are not inherently distorting. Although 'prejudice' is commonly used to refer to a belief that is unfounded, Gadamer wants to change the negative connotations we attach to the word. His

ontological emphasis maintains there can be no understanding without prejudices.

In the second section of this chapter, I work out with more force and detail the implications of Gadamer's ontology of reason for his hermeneutic ideal. If understanding is not a matter of a correct method applied by an individual subject in order to get at the one true meaning, then what does the hermeneutic process look like? Are there goals, standards, ideals towards which we might aim? By articulating Gadamer's notion of prejudice, tradition, and authority in terms of his ontology of hermeneutics, I also want to allow his conception of the role and nature of truth to emerge. This will allow me to focus the Habermasian challenge which I pose in Chapter Four. For, on the reading of Gadamer I intend to support, the illumination of the efficacy of prejudice, tradition, and authority as crucial aspects of understanding will clear the way for, and open us up to, a better understanding, i.e., an understanding that is more likely to escape ideology.

Gadamer maintains that our prejudices constitute us as beings and that all understanding relies on this 'prejudiced' nature of beings--without prejudices there would be no understanding. The process of understanding involves the continuous exposure, challenge, and/or reinforcement of prejudices. It is this propensity for the continual examination of our beliefs that undergirds Gadamer's claims

about the relation between truth and understanding. Truth and understanding cannot be held systematically apart the way sceptical accounts imply. At the same time, the more fully we are aware of the ontological nature of the hermeneutic experience, the more we will feel compelled to self-questioning, which, according to Gadamer, is the greatest safe-guard against distortion. Such self-questioning allows for the articulation and examination of prejudices. Here we can see the tension in the Gadamer-Habermas debate this thesis will etch out in the final chapters: namely, the struggle between praxis and theory. For Gadamer, understanding always involves application; for Habermas, in order to ensure a genuine understanding, we must develop a theory that lifts us above the potentially distorting influences of a particular moment of application. Although the pragmatic elements of Gadamer's thought will not be explicitly articulated on until the final chapter, his defense of the importance of prejudice to understanding confronts Habermas's claim that theory is the best insurance against distorted understanding.

Prejudice, Tradition, and Authority

In reclaiming the importance of prejudice for understanding, Gadamer begins by spelling out the history of the word. Stemming from the Latin praejudicum, 'prejudice' is a judgement which comes prior to a thorough justification. Although in our common usage, prejudice has come to mean a

wrongful and misguided belief, Gadamer wants to reclaim it as a neutral term and therefore makes use of its Latin roots to emphasize it as that which precedes a judgement. For example, recall Heidegger's notion of fore-meaning as described in the last chapter. Prejudices are the hidden and unarticulated elements of our understanding that we have inherited and absorbed through our socialization into, and participation within, our culture. Consequently, many of our prejudices function to help us get around in the world. The Enlightenment, however, cast an unequivocally disdainful shadow over the concept of prejudice. In fact, the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudices" became one of its defining themes. Leo Strauss comments: "The word 'prejudice' is the most suitable expression for the great aim of the Enlightenment, the desire for free, untrammeled verification; the Vorurteil is the unambiguous polemical correlate of the very ambiguous word 'freedom'" (quoted in Gadamer 1992c, 271). The Enlightenment viewed prejudices as menaces to objective understanding in so far as they were seen as lacking basis, since they were that which preceded true knowledge or understanding.

Gadamer, however, wants to reveal how prejudices are not necessarily (or by definition) always misleading or deceptive. Like reason, or understanding, prejudices may or may not be distortive--but we should not assume that they are always a source of deception and therefore must be

eradicated. Relying on Heidegger's conception of fore-meaning and temporality, Gadamer attempts to show that because there is no such thing as a free-floating prejudice, a prejudice is never utterly whimsical or capricious. This is not to say that a prejudice may not be misleading, but that even its inaccuracy is based on something--and therefore it is not something we can, or should, just seek to dispose of. Gadamer uncovers the significance and history of prejudice as emerging out of our fore-having: the prejudice we have is based on something, growing out of the contingency of our lives, and therefore having a basis, a grounding. The contingent nature of our lives reveals the primacy of prejudices as constituting, shaping, and enabling our very being. As I shall indicate later, prejudices incite all understanding (and thus being) by giving rise to various questions and interests.

The Enlightenment, on the other hand, conceived of prejudice as always unjustified: based either on one's (presumably) unfounded concession to authority or on one's ignorance and "overhastiness." It was evidence of a failure of rationality. Here we find the Enlightenment's scourge of another hindrance to knowledge: authority. Whereas the Enlightenment considered authority always to be an impediment to true knowledge, Gadamer wants to reveal how authority has the potential for stemming from reason. Gadamer questions the Enlightenment decree that "authority is a source of

prejudice" (Gadamer 1992c, 271). The result of this view, writes Gadamer,

> is that the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgement seat of reason. . . . [Consequently] it takes tradition as an object of critique, just as the natural sciences do with the evidence of the senses. (Gadamer 1992c, 272)

But what can it mean for reason to be the ultimate critique of, standing over and against, authority and tradition? Obviously, from what Gadamer has been saying about the importance of examining our fore-knowledge, he would not disagree with the impetus to critically examine our prejudices. However, while the Enlightenment regards reason and prejudice as incompatible, Gadamer regards prejudices as constitutive of reason. Gadamer does not equate prejudice with reason, however, but considers prejudice a necessary and efficacious part of reason. Gadamer notes the inadequacies of the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudices:

> Does being situated within traditions really mean being subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom? Is not rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms--i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates. (Gadamer 1992c, 276)

If, according to Gadamer, prejudices are necessary for understanding, are we led to the conservative conclusion that we are bound to accept (i.e., adhere to, substantiate, agree with, etc.) every one of our prejudices? Are our prejudices

always out of our control, always irrational? Gadamer certainly does not intend to claim that just because, in general, prejudices are requisite for understanding, therefore any one particular prejudice can never be misleading. He argues that prejudices cannot be revealed as either accurate or inaccurate unless they are brought to the fore and we articulate and criticize their claims. And how do we bring them to the fore? Do we need to, as Habermas claims, indeed, can we, formulate a method that relies on abstraction and theory to remove all of our prejudices? Can we develop some sort of methodological tool that uncovers our prejudices for us--apart from the contextuality of our experience?

Recall from the last chapter, the discussion of the interdependence of application and understanding, i.e., how understanding involves knowing-how (i.e., practical knowledge) rather than knowing-that. Only through lived experience, through the concrete working out of understanding-as-being, does the exposure of prejudices occur. Gadamer wants to show the limitations of a methodological approach to understanding by arguing that method denies the universality of the hermeneutic process. Such a denial attempts to circumvent the very aspects of the hermeneutic circle that yield true understanding, namely its disturbing and revelatory characteristics.

But why does Gadamer consider it futile to attempt to methodologize, or to distill a procedure from, the activity of hermeneutics? He writes: "The prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings" (Gadamer 1992c, 295). Thus making one's fore-understanding and prejudices explicit happens within the hermeneutic process--not prior to it.

Consider an example that reveals the way in which our very situatedness disturbs and reveals prejudices. I am on my way to a friend's house for a party. I ponder many assumptions I hold about the evening ahead: who will be there, what we'll talk about, what type of victuals will be served, etc. Only when I arrive, however, and find the front door moved to the side of the house, am I jolted into the awareness of certain other beliefs, 'prejudices', I possessed. This trivial example suggests that there are some prejudices that simply cannot be brought to light without a confrontation by experience. Application, practical knowledge, and knowing-how allow the contextual aspects of experience to correct us. Of course, I am not claiming that someone could not have questioned whether the front door would be where it has always been. Rather, my point is that since our very way of being is constitutive of prejudices how could we ultimately know apart from our

experience which prejudices are distorting and which are helpful? Gadamer wants to show how the effort to abstract a method out from experience, in order to somehow alleviate the effects of prejudices, proves ontologically impossible.

On Gadamer's account, there is no final resting place of assurance that we have reached undistorted knowledge: prejudices are continually called into question and either reinforced or jettisoned. It is this propensity and incentive for movement that sustains Gadamer's claims of the truthfulness of understanding, showing how the very exposure of prejudices leads to a critique of them. In other words, understanding is enhanced by the continual critique, initiated by experience and praxis, of prejudices. Gadamer exposes the reason why the Cartesian quest for the absolute conception of reality fails. For if, like Descartes, one proposes a method for exposing all of one's prejudices, one implies that there can be a point at which the further articulation of prejudices can cease. And, according to Gadamer, this desire for closure on the examination of prejudices ultimately leads to deception and untruth. For Gadamer, exposure of a prejudice is not a process separate from the examination of whether its foundation is acceptable. For the very process of bringing a prejudice to light entails a critical analysis of its place in one's belief system. It is the extent to which this is possible that fuels the Gadamer and Habermas debate, since Habermas appears to hold

that such a critical analysis of one's prejudices must always lead to their rejection. I will examine this more closely in Chapter Five.

But, if, on Gadamer's account, prejudices are not always to be rejected, how are we to evaluate them? Gadamer puts the question this way: "What is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?" (Gadamer 1992c, 277). In pursuing an answer to this question he looks at the roles of, and relationship amongst, tradition, authority, and reason. To reiterate, he wants to challenge the Enlightenment equation of authority with "blind obedience." Gadamer does not want to argue that sometimes authority does not result from blind obedience. Rather, his point is that "this is not the essence of authority" (Gadamer 1992c, 279). In other words, Gadamer wants to recover a meaning of authority that reveals that the opposition between reason and authority is a superficial one.

On Gadamer's account, genuine authority is earned, i.e., it entails respect--it does not result from coercion. This stands in contrast to a popular way of dichotomizing reason and authority. Consider, for example, the fallacy of deferring to authority. This fallacy occurs when we consider the fact that an authority says X as a sufficient condition

that X is true.[1] This fallacy describes a type of "slavish obedience" to authority--there is no critical analysis of the adequacy of the authority. As a result, one fails to get at the root and context of authority. On Gadamer's account, however, the status of true authority is earned through the rational recognition that another person (or institution) possesses some skill, ability, or knowledge that one does not oneself possess. As a result, one considers the more skilled person to have authority over oneself. For example, as adult members of a democracy, we frequently exercise reason in acknowledging and choosing to submit to the authority: e.g., when the system works well we can articulate reasons for why our college professor, our cooking instructor, our plumber, our chiropractor, etc. earn our respect as authorities, which we recognize. This process of earning authority involves, in fact entails, reason on the part of such persons who recognize it.

The Enlightenment critique of authority rejected the apparently arbitrary bestowal of authority as lacking reason. Whether this was really what went on at the time is not the issue. Gadamer's point is that true authority possesses a degree of reciprocity: one must prove to the other that one is worthy. Gadamer writes, "Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says

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[1]Again, Gadamer would not deny that there are instances when deferring to authority is fallacious; rather, he wants to expose what lies behind our "deferment" to authority.

is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true" (Gadamer 1992c, 280). The core of authority, for Gadamer, results from a reasoned decision to acknowledge it.

Once again, Gadamer does not argue that this is always how authority works. He differentiates genuine authority from the potential for, and existence of, dogmatic, oppressive authority. He aims to reveal, however, contrary to the Enlightenment claims, that authority is not by its nature unrelated to reason, but that authority is actually based on reason itself. Gadamer prefers the term 'acknowledgement' of authority because it suggests the importance of knowledge to authority. The role that knowledge plays in relation to authority means that one can point to and accept the standards by which expertise is granted. One freely affirms the accepted standards and chooses (as a result of reason not force) to defer to authority. Authority, in the best case scenario, is not just accepted (i.e., coercion can make one 'accept' authority) but is acceptable. He adds: "The obedience that belongs to true authority is neither blind nor slavish" (Gadamer 1977, 34). In other words, Gadamer distinguishes between authority and authoritarianism (Gadamer 1992c, 280).

The form of authority that Gadamer appeals to as most efficacious, and indeed, ubiquitous, is that of tradition. But this is not to say Gadamer endorses the Romantic view

which objectifies and reifies tradition. In its call to return to the past, to what is 'natural', Romanticism failed to acknowledge the dynamic quality of tradition. Thus, in so far as Romanticism held up tradition as the alternative to Enlightenment reason, it consequently reinforced the Enlightenment dichotomy between tradition and reason. Gadamer notes:

> Reversing the Enlightenment's presupposition results in the paradoxical tendency toward restoration--i.e., the tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth. But the romantic reversal of the Enlightenment's criteria of value actually perpetuates the abstract contrast between myth and reason. (Gadamer 1992c, 273)

Gadamer describes here the kind of dialectical development found in the prominent Hegelian notion of Aufhebung. Gadamer shows how this dialectic between the Enlightenment and Romanticism is a limited one. He seeks to show how the resulting opposition between tradition (or myth) and reason obscures the fecundity of both. Both the Enlightenment and Romantic assumption of the duality between tradition and reason prevents acknowledging the ontological nature of reason. In recognizing the contingency of this dualism, Gadamer's Aufhebung transcends this dualism by providing a critique of it. His critique is two-fold in that it both overcomes as well as preserves elements of the Enlightenment/Romanticism conflict. On one hand, Gadamer notes how the quarrel between the Enlightenment and

Romanticism suggests that "the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms--i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates" (Gadamer 1992c, 276). But the turn Gadamer effects in the second part of his critique is to reveal how such an historically-effected reason is not something to be overcome but is itself productive of true understanding.

For Gadamer, as for Hegel, reason both emerges out from and shapes tradition--just as the individual emerges out from and shapes her own family. In this way, reason is thus both **critic** and **activator** of tradition. But (pace Habermas, as we shall see), a critique of tradition does not entail a thorough rejection of it. Contrary to both Enlightenment and Romantic ideals, we can never extract ourselves fully from tradition, defining ourselves in terms of a subject-object relationship to tradition. Tradition cannot be reified: it is no more something that can be disposed of (as the Enlightenment called for) as it is something we can or should just follow (as Romanticism insists upon). On Gadamer's account, we cannot define ourselves apart from tradition--it is something we inhabit, and which gives rise to our understanding. If we are always within some tradition or other, how far is it possible to remove ourself from tradition, as the Enlightenment would have us do? Recall

Descartes's attempt to rid himself of the distorting traditions of his day in order to behold the mind of God. Gadamer asks, what could it possibly mean to claim to have removed oneself safely from the influences of one's tradition? Gadamer sees tradition not just as inescapable, but as an active force that speaks to and addresses us, ultimately enabling understanding.

As I described in the previous chapter, our relationship to tradition can best be characterized as a form of symbiosis. Gadamer claims that just as authority requires active reflection by the person choosing to submit to authority, so tradition requires active reflection in the form of preservation. Gadamer writes:

> My thesis is--and I think it is the necessary consequence of recognizing the operativeness of history in our conditionedness and finitude--that the thing which hermeneutics teaches us is to see through the dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing, natural "tradition" and the reflective appropriation of it. For behind this assertion stands a dogmatic objectivism that distorts the very concept of hermeneutical reflection itself. In this objectivism the understander is seen . . . not in relationship to the hermeneutical situation and the constant operativeness of history in his own consciousness, but in such a way as to imply that his own understanding does not enter into the event. (Gadamer 1977, 28)

In other words, tradition is not a separate entity apart from human actors--it cannot persevere in the face of passivity. Tradition cannot be reduced to a list of cultural practices, e.g., the American tradition comprises pledging allegiance to the flag, celebrating Thanksgiving,

observing the Fourth of July, etc. At best, these are caricatures of tradition. Nor can it be reduced to a substitute for reason, e.g., "don't think for yourself," "just do it the way we've always done it." For Gadamer, it is impossible to "just do it the way it's always been done." One cannot step into the same stream twice, so to speak; to assert as much is to deny the reciprocity and symbiosis of personal identity and tradition. Any utterance we make about tradition is itself effected by tradition--we cannot come up with a list of aspects of our tradition that has not itself been spawned by some aspect of our tradition. Tradition requires involvement and active consent; it unfolds through application and praxis.

To put it in Heideggerian terms, tradition is a form of knowing-how. Gadamer writes:

> The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. . . . At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. (Gadamer 1992c, 281-282, emphasis mine)

In order to understand Gadamer's conception of tradition more fully, one needs to look at his notion of horizon. Gadamer notes how "Since Nietzsche and Husserl ["horizon"] has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one's range of

vision is gradually expanded" (Gadamer 1992c, 302). Underlying this view is the presupposition that our goal in understanding is to step into the horizon of the subject we are attempting to understand. Gadamer takes issue with the this conception of horizon as finite and determinate. On his conception, horizon is organic, continually changing:

> Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. (Gadamer 1992c, 304)

This description of the fluid and organic nature of tradition and horizon brings into focus Gadamer's notion of truth. Extending the metaphor of horizon, we can say that truth results from a willingness to look "beyond what is close at hand--not in order to look away from it but to see it better" (Gadamer 1992c, 305). "Seeing it better" entails allowing "what is close at hand" to make a claim on us. The kinds of expectations we had become changed by virtue of this claim. For Gadamer, coming to truth involves an understanding based upon a shared perspective. Something that was previously distant, unknown, or alien becomes part of our horizon: having a perspective for it, it then makes sense to us. Consequently, the opposite of alienation is

truth: "The nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires admission. Rather, we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true" (Gadamer 1977, 9).

I now turn to examine in more detail how Gadamer works the concepts of truth and validity into an exposition of his hermeneutic ideal. Or, to put it another way, what does it mean to come to a truthful understanding?

Gadamer's Hermeneutic Ideal

At this point, it should be evident that temporality and circularity suggest the dynamic nature of the hermeneutic experience. The question then arises, that if, traditionally, truth has been viewed as occurrent and objective, how does the notion of truth fit with Gadamer's notion of the fluidity of the hermeneutic process? I will look at three aspects of the hermeneutic event which allow Gadamer's concept of truth to emerge. First, many critics of the Gadamerian project implicate his hermeneutics with a latent conservatism.[2] Therefore, we need to ask what provides the incentive to move beyond or challenge the status quo. Second, if the hermeneutic process is continuous, non-formal, and circular, and thus with no final point to be reached, how do we know when we have reached a truthful

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[2]Among those I contend with in Chapter Five are Habermas, Georgia Warnke, and Jack Mendelson.

understanding? How do we know the process has gone on long enough, or that it has succeeded? Furthermore, what is, exactly, Gadamer's implicit notion of truth? Third, if Gadamer does not take the dualistic conception of reproduction as the standard against which one determines a valid from an invalid interpretation, then what does determine validity, i.e., truth?

First, in order to address charges of conservatism made against Gadamer, I want to investigate what initiates the hermeneutic process, inciting us to move beyond the status quo. For Gadamer, the question is crucial to the hermeneutic process; and it would be tempting to say, straight-forwardly, that the hermeneutic process commences with a question, a quandary, a confusion inciting the need for reconciliation or understanding. This, however, would be putting this point too strongly. Assuming that the hermeneutic process commences with a question suggests that we can point to the one distinct moment at which the hermeneutic process begins. Similarly, if there is one distinct beginning, should there not be one final point at which this process ends? Gadamer, however, maintains that the hermeneutic process is never static and does not finalize. By drawing attention to the importance of the question, Gadamer shows the contextual, temporal, and circular nature of the hermeneutic process--in so far as a question is always invoked by some previous event or concern. In an essay entitled "What is Truth?", in

which he discusses the nature of, and relationship among, truth, propositions, and questions, Gadamer asserts:

> The primacy of the question over against the proposition implies . . . that the proposition is essentially an answer. Therefore, there is no understanding of any proposition that does not take its exclusive criterion from the understanding of the question that it answers. (Gadamer 1994, 42)

At first glance, the fact that a proposition is posited as an answer to a question might seem so obvious it is of no interest. Therefore, we need to step back and consider the context in which Gadamer proffers such claims. Against those who assert that truth can only be found by extricating ourselves form our situation in order that we may be more objective, Gadamer argues that, far from producing a collusion with the status quo, the circular, temporal, and contextual aspects of the hermeneutic process allow us to continually challenge our beliefs:

> Seeing questions means, however, to be able to break through that which controls our entire thinking and knowing like a closed impermeable layer of smoothed-over opinions. The researcher is constituted by the ability to break through, and in this way new questions are seen and new answers are made possible. Every proposition has its horizon of meaning in that it originates in a question situation. (Gadamer 1994, 42)

Thus we see that Gadamer's hermeneutics provides no necessary justification for the status quo. Questions continually arise compelling our motivation to truth, and also allowing truth to emerge; for, the "truth in the proposition is only there insofar as it is an address"

(Gadamer 1994, 43). But, we may ask, is it enough to posit that the raising of questions opens up the way to truth?

This leads to my second point: if hermeneutics comprises a continuous and informal process, what guarantee is there that we will (or even can) reach the truth? How can we account for truthfulness given the circular nature of the hermeneutic process? To answer this question, I want to take a closer look at Gadamer's description of the nature of the movement comprising the hermeneutic circle.

Gadamer points to the possibility of the movement of the hermeneutic circle as being propelled by the interplay of strangeness and familiarity. What does he mean by this? "Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks" (Gadamer 1992c, 295). But what, we want to ask, is the nature of this bond? And, why must we presuppose it?

I will explore the latter question first. As I mentioned above, the question is not really the first step in understanding: even before the question is asked it is presumed that there is meaning to be found. This presumption of meaning is what Gadamer calls "fore-conception of completeness" and it refers to our presupposition of a unity of meaning, necessary for understanding. If we are

going to attempt to understand something, we must already have presupposed a unity of meaning; when we expect something to make sense, we have a conception of what that would look like. Having presupposed unity of meaning, if we do find conflict of content, we assume either that we have not understood it or that it cannot be understood because the content is self-contradictory. Gadamer stresses that no disagreement with or criticism of another can occur without the prior step of seeking unity of meaning. And our conception of meaning and consistency comes from inhabiting our particular tradition--this is the bond to tradition of which Gadamer speaks.

This brings us back to inquire into the nature of this bond. This bond with our tradition is not static, and neither self-evident nor permanent, for it is continually put into question. Gadamer writes:

> Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather we produce it ourselves in as much as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of understanding is not a "methodological" circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding. (Gadamer 1992c, 293)

Being caught up in the circle of understanding, being produced by as well as producing tradition, has repercussions for the way in which we regard the concepts of meaning and validity in terms of interpretation. Gadamer considers understanding as a creative and productive activity--not an attempt to reproduce authorial intent.

Now we can address the third and final question I raised concerning validity. In discussing the fact that meaning and authorial intent are not equivalent, Gadamer writes that meaning

> is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. . . . Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. (Gadamer 1992, 296, emphasis mine)

A valid interpretation takes the text seriously by allowing the world of the text to challenge one's own world. Such a challenge takes the form of a claim that is not compatible with our expectations of the subject matter. In order to understand we must respond to the claim. An interpretation must always go beyond the author's intentions in order to interact with the world of the interpreter--otherwise the possibility for a claim is occluded. In claiming that the authorial intent comprises the meaning of the text, one presupposes that understanding can ultimately be divorced from application (i.e., knowing-how). Gadamer argues, however, that understanding can never be divorced from application. He writes: "This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly--i.e., according to the claim it makes--must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application" (Gadamer 1992, 309). Our interaction with the text, by

continuously exposing our prejudices, opens up the pathway to true understanding.

As a corollary of its productivity, the hermeneutic process never finalizes. Gadamer writes: "But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process" (Gadamer 1992, 298). For Gadamer, as for Heidegger, understanding occurs in a stream of continuous change. Therefore, the dynamic and circular nature of understanding reveals the inadequacies of the incentive to statically reproduce authorial intent.

The picture we have here of Gadamer's hermeneutics is of a continuous, ever-changing, incomplete, informal process. Gadamer has described, based on concepts borrowed from Heidegger, how these aspects contribute to and foster a more truthful understanding. It is not that Gadamer merely does not go far enough in proposing a way to eradicate our undesirable prejudices (as, we shall see, Habermas claims). For, it is precisely the contextual, non-formal, and productive nature of understanding that spurs on the hermeneutic process. Thus, the very nature of the hermeneutical process precludes going further. Gadamer writes:

> Fore-grounding (abheben) a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us. For as long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not consider it a judgement. How then can we fore-ground it? It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary

> text can provide this provocation. For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity. Understanding begins, as we have already said above, when something addresses us. (Gadamer 1992, 299)

Questions, challenges, provocations, and a suspension of our prejudices can only occur contextually, within a particular situation. The importance of a question serves to highlight the contextual nature of the hermeneutic process. For questions emerge from within a context, grow out of a concern allowing the text to actively engage us. To assert, as Gadamer does above, that "understanding begins . . . when something addresses us," is to maintain that we are not the sole actors nor initiators in the process of understanding. If this is the case, methodological critique is not something that can be merely grafted onto Gadamer's hermeneutics (as Habermas attempts). Therefore, as I will articulate more fully in the fifth chapter, Gadamer's hermeneutics emerges as less susceptible to ideology precisely because it never finalizes, solidifies, or reifies into a method. The continual questioning and exposure of prejudices opens up the way to a more truthful understanding precisely because there is no incentive to claim the final ideology-free stance. Claims of this nature, I argue, are more likely to lead to ideological stances than the process Gadamer describes. Thus far I have spoken only briefly about ideology as it impinges upon understanding. I turn now, in my next chapter, to spell out the nature of ideology and the

way in which the Habermasian project attempts to formulate an ideological critique of Gadamer´s hermeneutics.

CHAPTER IV

FROM CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY TO COMMUNICATIVE ACTION THEORY: HABERMAS'S CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

In my approach to the voluminous writings of Habermas, I will focus on that aspect of his work which most fully overlaps with Gadamer's: his philosophical critique of understanding, which reveals the possibilities for objectivity and truth as well as the susceptibility to illusion and ideology. Both Gadamer and Habermas reject positivism (which I will characterize in a moment) and, while Habermas draws upon elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics, he ultimately attempts to combine the contextual and circular aspects of hermeneutics with the tools of empirical science in order to provide a formal and methodological critique of rationality, leading him in a direction quite different from that of Gadamer.

Despite the intensity of the Gadamer-Habermas debate, the positions of the two interlocutors appear to have become increasingly similar over the years--itself a testimony to the force of hermeneutic encounter. Through their interaction, both of their projects have come to reflect the

influence of the other. Habermas, for instance, has increasingly wrestled with the implications of hermeneutics for his own project. As Richard Bernstein notes, one can also detect a shift in Gadamer who in his later publications exhibits an increasing interest in the practical and social repercussions of philosophy. These works include Reason in the Age of Science, and On Education, Poetry, and History.

In this chapter I will be primarily interested in focusing on how Habermas has revolutionized the science of ideological and social critique by incorporating aspects of philosophical hermeneutics into his project. His over-arching goal is to draw on hermeneutics in order to avoid the traditional dichotomy between objectivism and relativism. This particular focus of the Habermasian project is important for this thesis in order to set the stage for the claims Habermas makes regarding the inadequacies of the Gadamerian project, claims I examine in the following chapter. As I have noted earlier, Habermas maintains that Gadamer's hermeneutics precludes a formal critique. For Habermas, such a critique is our only defense against ideological distortion of discourse and reason.

The first section of this chapter examines Habermas's reaction to the neo-positivistic critiques of society that lead him to develop his theory of communicative action. He attempts to restore the efficacy of normative claims by turning to reconstructive theory, which combines empirical as

well as hermeneutic strains. Relying on the reconstructive sciences, whose aim "is to provide explicit theoretical knowledge ("knowing-that") of implicit pre-theoretical "knowing-how,"" allows Habermas to seek to "isolate, identify, and clarify the conditions required for human communication" (Bernstein 1991, 16). Habermas's critique of positivism is driven by his attempt to move beyond what he takes to be the false dichotomy of objectivism and relativism. In my first section I will explore in more detail whether, in his attempt to provide a formal and methodological program for routing out ideology, Habermas successfully deflects charges of neo-Kantian transcendentalism.

In the second section I explore the role language plays for Habermas by considering the way in which he adopts key elements of the later Wittgenstein: namely, Wittgenstein's consideration of life-world and the contextual nature of language. Habermas's penchant for the linguistic turn, i.e., his incorporation of aspects of hermeneutics into his critique of ideology, marks his radical break with fellow sociologists of the Frankfurt school.[1] In the final part of section two I draw on an analysis by Thomas McCarthy in which

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[1]In his earliest writings, Habermas (still predominantly under the influence of the Frankfurt School) calls his theory a "critique of ideology." He uses this term less and less and now refers to it as a theory of "communicative action." None-the-less, the concept "ideology" remains crucial in Habermas's work and I begin the first section of this chapter by defining it.

he compares and contrasts Habermas with the later Wittgenstein. Although, at times, McCarthy's reading of Wittgenstein is implausible (as I note in more detail in my footnote on page eighty-five), I make use of his account because it sets in relief the Habermasian position. McCarthy's analysis proves helpful in illuminating those aspects of the hermeneutic/linguistic turn that Habermas incorporates into his project as well as those aspects from which he distances himself. His account brings out the peculiar tension between these two poles and thus sets the stage for an examination of the interaction between Gadamer and Habermas in the following chapter. There I elucidate more thoroughly those aspects of Habermas's thought that directly confront the claims of Gadamer.

Critique, Positivism, and a Theory of Communicative Action

In his early work Habermas was strongly influenced by the neo-Marxist emphasis of the Frankfurt school. As scientific materialists, the Frankfurt theorists sought to model the notion of critique, as well as the construction of a blueprint for social progress, on natural scientific method--or rather, on what they perceived to be the methodological concerns of natural science. A better society, according to the Frankfurt school, would be free from the ideological distortion of communication as well as exploitative practices of authoritarian institutions.

Since the term 'ideology' emerges as a key concept in the Habermasian corpus, I want to pause here to give it more precise content. The term 'ideology' was first coined around the turn of the eighteenth century. Since that time, there have been several different definitions of ideology, and it remains a controversial concept (Geuss 1981, 4-44; Thompson 1990, 28-73). For example, despite the Marxist obsession with routing out ideology, few can even agree on a specifically Marxist definition of ideology (Thompson 1990, 33). An exceedingly general working definition, however, stemming from Marxist and Frankfurt schools, considers ideology to consist of ideas that distort a true understanding of history, society, and one's contingent relation to these. For Marx, for example, this meant the dominant class hid its true power over the lower classes through its distortion of history, language, and society (Thompson 1990, 33-44). Such distortion did not necessarily take the form of false claims; rather, the distortion lay in the fact that the underlying compulsions of such claims were hidden.

Although it rejected important aspects of Marx's account of history and social structure, the Frankfurt school extended the Marxist view by attempting a formal critique of society in order to expose false presuppositions and hidden forces of domination, coercion, and deception that comprise its ideology. The notion of a 'formal' critique implies the

possibility of an isolated subject using a method in order to achieve a distanced and objective perspective on the object under study. The hope of the Frankfurt school was that by using scientific method to understand society, one could determine once and for all those elements that were ideological and thus distortive and/or coercive. The assumption here remains Cartesian: if the Marxist social theorists could just methodologically elevate (isolate) themselves above the influences of culture, they could achieve the ultimate perspective on society and thus see clearly what the 'real' problems were.

Habermas, although influenced by the Frankfurt school, was ultimately frustrated by the fact that its critique seemed ineluctably to end in positivism. But what, one may ask, is the source of Habermas's frustration with the resulting positivism? Richard Bernstein offers this insight into Habermas's understanding and critique of positivism:

> Habermas . . . is speaking of "positivism" in a broad encompassing manner. He wants to identify that tendency, to which many independent movements have contributed, that narrows and restricts the scope of rationality. Reason, from this perspective, can enable us scientifically to explain the natural and even the social world. It can discern nomological regularities, predict, and grasp the empirical consequences of different courses of action. It can evaluate the rational decision procedures and assess the cost of competing means to achieve specified ends. **But it is beyond the scope of reason to justify ends or warrant universal norms.** (Bernstein 1991, 5, emphasis mine)

Habermas thus uses positivism as a label that refers to the way in which the scope of rationality is limited, or reduced, to instrumental reason. He maintains that the ideological critique of the Frankfurt school theorists resulted, when applied to society, in a problematic opposition between 'facts' and 'values'. For, as McCarthy summarizes, positivism "argued that the application of the scientific method to the study of social phenomena required the rigorous avoidance of normative considerations. Value judgements did not admit of truth or falsity; they were not rationally (scientifically) decidable" (McCarthy 1985, 4-5). In particular, it was the lacunae left in Max Weber's project, the most influential sociologist in early twentieth century Europe, that provided the incentive for the Habermasian project. Weber attempted, but failed, to imbue critique with the ability to enervate positivism. Habermas was disturbed by Weber's failure to overcome the positivistic conclusion that reason alone cannot show us the best way to live. Therefore, Habermas took it upon himself to build upon and extend the thinking of Weber hoping to avoid the deleterious "iron cage" of rationalization by "provid[ing] a rational justification for universal normative standards" (Bernstein 1991, 4). Habermas hoped to rejuvenate a rational critique of the distorting forces within society without resorting to positivistic attempts like those of Weber.

In reflecting upon Weber's failure to elucidate a satisfactory relationship between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', Habermas noted the Kantian influence of transcendentalism and a priorism. Specifically, Habermas attempted to describe how the dead end of positivism resulted from Kant's attempt to use philosophy to clarify, direct, and limit science:

> In championing the idea of a cognition before cognition, Kantian philosophy sets up a domain between itself and the sciences, arrogating authority to itself. It wants to clarify the foundations of the sciences once and for all, defining the limits of what can and cannot be experienced. This is tantamount to an act of showing the sciences their proper place. I think philosophy cannot and should not try to play the role of usher. (Habermas 1991a, 2)

Nor should philosophy, Habermas continues, play the role of judge. Philosophy should not seek to be a 'First Philosophy'; instead, it should strive for more modest ends, without lapsing into subjectivism. But this is not to say that philosophy has no special role in society in virtue of its relation to truth. Habermas wants to find a role for philosophy that lies somewhere between those who claim philosophy should provide foundations for truth, i.e., be a First Philosophy, and those who think philosophy has nothing special to do say about truth.

What, then, should be the role of philosophy? According to Habermas, that of Platzhalter, 'stand-in'. "Whose seat would philosophy be keeping; what would it be standing in for? Empirical theories with strong

universalistic claims" (Habermas 1991a, 15). The role of philosophy should not be to provide the foundations for knowledge but to provide the terms and ideas that can be welded together with empirical sciences to elicit "universal normative standards." In the past, philosophy's role as judge developed into the search for the ability to achieve objective judgement over and against one's culture. Habermas acknowledges the contextual nature of reason and thus develops a new role for philosophy as uncovering and describing the hidden norms and presuppositions of our culture. The difference between playing the role of judge versus that of stand-in lies in the difference between the attempt to discover timeless and culture-transcendent truths versus the attempt to provide a critique of the norms our culture happens to presuppose. For Habermas, as for his neo-Marxist fore-fathers, this ultimately comes to mean that philosophy is inherently political: truth emerges from philosophy's ability to provide a **political** critique.

Thomas McCarthy describes Habermas's attempt at integrating empirical science with hermeneutic philosophy in order to provide such a critique:

> It is important to note that Habermas sees the problem as one of bringing the two approaches "under one roof," and not as one of replacing the methods of causal analysis by those of interpretive understanding, or conversely. It is not a matter of choosing between the two but of criticizing any pretension to universal and exclusive validity on the part of either, and of finding some sort of higher synthesis in which both have a place. (McCarthy 1978, 140)

Habermas wants to come up with a theory that locates and describes "universal norms and standards." But what, more precisely, lies behind Habermas's desire to synthesize empirical science and hermeneutic philosophy? Habermas is driven to 'right' Weber's failure, which resulted from the fact that positivism delivered empirical claims without underwriting standards by which to evaluate them normatively. Richard Bernstein gives this description:

> The stance that Habermas was challenging is most poignantly and even tragically represented by Max Weber. For all Weber's rationalist proclivities, he despaired about the possibility of rationally grounding the ultimate norms that guide our lives; we must choose the "gods or demons" we decide to pursue. . . . Habermas saw clearly that the logic of Weber's unstable resolutions leads to the relativism and decisionism so characteristic of our times. (Bernstein 1988, 5)

According to Habermas, however, this need not be so. Habermas turned his efforts into developing a reconstructive theory which starts from assessing concrete situations of communication and locates within them the universal norms presupposed in all of communication, or communicative action, as he calls it. Before looking at what, exactly, constitutes the concrete situations of communication that concern Habermas, we need, first of all, to get clear about Habermas's conception of communicative action, particularly as it differs from purposive-rational, or strategic, action. Purposive-rational, or strategic, action makes use of empirical data, facts, propositions and propositional truth in order to achieve its ends. Maeve Cooke writes,

> . . . one might say that agents who act strategically recognize only one dimension of validity: that of propositional truth and efficacy. They deal with other persons and with their own inner nature as though these were states of affairs, or entities in the physical world, for which criteria of propositional truth are appropriate. They recognize no other modes of validity and, hence, no other modes of rationality than the cognitive-instrumental mode. (Cooke 1994, 21)

Further on she adds, ". . . the aims of strategic action must be conceptualized as part of the objective world of facts and existing states of affairs. They can thus be described adequately in terms of their effect qua causal interventions in the objective world" (Cooke 1994, 22).

For example if I order my son to bring me a drink, I commit a purposive-rational act. In attempting to get my goal met (to have a drink brought to me) I treat my son like an object, which I manipulate in order to meet my chosen goal. I am completely unconcerned with him as a rational being who has concerns of his own. Attempting to achieve a certain end through manipulation (that of force or authority, i.e., power) contrasts with having as my goal the reaching of consensus or a co-operative understanding. Cooke points out how Habermas distinguishes between purposive acts, which aim for influence, and communicative ones, which aim for consensus, and that influence and consensus are mutually exclusive categories (Cooke 1994, 9).

An example of acting communicatively would be if I told my son I was really thirsty and I had had a busy day and

would he mind getting me a drink. In this scenario I attempt to achieve consensus by the fact that in my trying to persuade him to bring me a drink I also acknowledge his concerns. My goal is to raise a validity claim and to have him interact with it by giving the reasons for either his rejection or acceptance of it. Thus when he replies that he is in the middle of an important phone conversation, but he could bring be a drink in five minutes, we both are satisfied. Achieving consensus via communicative action entails discerning not just the world as a set of objects but also recognizing the social and subjective aspects of reality. Cooke writes that

> . . . communicative action, in its simplest terms, is a form of interaction in which the success of the interaction depends on a hearer's responding "Yes" or "No" to the validity claim raised with a given utterance. With every speech act the speaker takes on an obligation to support the claim raised with reasons, if she is challenged by the hearer, while the hearer takes on a similar obligation to provide reasons for his "Yes" or "No." This means that communicative action is conceptually tied to processes of argumentation. (Cooke 1994, 29)

In order to reconstruct and evaluate communicative actions, Habermas works out a detailed theory that articulates universal norms of communication. This take on the search for universals marks another turn in the hermeneutic project. The Cartesian, or epistemological, emphasis within hermeneutics sought to create a method that would guarantee a true interpretation, i.e., one that corresponded with authorial intent. Gadamer maintained that

truth and meaning lay in the ontological activity of our on-going commitment to understanding and interpretation. In other words, truth lies in the ability to see the coming to agreement as a continual process. Habermas pulls us back to an epistemological emphasis by searching for universal norms that we can formulate into a method that will give us a prejudice-free evaluation of our communication.

Another aspect of his turn involves not seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake, but with the goal of developing a better society. Habermas believes that it is ultimately the emphasis on the pragmatic (in terms of the best way to effect a more rational society) that keeps charges of Kantian a priorism at bay. For Habermas, the pragmatic equals the political.

Habermas searches for universal norms in order to reveal the nature of the validity claims raised in communicative acts. Once all actors are clear about the validity claims raised, the stage is then set for a rational dialogue in which all concerned parties can rationally evaluate these claims. For Habermas, exposing implicit validity claims is the best way to ensure that rationality, and not coercion, is the main determinant in coming to consensus.

What kind of theory allows one to come up with universal norms of communication and assess the validity claims raised? Here Habermas introduces reconstructive theory: a synthesis of hermeneutics and scientific theory. Habermas's idea of a

reconstructive theory is modelled after the work of theorists like Chomsky, Piaget, and Kohlberg, which attempts to find universal rules and norms of language, behaviour, and moral development (respectively). Having located these universal rules, one can then construct linguistic and developmental theories. The term 'reconstructive' refers to the way these theories are germinated. Built from the ground up, they are not considered transcendental or a priori. The theories result from the controlled observation of communicative acts: hypotheses are formulated, tested, and so on. Describing the way in which Habermas's reconstruction differs from that of Kant, and thus avoids transcendentalism, Cooke writes:

> For Kant and his successors, reconstruction took the form of a search for the transcendental ground of possible theoretical knowledge and moral conduct. Habermas maintains that in the meantime reconstruction, as a mode of reflection, has taken the form of a rational reconstruction of generative rules and cognitive schemata. Here he is thinking of endeavors such as Chomsky's generative grammar, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, and Kohlberg's account of moral development. According to Habermas these are examples of reconstructive sciences, for they set out to reconstruct, or make theoretically explicit the pretheoretical implicit knowledge and competencies of acting and speaking subjects. (Cooke 1994, 1)

In describing the efficacious achievements of such reconstructivist theorists, Habermas writes: "Both Kohlberg and Piaget explain the acquisition of presumably universal competencies in terms of patterns of development that are invariant across cultures, these patterns being determined by

what is conceived as an internal logic of the corresponding learning process" (Habermas 1991a, 35).

Habermas attempts a parallel project by analyzing communicative acts and coming up with rational reconstructions of universal norms which are present in every such act. Part of the strength of reconstructive theory, according to Habermas, lies in its subsequent ability to be empirically tested. It is precisely this reciprocal relation between theory and practice that allays concerns that Habermas is attempting an a priori justification of ideal communication patterns. Habermas emphasizes that "it is important to see that all rational reconstructions, like other types of knowledge, have only hypothetical status." He continues: "While [such a] critique of all a priori[sic] and strong transcendental claims is certainly justified, it should not discourage attempts to put rational reconstructions of presumably basic competencies to the test, subjecting them to indirect verification by using them as inputs in empirical theories" (Habermas 1991a, 32).

In other words, having formulated hypotheses that identify the norms implicit in communicative acts, one then tests whether these norms are salient, productive, and reasonable in light of other norms and practices of society. Habermas does not just accept such norms as timeless truths but investigates whether they inspire rational dialogue as opposed to coercion by force or deception. Cooke describes

how this rational dialogue--or, as Habermas calls it, "discourse"--is

> based on a number of "idealizing suppositions" which are rooted in the very structures of action oriented toward understanding. Even the most rudimentary forms of validity-oriented discussions point implicitly to ideal forms of argumentations. . . . Some of the strong idealizations specific to argumentation that Habermas frequently mentions include the presupposition that no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded by the participants, the presupposition that no force except that of the better argument is exerted, and the presupposition that all the participants are motivated only by concern for the better argument. (Cooke 1994, 30-31)

Habermas thus turns his analytic attention to the everyday context of communicative acts and, by focusing on the life-world, derives inherent 'rules' of communication which can be used to highlight deviant--or ideological--communication. "Habermas singles out claims to propositional truth and normative rightness as validity claims that are conceptually linked to the idea of universal agreement on the universal validity of what is agreed" (Cooke 1994, 31). That there can be said to be norms of communicative action is crucial for Habermas, but of equal importance is the fact that these norms emerge out of communicative acts--they are not a priori with respect to communicative practice in general. Philosophy attempts to explicate the underlying assumptions about moral standards hidden in communicative action, and once these are laid bare we are in a better position to evaluate them rationally. This includes

uncovering mechanisms of coercion and ideological distortions that, for Habermas, impede freedom.

Habermas hopes his attempt at uncovering universal norms will avoid the snares of both transcendentalism and relativism. Cooke provides us with this description of the claims of the Habermasian project:

> Habermas maintains that the concept of communicative rationality expresses a conception of rationality that does justice to the most important impulses of twentieth-century philosophy while escaping relativism and providing standards for critical evaluation (for instance, of social pathologies, questions of moral validity (justice), and practices of communicative action). This double aspect allows him to regard his conception of reason as a distinctively modern one and to describe it as postmetaphysical yet non-defeatist. (Cooke 1994, 37)

Nevertheless, comments Bernstein, "such a communicative reason only conceptualizes a procedural rationality; it is not sufficient to judge or dictate a substantial form of social life" (Bernstein 1988, 191). Rather, Habermas maintains, the judgement regarding social life is best left up to the actors within a given community--not scientists or philosophers who are removed from the situation. In this way, philosophy does not assume a transcendent position of 'First Philosophy'. Instead, the stage is set where the possibility for rational dialogue is maximized and the possibility of force or coercion is minimized.

It cannot be stressed enough that, in spite of the temptation of reading Habermas to the contrary, he does not expect to provide an infallible plan for achieving a society

that is thoroughly free of ideology and coercion. He does not expect to come up with a formula that would provide philosophy with timeless equations for truth. Instead, Habermas maintains the importance of coming up with a reconstructive theory which can point the way to an increasingly ideology-free communication and prevent us from lapsing into relativism overwhelmed by destructive prejudices.

In arguing for philosophy's role to be that of stand-in, as opposed to usher or judge, Habermas hopes to avoid charges of a priorism. Philosophy's goal no longer is to illuminate the a priori structures of understanding (as Kant advocated) but to describe the contingent and hidden structures of understanding and communication. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is nature of the extent and power of such a descriptive process to actually free us from distortive understanding that stands as the crux of the Gadamer-Habermas debate.

Language, Hermeneutics, and Beyond

Habermas pictures the state of philosophy as that of a "tangled mobile" at a standstill. This standstill is characterized by the intertwining of "science, morals, and art." To free these strands and allow them to swing in balance, Habermas advocates that philosophy should stop "playing the part of the arbiter that inspects culture and instead [start] playing the part of mediating interpreter"

(Habermas 1991a, 19). For Habermas, acknowledging the role philosophy plays as interpreter entails looking at the use and meaning of language. Since language plays a key role for both Gadamer and Habermas, I want to explore Habermas's view of language in terms of its similarities to Gadamer's.

As we have seen above, communicative-action, as one form of language use, plays a key role in Habermas's project. But what are Habermas's underlying commitments regarding language? Habermas follows Wittgenstein in reversing previous conceptions of language by

> taking intersubjectivity as the starting point and constructing subjectivity in relation to it. This is the procedure represented in . . . Wittgenstein's model of a rule that at least two subjects must be able to follow. Concepts such as "role" or "rule" must be defined from the outset in intersubjective terms. Thus the priority of the solitary private consciousness is replaced by that of communicative relations. Furthermore, the underlying systems of rules are no longer attributed to individual subjects . . . .(McCarthy 1978, 162)

What does it mean to start with intersubjectivity? Addressing intersubjectivity allows us to spell out what goes on in communication, that is, language, and derive our notion of an individual from that. Searching for what goes on in language does not mean searching for <u>a priori</u> grammatical rules. Yet, to assert that there is no <u>a priori</u> grammatical structure to language does not entail denying the possibility of any underlying grammatical structure to language. McCarthy describes it this way:

> Language is no longer represented as a logically rigid essence. Rather, expressions have meaning only within diverse language games, which are complexes of speech and action. These polymorphous arrays of language and practice are not, however, without their own structure of "grammars" . . . . In learning a natural language, we come to engage in agreed common practices and to share agreed common criteria for their performance. (McCarthy 1978, 163)

Habermas's concern to develop an alternative to the view that language is fixed and rigid relies on select aspects of the later Wittgenstein. The later Wittgenstein attempted to show how language-as-practice is primary to theoretical conceptions of language. In other words, the Wittgensteinian "life-world" of language learning and use precedes the theoretical constructs. This primacy of the life-world to theory, as McCarthy points out, is also fundamental to Habermas' theory:

> At this stage, language analysis loses the significance for the logic of science claimed by the Tractatus; it no longer delimits the contestable domain of the natural sciences. Instead it gains a special significance for the social sciences; it not only delimits the domain of social action, but makes it accessible. . . . In disclosing the grammars of forms of life, the logical analysis of ordinary language touches the very object domain of the social sciences. (McCarthy 1978, 163)

Building upon Wittgenstein, Habermas attempts to relocate the activity of language from within the individual, isolated mind to the rational actions and intentions of a society, community. In fact, in his later writings, Habermas takes up Wittgenstein's concept of life-world. Cooke describes the life-world as a background of practices that

both restricts communication (in terms the limiting effects of a horizon) and enlivens communication (in terms of creating traditions, language, etc. that provide the raw material for communication). She writes, "More precise[sic], he uses 'life-world' to refer to the stock of implicit assumptions, intuitive know-how, and socially established practices that functions as a background to all understanding" (Cooke, 1994, 14). This suggests that Habermas leans toward agreeing with Gadamer that the isolated mind can never wrench itself free from prejudices in order to arrive at the one, final truth but that none-the-less we may still arrive at non-relativistic knowledge.

McCarthy points out how Habermas, relying on Wittgenstein, asserts that neither language learning nor rationality is a pre-practical, pre-theoretical activity; rather, it emerges from the interaction of participants in a living community. Both language use and rationalization occur at once through the socialization into, and participation within, society. McCarthy summarizes: "In this sense, the adequacy of our mastery of rules--rules that pertain now not merely to the formation and transformation of propositions, but to an interplay of symbols and activities--can be corroborated only in interaction, by a kind of consensus among those acting together" (McCarthy 1978, 165).

In one of his earlier essays, Habermas describes his view of the interaction between rules and action, a view that

at the time he labelled "critique," and that now undergirds his theory of communicative action:

> [Critique] thus encompasses a dual relationship between theory and praxis[sic]. On the one hand, it investigates the constitutive historical complex of the constellation of self-interests, to which the theory still belongs across and beyond its acts of insight. On the other hand, it studies the historical interconnections of action, in which the theory, as action-oriented, can intervene. . . . Because of its reflective origins, critique is to be distinguished from science as well as from philosophy. For the sciences focus away from their constitutive contexts and confront the domain of their subject matter with an objectivistic posture; while obversely, philosophy has been only too conscious of its origins as something that had ontological primacy. . . . Critique understands that its claims to validity can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means: in the practical discourse of those concerned. (Habermas 1973, 2)

Habermas regards this reciprocal movement between reflection and action, or theory and practice, as the process towards an ideology-free stance. This emphasis on movement echoes the two themes we looked at in Gadamer's hermeneutics: circularity and temporality. This description of Habermas's acknowledgement of the interaction between theory and <u>praxis</u> may seem Gadamerian, as it derives theory from experience and emphasizes the back and forth movement between the two. However, Habermas denies the universality of the hermeneutic process. Their discrepancy over the ontological status of hermeneutics, as I noted in Chapter Two and elaborate in the following chapter, expresses the fundamental difference between the two. I shall say more about Habermas's reliance

on Gadamer in a moment, but suffice it to say here that Habermas's reliance on hermeneutics marks his divergence from the Frankfurt school.

Another important point of agreement between Habermas and Wittgenstein (and Gadamer), as hinted at above, concerns their view of rules. Wittgenstein maintains that language is rule describable, and yet not "ipso facto[sic] rule governed" (McCarthy 1978, 166). Given McCarthy's mis-reading of Wittgenstein at times, this description may appear to have 'gotten it wrong'. In what sense is language rule describable but not rule governed? Although we derive rules from our language use, our every day language practice is not consciously determined by rules. We can pick out rules from our language practice, in this way the rules are derivative. But that does not mean that following such rules comprises all there is to language use--this is the Wittgensteinian point. This is similar to a point we have seen in Gadamer: namely, that the contextual nature of behaviour is ontologically prior to rules. Habermas agrees with this much, but goes further: he wants to re-emphasize the importance of rules (even though they derive from experience) to the rationality of understanding. Just as Gadamer wanted to resuscitate the discarded notion of prejudice, so it might be said that Habermas wants to resuscitate the post-positivistic notion of rules. Habermas wants to show the necessity and potency of rules in allowing an ideology-free

understanding. Being cognizant of certain rules allows us to see more clearly. McCarthy writes:

> principles and rules "arise in the course of conduct and are intelligible only in relation to the conduct out of which they arise." On the other hand, "the nature of the conduct out of which they arise can only be understood as an embodiment of these principles." Thus the sociologist cannot arrive at a "more reflective understanding" of social phenomena without first grasping "the participant's unreflective understanding." (McCarthy 1978, 167)

The importance of the social actors and the derivative aspect of rules are key themes for Wittgenstein, Habermas, and Gadamer; and yet, each does very different things with these ideas. I want now to explore in more detail, with the help of an analysis by Thomas McCarthy, those aspects of hermeneutics Habermas uses and how, in this way, he strays from the views McCarthy attributes to Wittgenstein. Specifically, I will look at three of the points McCarthy spells out regarding the way in which Habermas sides with Gadamer against Wittgenstein.[2] The point of this analysis, which serves as a conclusion to this chapter, is to draw out more pronouncedly Habermas's claim to have avoided the snares

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[2]McCarthy's points actually address the inadequacies of both Wittgenstein and Winch. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is not necessary to go into McCarthy's exegesis and summary of Winch. Furthermore, I take issue with some of McCarthy's characterizations of Wittgenstein which tend to exaggerate the difference between Gadamer and Wittgenstein. In particular, I am thinking of his description of Wittgenstein's 'forms of life'. However, because McCarthy generally has an accurate conception of Wittgenstein, and his criticisms highlight important tensions, I am allowing his characterization to stand.

of both objectivism and relativism. Indeed, it is Habermas's claim to have moved beyond both the ahistoricism of a Kantian transcendental account of sciences and the threat of relativism within hermeneutics that undergirds his criticisms of Gadamer.

As we have already seen, for Habermas, the ability to come to a consensus via rational dialogue and reasoned argumentation drives his project. And this ideal of rational dialogue, McCarthy points out, presupposes a commitment to the unity of reason, as developed by hermeneutics. Such a commitment to the unity of reason stands in contrast with the idea of separate, isolated language games, as put forth by Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy. Here we see the strength of Habermas's contention that if we are to develop a reasoned critique of society, we must postulate a universal rationality: he develops a case for the unity of reason to confute the theses of both relativism and Kantian transcendentalism. For, the unity of reason invites a rational progression to consensus. Habermas argues against the Wittgensteinian notion of forms of life and language games, which cannot be brought into rational dialogue but exist as "windowless monads." Habermas says:

> We are never locked within a single grammar. Rather, the first grammar that we learn to master already puts us in a position to step out of it and to interpret what is foreign, to make comprehensible what is incomprehensible, to assimilate in our own words what at first escapes them. The relativism of linguistic world views and

> the monadology of the language games are equally illusory. (quoted in McCarthy 1978, 171)

If language is open-ended, as with Gadamer and Habermas, we have the potential to communicate with any other language speaker no matter how foreign the language may seem at first. Habermas goes a step further by arguing that it is precisely the unity of reason that undergirds the Gadamerian thesis that understanding amongst users of different languages is possible. In this way, Habermas attempts to explain why Gadamer's theory works, while showing that it also contains the potential for a formal critique of itself. This latter claim is crucial, for it illuminates how Habermas can draw on aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics and yet claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics stops dangerously short of developing a formal critical method.

It is from his understanding of the unity of reason that Habermas derives his theory of validity claims. Bernstein remarks: "According to Habermas, anyone acting communicatively must, in the performing of a speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated or redeemed (Kinlosen)" (Bernstein 1988, 186). If however, the universality of validity claims rests on the assumption of the unity of reason, how can Habermas avoid making a transcendental appeal?

This brings us to the second point of divergence. McCarthy points out the way in which Habermas offers a particularly hermeneutic emphasis on the temporality and

historical contingency of language, in contrast to a Wittgensteinian ahistorical approach to language. Habermas writes:

> Actually spheres of language are not monadically closed off, but inwardly as well as outwardly porous. The grammar of a language cannot contain a rigid design for its application. Whoever has learned to apply its rules has not only learned to express himself but interpret expressions in this language. Both translation (outwardly) and tradition (inwardly) must be possible in principle. Along with their possible application, grammatical rules simultaneously imply the necessity of interpretation. . . . With Gadamer language gains a third dimension--grammar governs an application of rules which in turn further develops the system of rules historically. . . . Language exists only as transmitted. For tradition reflects on a large scale the life-long socialization of individuals in their language. (quoted in McCarthy 1978, 174)

This aspect of the temporality of understanding is a particularly salient one for the Habermasian project because Habermas wants to jettison the neo-positivistic attempts at a method that would guarantee an ideology-free future. It is not, however, that Habermas believes we should not aim for less ideological communication--this is precisely his concern. But, pace the neo-positivists, he wants to come up with a critique that takes into account our historical contingency and temporal being instead of trying to transcend it. Habermas, noting the strengths of Gadamer's disavowal of subjectivism, writes:

> The interpreter is a moment of the same fabric of tradition as his object. He appropriates a tradition from a horizon of expectations that is already informed by this tradition. For this reason we have, in a certain way, already understood the tradition with which we are

> confronted. And only for this reason is the horizon opened up by the language of the interpreter not merely something subjective that distorts one interpretation. (Habermas 1986, 253)

In other words, his project entails reversing the sociological tendency to attempt an ahistorical understanding that presupposes the elevation of theory over practice. This leads directly to a final point of contrast McCarthy makes between Habermas and Wittgenstein.

The two prior points bring out Habermas's opposition to both relativism and transcendentalism. As I suggested earlier, this shows a fundamental similarity between Habermas and Gadamer, particularly in terms of the pragmatic elements in both. But, it is important to reiterate here that Habermas's attempt to derive theory from praxis denies the universality of the hermeneutic experience. While Gadamer would not fault the use of re-constructive theory to illuminate certain aspects of communication, he would dispute its claim to provide a truer understanding of communication. That is, he wants to show how the universality of the hermeneutic experience undercuts claims that a theoretical understanding provides the most final, complete, and comprehensive description. With this point in mind, we can see the important similarities between the two in the right perspective. McCarthy points out the importance of hermeneutics for Habermas in terms of the role praxis plays in understanding.

To put it generally: for Gadamer, the moment of interpretation cannot occur apart from the moment of application. In other words, one cannot understand without relating the meaning to one's own situation. Both Gadamer and Habermas emphasize that understanding is precisely related to the working out in one's own situation, not trying to get away from, i.e., transcend, one's own situation. Habermas, again commenting on the strength of Gadamer's work, writes:

> From the perspective of hermeneutic self-reflection, the phenomenological and linguistic foundations of interpretive (verstehenden) sociology move to the side of historicism. Like the latter, they succumb to objectivism, because they claim for the phenomenological observer and the language analyst a purely theoretical attitude. But both are connected with their object domain through communication experience alone and cannot, therefore, lay claim to the role of uninvolved spectators. Impartiality is guaranteed only through reflected participation, that is, by monitoring the initial situation (Ausgangssituation) of the interpreter--the sounding board from which hermeneutic understanding cannot be detached. (Habermas 1986, 253)

Gadamer's emphasis on praxis and application is the element most heralded by Habermas. Grounding understanding in the concrete moment provides Habermas with the material to be able to work out an empirical analysis of understanding. Habermas hopes that the combined efforts of hermeneutics and empirical analysis, which comprise his reconstructive theory, allow his critique to move beyond what he sees as the dangerous potential for the conservatism of Gadamer's approach. In the next chapter I turn to examine Habermas's

explicit allegations that Gadamer's hermeneutics is fundamentally conservative, and leaves us unable to detect ideological distortions that hide the real relations of dominance and power that make up a society.

CHAPTER V

HERMENEUTICS AS ONTOLOGY OR EPISTEMOLOGY?: A CRITICAL INTERACTION WITH TRUTH AND METHOD

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I outlined the key components of Habermas's project in order to set the stage for understanding Habermas's criticisms of Gadamer. So far, I have only hinted at Habermas's main contention with the Gadamerian project: namely, that Gadamer's resuscitation of the notions prejudice, authority, and tradition fails to imbue understanding with the power to effectively identify and rout out ideology, i.e., distortive understanding. Such a charge imputes to Gadamer's hermeneutics an insidious conservatism. Put another way, the main thrust of Habermas's criticisms concerns the ontological claims Gadamer makes about the hermeneutic process. Gadamer insists on the universality of the hermeneutic experience, he claims it is fundamental to our theorizing about it. This leads Habermas to accuse his hermeneutics of not "going far enough." Habermas contends that although Gadamer's account of hermeneutics moves in the right direction in attempting to go beyond positivistic or relativistic accounts, it

nevertheless emerges as too passive an account of understanding. Habermas demands that hermeneutics needs to go further by incorporating a methodologically critical component. This challenge that Gadamer's hermeneutics does not "go far enough" emerges as a key theme towards the end of this chapter.

Although Habermas agrees that prejudice, tradition, and authority are all part of understanding, he does not believe that this precludes the possibility of a methodological critique. Thus, he sets out to integrate aspects of the empirical sciences (namely, reconstructive theory) with hermeneutics in order to come up with a way to provide checks and balances within the hermeneutical process that alleviate ideological influences. Although Habermas does not dispute the pivotal role played by prejudices in understanding, and he praises Gadamer for uncovering what the Enlightenment covered up in this regard, Habermas asks pointedly: "But does it follow of itself from the unavoidability of hermeneutic anticipation that there are legitimate prejudgments?" (Habermas 1991b, 169).

Habermas argues that merely showing the unavoidability of prejudices, without a critique of prejudices, leaves Gadamer's hermeneutics impotent against the snares of ideology. Habermas is concerned that since Gadamer is not explicit about the possibility for critique, we possess no incentive much less ability for critically reflecting upon

our tradition as a whole. Habermas thus bases his critique on the apparent failure of Gadamer's description of the role of prejudice and tradition to include both an incentive and means for a self-reflective critique. At the end of Chapter Three, I introduced my claim that the circular and continuous nature of Gadamer's hermeneutic process actually provides a better guard against ideology than the development of a methodological critique of the sort Habermas proposes. I now develop this claim by looking at four specific criticisms Habermas makes against Gadamer.

Charges of Positivism

In his first point of criticism, Habermas maintains that Gadamer's insistence on the primacy of the hermeneutic process to method ends up sounding positivistic. Recall that according to Habermas, positivism refers to the view that reason is unable to justify universal norms. Habermas writes:

> Gadamer unwittingly obliges the positivistic devaluation of hermeneutics. He joins his opponents in the view that hermeneutic experience "transcends the range of control of scientific method". . . . [His] critique of a false objectivist self-understanding cannot, however, lead to a suspension of the methodological distanciation of the object, which distinguishes a self-reflective understanding from everyday communicative experience. The confrontation of "truth" and "method" should not have misled Gadamer to oppose hermeneutic experience abstractly to

> methodic knowledge as a whole. (Habermas 1986, 267)[1]

In other words, Habermas considers Gadamer's hermeneutics ultimately positivistic because it admits a distinction between critical reflection and everyday experience. This divorce, according to Habermas, results from Gadamer's false dichotomy between methodic knowledge and hermeneutic (i.e., communicative or everyday) experience. Habermas quotes Gadamer in order to show what lies behind Gadamer's 'positivistic' tendency to keep everyday experience (the subject of Geisteswissenschaften) separate from method:

> Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a process, a method. (Habermas 1991b, 168)

According to Gadamer, understanding is not a matter of following the right steps to ensure truthfulness, accuracy, etc., but of seeing oneself placed within a greater tradition, and this means seeing the prejudices that make up one's tradition in order to be challenged by them. On this view, understanding involves the awareness of one's own horizon, and achieving such an awareness in itself brings about a shift, an expansion, of one's horizon. Habermas considers this too passive, too resigned a position.

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[1]In this chapter, for reasons of clarity and explanation, I draw on of two different translations of Habermas's review article of Truth and Method.

This first concern of Habermas is, perhaps in one sense, the most straight-forwardly dealt with since it seems to revolve around a misunderstanding of the Gadamerian project, albeit a common one. For example, Dieter Misgeld writes

> Gadamer proposes to use the notions of truth and method disjunctively, as if the one had no relation to the other. In a reversal of the usual conception, he seems to claim that truth can be found only if it is argued that "the hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all." (Hollinger 1985, 144)

However, in the foreword to the fifth German edition of Truth and Method (from which the second revised English translation was made) Gadamer disputes the notion that he pits truth against method. Gadamer states that he never intended to negate the desirability for a scientific approach to understanding, rather he wanted to underscore the "'scientific' integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding" (Gadamer 1992c, xxviii). Commitment precedes all applications of method. Scientists must precariously balance the explanation of unconventional data in a way that is commensurate with the tacit commitments of their scientific community. This requires the need to creatively go out on a limb by exposing the limitations of such tacit commitments, and yet not go so far that they are dismissed, out of hand, by their scientific peers.

An example of the way in which the tacit commitments of scientists influence their work is Einstein's development of the cosmological term that 'righted' one of the more shocking

conclusions of his general relativity equation. Einstein's scientific community was committed to the fact that the universe is static: it neither expands nor contracts. Therefore, when his general relativity equation suggested that the universe either expands or contracts, instead of pursuing this 'unbelievable' notion, he developed a term that accounted for the apparent movement of the universe and concluded that it was indeed stable as "was known all along." Einstein's tacit commitment to the assumptions of his scientific community fundamentally influenced his conclusions. Stephen Hawking remarks:

> As it was, no-one thought the universe was changing with time until 1929 when Edwin Hubble discovered that distant galaxies are moving away from us. The universe is expanding. Einstein later called the cosmological term "the greatest mistake of my life." (Hawking 75, 1993)

It is a blatant misunderstanding to claim that Gadamer argues that scientific methodology has no place in the humanities or social sciences. Gadamer directly denies this is his position: "I did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical work within the human sciences" (Gadamer 1992c, xxix). He continues,

> The difference that confronts us is not in the method but in the objectives of knowledge. The question I have asked seeks to discover and bring into consciousness something which that methodological dispute serves only to conceal and neglect, something that does not so much confine or limit modern science as precede it and make it possible. (Gadamer 1992c, xxix)

Gadamer thus wants to stay away from the dispute regarding the difference between, and/or superiority of, the method used in the natural sciences versus that used in the human sciences. Instead, his concern is to articulate the process of understanding that goes on before and encompasses the actual methodological practices of the natural sciences. This sort of hermeneutical self-awareness does not preclude the subsequent use of method, but calls for a more humble use of method in that we are aware of its conditional validity.

In other words, Truth and Method is an exploration of what drives method, or what drives our scientific (as well as non-scientific) quest for understanding. The germinating question of his magnum opus asks:

> how is understanding possible? This is a question which precedes any action of understanding on the part of subjectivity, including the methodical activity of the "interpretive science" and their norms and rules. Heidegger's temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviours of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself. (Gadamer 1992c, xxx, emphasis mine)

Gadamer does not view hermeneutics as transcending scientific method, as Habermas claims, rather Gadamer wants to expose the nature of the understanding that takes place prior to and underneath scientific method. If this description still makes Gadamer's project sound transcendental, perhaps one has forgotten the circular emphasis Gadamer brings to the hermeneutic process. Keeping in mind the circular aspect of the hermeneutic event prevents

one from formalizing Gadamer's description of the hermeneutical process into a series of steps: first comes a hidden, 'mysterious' hermeneutic process, then comes the explicit formulation of a scientific method. Such a description conflicts with Gadamer's emphasis on the Heideggerian themes of circularity and temporality. When Gadamer claims to explicate the hermeneutical process 'underneath' the scientific method, he is not looking for an ontologically distinct realm in which the hermeneutical process occurs.

Recall Heidegger's description of being-in-the-world in terms of Dasein as always already caught up within a world. Heidegger and Gadamer have shown the effeteness of a bifurcated view which posits subject versus object in the world as the basic given. So it is with the relation between hermeneutics and science. Gadamer writes: "The hermeneutical experience is prior to all methodical alienation because it is the matrix out of which arise the questions that it then directs to science" (Gadamer 1977, 26). The practice and questions of science emerge from our situatedness, our engagement within the world. Although scientific method provides an important way to look at the world, the circular and temporal aspects of understanding show the derivative nature of scientific method. Scientific understanding focuses on the occurrent, but this is dependent on, as Heidegger has shown, our fundamental being-

in-the-world. Both Heidegger and Gadamer maintain that scientific understanding does not oppose hermeneutic understanding but stems from it. They argue for the derivative nature of a scientific, objective approach to the world. Unless we already have a situation, a fore-grounding of experience, we have no horizon by which to bring into focus the occurrent. Therefore, far from being positivistic by opposing scientific and hermeneutic understanding, Gadamer's emphasis on the circular, temporal and contextual aspects of understanding actually undercuts this dualism. On Gadamer's account, just as the subject-object dualism is not the fundamental way to consider the world, so it does not make sense to argue for a scientific-hermeneutic dualism.[2]

Critique of Tradition and Historically-Effected Consciousness

I now turn to Habermas's second point of critique concerning the role of tradition in understanding. According to Gadamer, understanding occurs not as a matter of intentionally following a method but by the ". . . placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a process, a method," (quoted in

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[2]This is not to say that the two do not consist of different activities or procedures--I will say more about this under the fourth point below where I consider Habermas's appeal to an extra-traditional critique in order to rout out ideology.

Habermas 1991b, 168). Habermas asserts that Gadamer's view of tradition remains too passive, ruling out any critique of the tradition itself. Again, it is not that Habermas denies the crucial role played by tradition in understanding; rather, he wants to call attention to the way in which the appropriation of a tradition actually dissolves its subtle grasp on us. More specifically, Habermas maintains that we are able to grasp and reify the genesis of our tradition so as to free us from its potential distortive influences. Habermas comments, "In Gadamer's view, *on* going tradition and hermeneutic inquiry merge to a single point. Opposed to this is the insight that the reflected appropriation of tradition breaks up the naturelike (naturewuchsige) substance of tradition and alters the position of the subject on it" (Habermas 1986, 268). The term "naturelike," as explained in an editor's note to this particular translation "means literally 'growing'. The term is used by neo-Marxists to refer to processes that develop without reflection or plan" (Habermas 1986, 275).

Thus according to Habermas, Gadamer's view of tradition mimics the evolutionary process; thus we can speak about tradition unfolding, changing, adapting, growing, etc. Such a view of tradition suggests a tacit contingency upon origins, as opposed to a reflected disassociation with what came before. Our participation within a tradition manifests our continuity with, and connection to, what came before. It

does not break up or problemize this continuity. Habermas therefore concludes that Gadamer's approach to the role of tradition appears to limit the possibility for critical exposure of tradition itself. Whereas for Habermas, reflection actually breaks up this naturelike process: through scientific reflection tradition is significantly altered to the point of its demise, or at least to the point of unrecognition. Habermas claims: ". . . when reflection understands the genesis of the tradition from which it proceeds and to which it returns, the dogmatism of life-praxis is shaken" (Habermas 1991a, 168). In other words, reflection, as critique of tradition and understanding, radically changes the old tradition.

Habermas thus draws a marked contrast between his own position and Gadamer's, which emphasizes our embeddedness within tradition and suggests a compliant relation to tradition. Again, it is this apparent passivity that troubles Habermas, for it seems we are too easily lulled into accepting the <u>status quo</u> (which may be ideological), and denied any impetus to come up with a formal critique of our tradition. Habermas's concern pits the power of the reflected appropriation of tradition to "break up the naturelike substance of tradition" against the "acknowledgement" of tradition through the creation of new practices.

The provocative question is, "How strong is the quake that shakes the 'dogmatism of life-praxis'?" Habermas, as we have seen, portrays the Gadamerian view of tradition as a passive unfolding with no critical ability. In its place, Habermas proposes we come up with a method that allows us to reflect ourselves out of tradition. Gadamer summarizes his view of Habermas's false dichotomy:

> Now my thesis is--and I believe--that the thing hermeneutics teaches us, as a necessary consequence of recognizing the contingency and finitude which are inseparable from historical involvement, is to see through the dogmatic antithesis between ongoing "autochthonous" tradition, on the one hand, and its reflective appropriation on the other. Even in the interpretive sciences, the one who does the understanding can never reflect himself out of the historical involvement of his hermeneutical situation so that his own interpretation does not itself become a part of the subject at hand. (Gadamer 1990b, 282)

Gadamer's conception of 'historically effected consciousness' is important in sorting out this clash over the nature and potency of tradition. The term 'historically effected consciousness', according to Gadamer, will always remain intentionally ambiguous in that "it is used to mean at once the consciousness effected in the course of history and determined by history, and the very consciousness of being thus effected and determined" (Gadamer 1992c, xxxiv).

For Gadamer, historically effected consciousness does not imply the passivity of understanding but the limitations of what we are able to be aware of at a given time. Historically reflected consciousness does not preclude

reflection, i.e., it is not an uncritical (nature-like) unfolding as the neo-Marxists imply. Gadamer does not deny it is important to critically reflect on one's knowledge, tradition, history, culture, etc. Nor would he rule out the importance of the use of social scientific methods to aid in our reflection. Rather, what he denies is our ability to exhaustively expose every prejudice that makes up the tradition which we are. There is no "reflecting ourselves out of the historical involvement of our hermeneutical situation," as Habermas proposes. Given the nature of this situatedness, we cannot even strive for such an historically transcendent stance. Gadamer writes:

> But on the whole the power of effective history does not depend on its being recognized. This, precisely, is the power of history over finite human consciousness, namely that it prevails even where faith in method leads one to deny one's own historicity. . . . That we should become completely aware of effective history is just as hybrid a statement as when Hegel speaks of absolute knowledge, in which history would become completely transparent to itself and hence be raised to the level of a concept. Rather, historically effected consciousness . . . is an element in the act of understanding itself and, as we shall see, is already effectual in finding the right questions to ask. (Gadamer 1992c, 301)

Gadamer argues that the power of historically effected consciousness results in aspects of understanding that can never be fully exposed, articulated or explicated; and if this is the case, then any method we come up with to expose some deeper level of our understanding remains initiated by and embedded within historically effected consciousness.

Therefore Habermas's dichotomy does not stand. As a result, Gadamer argues that only "dogmatic prejudice" will make us attempt the type of methodological critique Habermas desires. Furthermore, Gadamer stresses that Habermas's notion of the "naturelike substance of tradition" is an ineffectual one that even Marx himself dismissed. Hence Gadamer concludes:

> Seen from this point of view, of course, the concept of an "autochthonous" or "natural" order of things. . . takes on a highly questionable aspect. Indeed that is sheer romanticism--and such romanticism creates an artificial gulf between tradition and the reflection grounded in historical consciousness. (Gadamer 1990b, 287)

Gadamer here maintains that, given his description of tradition, the accusation that he condones the status quo rests on a misunderstanding. He dismisses proposals that the hermeneutical process he describes is evolutionary, unfolding in a non-critical way, and thus passive in nature. Recall the way in which Gadamer describes the continuation of tradition as requiring active participation, reflection, and adaptation. He maintains that not only can Habermas never, in all his attempts to develop a scientific critique of tradition and language, escape the grasp of historically effected consciousness, but the very attempt to do so is a denial of the fundamental ontological nature of hermeneutics and that such denial actually makes one more vulnerable to ideology and distortive understanding.

Dieter Misgeld argues that Gadamer's own work refutes

accusations of conservatism and blind acceptance of past views:

> Thus Gadamer argues for a thoroughly historical notion of inquiry. Traditions are open to modification, yet every modification contributes to their continuation. He is antagonistic to concepts of inquiry that postulate the possibility of a complete emancipation from tradition. (Misgeld 1985, 149).

This is not to say, however, that Gadamer thinks that such attempts at a method of critique are futile. (He himself admits that scientific method has a role in examining the social world.) But rather, Gadamer insists that he is only explicating what this comprehensive hermeneutical process comprises. He writes:

> What distinguishes the process of refining hermeneutic practice from acquiring a mere technique, whether it is called social technology or critical method, is that in hermeneutics history co-determines the consciousness of the person who understands. Therein lies an essential reversal: what is understood always develops a certain power of convincing that helps form new convictions. I do not at all deny that if one wants to understand, one must endeavor to distance oneself from one's own opinions on the matter. (Gadamer 1992c, 567-568)

For Gadamer, distancing oneself from one's opinions begins with the exposure of prejudice and I now turn now to Habermas's third point in which he disputes Gadamer's description of the role of prejudice in understanding.

The Role of Prejudices

Habermas argues, against Gadamer, that the exposure of prejudices necessarily renders them impotent. To recall, he

does not deny that prejudices are unavoidable but he does not draw the same conclusion from this that Gadamer does, namely, that prejudices can be legitimate. Recall that Gadamer insists that ". . . 'prejudice' certainly does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value" (Gadamer 1992c, 270). Thus, while both Gadamer and Habermas agree that exposing prejudices entails a change in the way they operate, on Gadamer's account, either prejudices are rejected (if they have no place in the development of a unity of meaning, i.e., they are found to be untruthful) or prejudices are brought to light and critically adapted into our belief structure (i.e., they are deemed truthful and are given the status of a justified belief). For Habermas, however, once a prejudice is exposed, it no longer functions as a prejudice, i.e., as a crucial (uncriticized) component within the understanding process.[3]

Habermas argues that what Gadamer considers the critical adaptation of a truthful prejudice is actually the mere transference of a prejudice from one place in one's belief system to another place. Discussing the way in which a student learns from his teacher, Habermas seeks to substantiate his claim that Gadamer needs to go further and

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[3]While it no longer has the same potential power (in operating unexamined), I do not see how Habermas could mean that all exposed prejudices simply melt away. I think we could think of many examples of hidden prejudices that are exposed and yet still (rightfully or not) continue to function.

develop a formal critique in order to avoid the distortive influences of the status quo. Habermas describes how on Gadamer's account a prejudice can be made immune from critique because it remains part of the tradition as a whole and that Gadamer provides no means for critically reflecting upon the tradition as a whole. Habermas writes:

> As the person, having become mature, confirmed the structure of prejudgments, he would transfer, in reflected form, the once involuntary acknowledgement of the personal authority of the guardian to the objective authority of a context of tradition. Yet it would remain authority, for reflection would be able to move only within the limits of the facticity of what was handed down. The act of recognition, mediated by reflection, would not have altered the fact that tradition as such remained the only basis for the validity of prejudgments. (Habermas 1991b, 169-170)

As we have seen, the process Gadamer describes as coming to a unity of meaning, in which one reflects critically on a prejudice, entails either rejecting it as inadequate or adapting it to fit more assuredly in one's belief system. According to Habermas, this process ends up maintaining the status quo of the tradition as a whole in which the prejudice is situated. Gadamer fails to notice the "limits of facticity of what was handed down" and how we remain trapped within these limitations unless we have a way to transcend them. Consequently, tradition ultimately holds onto its authority. This provides the force in Habermas's argument that Gadamer's hermeneutics does not go far enough: it may allow for reflection upon a myriad of prejudices, but it does nothing to provide a critique for the tradition as a

whole which provides the systemic support for these prejudices. We need to transcend our tradition for tools to be able to effectively criticize our tradition.

To reiterate, Habermas accuses Gadamer of failing to recognize the extent of the power of critical reflection to break up the "dogmatic forces" of tradition. Habermas relies on aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics to reveal that we cannot ignore tradition nor our place with in it, but this does not mean that we cannot use scientific reflection to help us escape the distorting influences of tradition.

Echoing Habermas's concerns, Jack Mendelson reveals a lacuna in Gadamer's response to Habermas:

> Reflection and critique are for [Gadamer] moments of understanding. Thus, he thinks that the opposition between hermeneutics and ideology-critique is misleading. But Habermas is right when he points out that the psychoanalytic approach to unconscious motives and neurotic behavior employs a theory for the purpose of explanation, and this differentiates its procedures from ordinary processes of understanding meaning. From the perspective of the methodology of social science this is a crucial distinction, and Gadamer nowhere deals with it satisfactorily. (Mendelson 1979, 65)

We need to ask, then, why Gadamer fails to deal with this point satisfactorily. I think this is due to the fact that both Gadamer and Habermas seem to mean different things by 'exposure' in their dispute about the role of prejudice, and their differing definitions are not mutually exclusive. When Habermas claims that once a prejudice is exposed it no longer operates as a crucial belief in our belief structure, this stems from his desire for the application of a formal

critique of tradition as a whole. In other words, the goal of a formal critique is to disintegrate prejudices in order to expose ideology. As Mendelson notes above, theory does provide an explanation in a way that differs from the fundamental onto-hermeneutical experience.

However, Gadamer nowhere denies that a formal critique may have a unique role to play, and he even acknowledges the role that the application of method can play in the social sciences. In fact, I believe that one can legitimately extend this claim by Gadamer and assert that Gadamer might actually agree with Habermas's point that a formal critique can lead to the demise of certain prejudices. To argue as much does not take away from Gadamer's main point that, nevertheless, there remains a more fundamental experience than that of a formalized critique. But to claim that a formalized critique may provide certain insights is not to elevate (or pit) method against hermeneutic experience.

Gadamer shows how at this more fundamental level of experience prejudices come to be exposed as a result of the dialogical process of understanding--but not necessarily to the point of their demise.[4] And this is the point Habermas never seems to address directly. He argues that Gadamer's account of the exposure of prejudices (as he illustrates with

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[4]For example, as in the psycho-analytic model, exposing a psychosis does not 'cure' the patient but better enables him to cope with it.

the student teacher example) fails to provide a suitable analysis of the tradition as a whole--but this line of argument does not address Gadamer's point that prejudices (not traditions) can be exposed in this way. Habermas denies Gadamer's point by always bringing the argument back to a critique of traditions as a whole. Perhaps one could infer that their argument over prejudice is really a red herring, attracting attention away from a more significant or perhaps more fruitful debate over the role of tradition as a whole. Pursuing this thought, I now want to turn to Habermas's final point of criticism.

The Search for Understanding: Epistemology or Ontology?

Habermas proceeds to argue that in order to avoid the tenebrific influences of ideology one must appeal to a framework, or a reference system outside of tradition. Anticipating a Gadamerian concern that if both the interpreter and the object are part of the tradition, as both Gadamer and Habermas assert, Habermas asks, "how could such a reference system be legitimized except, in turn, out of the appropriation of tradition?" (Habermas 1986, 270).

Habermas agrees with Gadamer that language is tradition, or as Habermas puts it, language is a "meta-institution." However, Habermas regards language as also at the hand of our social interactions; in other words, it is also a tool of social interaction. Delving into an examination of language is key because of the dual role it plays in society: as well

as being the embodiment of tradition, language also becomes a tool for society. This is Habermas's movement beyond hermeneutics: "Hermeneutic experience, encountering this dependence of symbolic context on actual relationships, becomes a critique of ideology" (Habermas 1991b, 172). Habermas takes hermeneutic experience to be a contextual encounter with phenomena. But it is precisely this contextual aspect of the encounter with meaningful phenomena as 'meaningful' that troubles Habermas: we need something external to this experience, i.e., theory, to insure that our understanding is not distorted. Hermeneutic experience, therefore, must be supplemented by a critique of ideology which problemizes what hermeneutic experience takes for granted.

This characterization of hermeneutic experience prevents Habermas from falling into the trap that he sees Gadamer as having fallen into: that of absolutizing hermeneutic experience and denying the power of reflection to act on and shape hermeneutic experience. Habermas agrees with Gadamer that social institutions are dependent upon the "meta-institution of language" but this does not mean that language cannot be brought under critical analysis in order to examine its potential for ideology. Habermas accuses Gadamer's description of hermeneutics of lapsing into idealism. According to Habermas, Gadamer pictures the relationship between language and society as unidirectional. Language

gives rise to and influences social relations but not the other way round. Instead of considering ideas to be the fundamental substance of reality, as he claims Gadamer does, Habermas paints a picture of a symbiotic relationship between language and the material world:

> The linguistic infrastructure of society is a moment in a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraints of reality: by the constraint of external nature, which enters into the procedures of technological exploitation, and by the constraint of inner nature, which is reflected in the repressions of social relationships of power. (Habermas 1991b, 174)

In other words, social relationships and power "affect the very grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world" (Habermas 1991b, 174). The same can be said of tradition--it does not stand free from the influence of social relations and power any more than language does. Habermas quotes Albrecht Wellmer:

> The Enlightenment knew what hermeneutics forgets: that the "conversation" which, according to Gadamer, we "are" is also a nexus of force and for precisely that reason is not a conversation. . . . The claim to universality of the hermeneutical approach can be upheld only if one starts from the recognition that the context of tradition, as the locus of possible truth and real accord, is at the same time the locus of real falsehood and the persistent use of force. (Habermas 1990, 314)

Here we see the concern expressed that any given tradition is as likely to spawn true understanding as it is a false one--and that hermeneutics provides no way of discerning one from another. Such a dualistic view of knowledge rests on the presupposition that one can achieve a standpoint from which

one can objectively assess that a starting point of a tradition is either true or false. But Gadamer's continuation of the Heideggerian project shows that such a perspective is impossible--one can only judge the truth or falseness of a tradition from within a tradition. The question then becomes not whether we started from a true or false perspective (for to what standards could we possibly appeal to make such a judgment?), but how are we best able to assess the present state of our tradition.

In Chapter Three I presented the Gadamerian argument that to inhabit a tradition demands continual assessing, modifying, changing, etc. of one's tradition. But this does not satisfy Habermas. He takes Gadamer's insistence that we are so imbedded within the hermeneutical process, and therefore have no recourse for a transcendent critique of tradition or language, to imply that Gadamer is ultimately an idealist. Habermas saddles Gadamer's hermeneutics with idealism because it appears to consider language as prior and giving rise to the activity of the community of language users. Gadamer, obviously, wants to deflect any such charges of idealism. Commenting on the reciprocal relation of the practice of science and our everyday language, Gadamer rejoins:

> This by no means suggests, however, what Habermas imputes to me: that the linguistically articulated consciousness claims to determine all the material being of life-practice. It only suggests that there is no societal reality, with all its concrete forces, that does not bring itself to

> representation in a consciousness that is linguistically articulated. Reality does not happen "behind the back" of language; . . . reality happens precisely within language. (Gadamer 1977, 35)

Gadamer thus explicitly defends himself against charges of idealism by stating that he does not think that there is a uni-directional causal or constitutive relation between language and society, and that he never implies that language is all there is to reality. Rather, he claims that there is no experience that is not linguistically constituted. How, then, does he respond to charges of conservatism? Gadamer himself considers this the "weightiest objection . . . [namely,] that I have allegedly derived the fundamental significance of agreement from the language dependence of all understanding and all coming to an understanding, and thereby have legitimated a prejudice in favor of existing social relations" (Gadamer 1992c, 566, emphasis mine).

Gadamer certainly does not take lightly such charges of conservatism. He follows this quotation by outlining how he agrees with the first part of this accusation, stating that: "All coming to understanding in language presupposes agreement not just about the meaning of words and the rules of spoken language; much remains undisputed with regard to the 'subject matter' as well--i.e., to everything that can be meaningfully discussed" (Gadamer 1992c, 567). But what Gadamer challenges, and what I want to explore, is whether this implicates his hermeneutics in preserving the status

quo. Georgia Warnke, who provides an insightful analysis of Gadamer's project, faults Gadamer for his latent conservatism:

> Gadamer's thesis . . . is fundamentally [a] conservative one that since we are historically finite, since we have no concept of rationality that is independent of the tradition to which we belong and hence no universal norms and principles to which we can appeal, we ought not even to attempt to overthrow the authority of that tradition. . . . We must accept the authority of the tradition because we cannot know enough to be certain of our criticisms of it. (Warnke 1987, 136)

I contend that Warnke misses Gadamer's point regarding tradition. Gadamer no where claims we should not attempt to overthrow authority, tradition, etc., but that our ability to do so will always be limited in ways we cannot grasp. We cannot give a final argument against authority that does not itself draw on the authority of our tradition. Gadamer insists: "Tradition is no proof and validation of something, in any case not where validation is demanded by reflection" (Gadamer 1977, 34). Warnke implies that Gadamer claims that if we do not have a coherent, systematic reason for rejecting tradition or authority, then we must blindly submit. For example, Warnke claims that Gadamer would be against revolutions in which there is no immediate cause for justification--or that there never are any good reasons for supporting a revolution.

While Gadamer provides no explicit rebuttal to Warnke's attack, I do think the Gadamerian account leaves room for the endorsement of revolutions. Recall Gadamer's account of

the way in which prejudices are exposed. The hermeneutic process fosters a more authentic seeing in that prejudices are exposed as we knock up against experience. Just because one does not immediately act on one's discomfort does not mean one is preserving the status quo--yet, this is what Warnke seems to imply:

> Failure to find axiomatic grounds for our criticism of authority does not mean that we must submit dogmatically to it. We can criticize it for a variety of different reasons, including its own inability to know why we should not. In equating the lack of an ultimate foundation for our beliefs with the necessity of submitting to authority Gadamer reinforces the conservative dimension of his "anticipation of completeness." (Warnke 1987, 136)[5]

According to Warnke, Gadamer maintains that unless we can develop a systematic account for challenging the system, then we should blindly submit. But, Gadamer's stress on the continually shifting horizon of understanding counteracts charges of conservatism. For example, if all societal eruptions begin from a feeling of distress, oppression, uncomfortableness, etc., and if social upheavals and revolutions are not arbitrary eruptions--if they are reactions to particular inadequacies within a system--then such feelings of inadequacies will naturally provoke questions and concerns regarding the status quo. It is precisely this sense of inadequacy, when one runs up against

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[5]Here Warnke appears to be referring to Truth and Method. Unfortunately, in her whole section on Gadamer's conservatism, she fails to make references to explicit passages.

something that one can no longer make sense of, that Gadamer accounts for in his descriptions of prejudice. On Gadamer's account, the very event of questioning and exposing one's prejudices elicits change.

Dieter Misgeld provides a helpful counterpoint here. He points out that Gadamer's claim about the fundamental and ubiquitous aspect of tradition "does not turn Gadamer into an ultra-conservative." Misgeld continues:

> For while Gadamer claims that, for example, the development of science will meet a limit, he also says that the limit is unknowable at present (Gadamer, 1967). Nor does Gadamer give his notion of tradition firm substantive content. He does not argue that monogamous or patriarchal family structures will survive no matter what. In his own domain of philosophical scholarship, the study of Greek philosophy and German Idealism (1976b) in particular, there can be no question that he takes a critical attitude toward central concepts. (Misgeld 1985, 148)

I am arguing that even though Gadamer does not believe that a formal critique can be applied to our knowledge as a whole, that does not mean Gadamer is against trying to be objective about, or critical of, one's communication. The conflict lies in the extent and degree to which Gadamer and Habermas each thinks such objectivity is possible. In explicating his deepest concern with the Habermasian presupposition of the counterfactual agreement, Gadamer writes: "On my side, by contrast, there is a deep skepticism about the fantastic overestimation of reason by comparison to the affections that motivate the human mind" (Gadamer 1992c, 567).

This claim should not be read as appealing to some ineffable process of understanding that can never be articulated. Rather, recall an earlier quotation from Gadamer in which he states that "in hermeneutics history co-determines the consciousness of the person who understands. Therein lies an essential reversal: what is understood always develops a certain power of convincing that helps form new convictions" (Gadamer 1992c, 567).

Gadamer adds that while understanding is based on agreement (e.g. of prejudices and the overlapping of horizons) this does not mean that one must agree with the position one is coming to understand. Here I want to draw out the difference between agreement that makes understanding possible (that is, a general and tacit agreement of background, language, tradition) and explicit agreement over particular points (that is, the sharing of the same opinions). I call the latter 'subjective agreement' and use it to refer to agreement that is conscious, and initiated by the subject. This distinction plays an important part in undercutting accusations that in emphasizing agreement the hermeneutic process entails enforcing the <u>status quo</u>. 'Subjective agreement' thus contrasts with what Gadamer calls 'hermeneutic experience', namely, the process of "affirming what one understands."[6] In

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[6]"Affirm" comes across as too vague in its similarity to "accept." And in English, we talk about "accepting where someone is coming from," even though we may not "agree" with

fact, any such attempt at subjective agreement will remain limited since

> what one understands always speaks for itself. On this depends the whole richness of the hermeneutic universe, which includes everything intelligible. Since it brings this whole breadth into play, it forces the interpreter to play with his own prejudices at stake. (Gadamer 1992c, 568)

The hermeneutic circle is seen as efficacious by Gadamer, and not as something to be avoided. Let me give an example in order to clarify the key aspects that make up the hermeneutic experience, differentiating it from mere subjective agreement and showing that the former does not necessarily entail the latter. This becomes important in demonstrating why the hermeneutic experience does not oblige one to agree with the status quo.

Let us say I am trying to understand the war in Bosnia. Someone explains to me the commitments, concerns, and histories of the different ethnicities in that region. I gradually come to see and understand aspects of the war I have never before considered. In this regard, the hermeneutic experience is at play: such an understanding is based on shared prejudices regarding communication, grammar, geography, ethnicity, war, pride, belief in one's own values, etc. Yet, my new found insights do not require me in anyway to sympathize with any particular side in the war. Thus not only does the hermeneutic process allow me to remain

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him or her--hence my designation, "subjective agreement."

objective (I can understand several competing positions at one time) it actually fosters a further examination (through suspension and provocation) of my previously hidden prejudices regarding ethnicity and nationality which cannot but help have bearing upon my life practice. Thus such understanding is not supported by any kind of idealism; it is not uni-directional--I am able to come to a new understanding because of life experience (e.g., I know what it's like to want something so badly I'm willing to make another suffer for it).

Gadamer's point is that the circular and continuous nature of hermeneutic experience not only emerges out from life and praxis but that the hermeneutic experience also gives rise to the examination of prejudices, which cannot but help affecting the way we live our lives. The practical emphasis of knowing-how, which epitomizes the hermeneutic experience, demands a 'critique of prejudices' born of praxis. I use scare quotes here to emphasize that I do not mean a formal critique, but one that results from and acknowledges our being-in-the-world without trying to transcend it. The situatedness of our being-in-the-world effects a continual stirring up of prejudices. As they are stirred up, we are forced to grapple with them, and as we grapple with them we are changed, along with our environment. Against those that impute the hermeneutic with preserving the

status quo, Gadamer's project reveals the richness and fecundity of the hermeneutic experience.

At this point it would be easy to object to the fact that on Gadamer's account there is no insurance that the hermeneutic experience will not succumb to ideology. For, if both we and our environment are in a constant state of flux, how, worries Habermas, can we escape a distorted understanding? For example, there is no guarantee that one would not use the example of the Bosnian war to support policies restricting the immigration and freedom of different ethnicities within Canada. One might conclude from the war in Bosnia that it is simply too dangerous to allow immigrants into Canada for it might lead to ethnic wars. We need, Habermas warns, some type of critique to prevent us from interpreting our life experience to an ideological end. According to Habermas, ideology, or the presence of power in communication, precludes the participation of all persons in a rational dialogue committed to agreement.

Remember, however, that Gadamer argues that in examining our prejudices, coming to a new understanding, etc., there is more going on than what a formal critique can account for. One way to bring out this point is to consider Gadamer's notion of rhetoric. Rhetoric is a form of reason that relies on the know-how of a situation. It reveals the way in which understanding is not, pace Habermas, a matter of merely extracting rules from a situation and then applying

them. Rhetoric, as one form pragmatic reason takes, demonstrates the inseparability of understanding and application. Gadamer describes the way in which pragmatic reason links rhetoric and hermeneutics:

> I would like to see more recognition of the fact that this is the realm hermeneutics shares with rhetoric: the realm of arguments that are convincing (which is not the same as logically compelling). It is the realm of practice and humanity in general, and its province is not where the power of "iron-clad conclusions" must be accepted without discussion, nor where emancipatory reflection is certain of its "contrafactual agreements," but rather where controversial issues are decided by reasonable consideration. . . . If rhetoric appeals to the feelings, as has long been clear, that in no way means it falls outside the realm of the reasonable. (Gadamer 1992c, 568)

Gadamer goes on to argue that rhetoric is not merely a technique but is embedded in the practice of life itself. In what way, then, is rhetoric more in danger of being a tool of ideology than is the appeal to the logic, or the 'rational' results, of technique, applied by the social scientists? Through his development of the similarities between rhetoric and hermeneutics Gadamer shows how reason plays a part in all of our experience--not just that of communicative rationality. Constructing a definition of communicative rationality is not unimportant, but it can never reveal all of the myriad of complex motivations that make up our lives. Gadamer concludes this section (after a dense but fascinating discussion on practical reason and consistency) with these words:

> I can only consider it a fatal confusion when the dialectical character of all reflection, its relation to the pregiven, is tied to an ideal of total enlightenment. To me that seems just as mistaken as the ideal of fully rational self-clarity, of an individual who would live in full consciousness and control of his impulses and motives. (Gadamer 1992c, 572)

In other words, there is a place for critical reflection--Gadamer never denies this. However, to think that it can go beyond hermeneutical experience is to subscribe to an inflated view of rationality. The nature of the hermeneutical experience is illustrated by rhetoric: both have their basis in life experience which includes communicative-rationality but is more than that (i.e., praxis, prejudices, affections, tradition, etc.). To suggest, as Habermas seems to do, that one is able to articulate to oneself all the possible reasons for doing something, or to be able to expose all of one's prejudices at once, is to slip into the Cartesian dream of trying to suspend all of one's beliefs at one time. Habermas therefore seems unable to escape the snares of his dualistic objectivism, the errors of which have been exposed by Gadamer's hermeneutics-as-ontology. Pushing hermeneutics to return to epistemology (by developing it into a formal critique to hermeneutics) thus proves futile.

CONCLUSION

In the last chapter I addressed four key criticisms Habermas makes against the Gadamerian project. I pointed out how Gadamer acknowledged that he was most troubled by the charge imputing his hermeneutics with conservatism. In fact, it seems fair to argue that most critics of the Gadamerian project sooner or later come around to making charges of this sort. Habermas, Ricoeur, Bernstein, Warnke, all present concerns about the way in which Gadamer's claim regarding the universality of the hermeneutic experience fails to provide his hermeneutics with a critical component. I have argued, however, that the absence of a formal critique does not rule out the possibility of critical reflection of a different sort; namely, a non-methodological critical reflection that relies on the temporal, circular, and contextual aspects of an ontological hermeneutics.

By way of conclusion, I want to suggest a direction in which the Gadamerian project may proceed. As I concluded in the last chapter, Gadamer and Habermas fundamentally, and irreconcilably, differ over their views regarding the nature and extent of the role tradition plays in understanding. Although Habermas concedes the Gadamerian point that

understanding is contingent to tradition and history, he thinks that by introducing scientific method into hermeneutics there is a way to alleviate the distortive influences of tradition.

Another way of expressing their fundamental difference is to consider the role each assigns to political critique. Although, as I noted in Chapter Four, Habermas does not think philosophy should play the role of socio-political judge, he seems to imply that a philosophy that is not political is automatically in danger of being ideological. This linking of philosophy with political critique presupposes an inflated view of rationality. He asserts that if philosophy can illuminate the rational and non-distortive modes of communication, we will be able to follow these norms to a freer society. One could say that Habermas, in spite of all his attempts to avoid a 'First Philosophy', ends up politicizing the Cartesian aim. Instead of seeking after the 'mind of God', Habermas seeks after the 'mind of Humanity'. Instead of freeing us to pursue knowledge for knowledge's sake, Habermas wants philosophy to free us for a better society. If we could just know what is truly rational (by methodologically examining the fundamental structure of humanity: language and culture), we can be free. A Gadamerian response asserts that even our conceptions of the terms, 'freedom', 'better society', remain conditioned by

our tradition. Reflection can never produce a culturally neutral critique.

Having come to the place where we let Habermas and Gadamer agree to disagree over the role of tradition, I want to examine the question I posed in Chapter One and use it to suggest areas for further research in the field of hermeneutics. Rather than inferring that if it no longer makes sense to push hermeneutics towards epistemology, then the need for some sort of socio-political critique is alleviated, I want to consider whether there is another way of framing this question that reveals something deeper about Gadamer's hermeneutics-as-ontology. A more relevant and useful way of framing the question is to inquire whether there is a form of self-criticism that eludes the problematic dualism of pitting formalized method against hermeneutic reflection.

Indeed, the lacuna Ricoeur and Habermas sense in Gadamer's project has to do with the absence of his explicit call for social and political critique. Again, Habermas has little impetus to accurately describe the mind of God; rather, he is concerned with the social and political effects of hermeneutics. Such a practical concern underlies Ricoeur's and Habermas's insistence upon the development of a systematized and generalized critique, an 'epistemological' aspect to hermeneutics. While I agree with the need to make explicit the place of social and political critique (and

Gadamer would surely agree, see Gadamer 1992a, 1992b), I want to argue that this can be done without returning to an epistemological emphasis, per se. In making suggestions for further research, I want to develop a second dimension to Ricoeur's hermeneutics-as-epistemology/ontology scheme.

In Chapter One, I discussed Ricoeur's line of questioning that traced the movement from epistemology to ontology within hermeneutics over the past 300 years. I want to add another axis to Ricoeur's epistemological-ontological one: one that draws on the opposition between generalized/de-regionalized and particularized/pragmatic approaches.

As I explained in Chapter One, prior to Schleiermacher, hermeneutics pursued an epistemological approach to the interpretation of texts. Biblical and legal hermeneuts sought to find the one true meaning of a text, where 'true' was assumed to be ahistorical and static. Thus besides being epistemological, the pre-Schleiermacherian hermeneutic concern was also with the particulars of textual interpretation. A significant shift in hermeneutics took place with Schleiermacher's attempt to come up with a generalized account of the hermeneutic process. He was no longer merely concerned just with the specifics of interpreting particular texts, but sought to give an epistemological account of how understanding in general took place.

Heidegger then took the emphasis within hermeneutics from the epistemological to the ontological. He changed the emphasis of hermeneutics from the epistemological search for the one accurate 'representation' of meaning to an ontological inquiry into the way in which Being shapes our understanding. In following Schleiermacher's impetus for developing a general account for understanding, Heidegger maintained that we needed to grasp the way in which Being precedes knowing. In a similar fashion, Gadamer extended the Heideggerian project to explicating the universality of the hermeneutic experience.

Throughout the history of hermeneutics, then, we can observe the movement not only from the epistemological to the ontological, but also from the particulars of textual interpretation to a general account of understanding. With the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' emphasis on a generalized account of understanding, Habermas insists that we must have some sort of political critique. He and Ricoeur assert that only by re-introducing the epistemological emphasis to hermeneutics can we bring about a socio-political critique. However, as I have shown in the last chapter, such a move back to epistemology will be fundamentally incompatible with the Gadamerian project. I want to argue that Gadamer's hermeneutics-as-ontology allows hermeneutics to remain ontological but steps away from generalized or systematized accounts to refocus on the way in which

hermeneutics is initiated on a particular, concrete, and pragmatic level. In so doing, we do not need to negate the generalized accounts of Heidegger and Gadamer but we can find ways to incorporate a socio-political response that remains compatible with their fundamental ontological commitments. We can push to expand the project of Gadamer to incorporate a distanciation that occurs primarily on the particular level, allowing for a greater socio/political awareness.

Relying both on Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world and Gadamer's fore-conception of completeness, the emphasis on particularity prevents a return to dualistic accounts of method while at the same time fosters a critical stance that does not try to transcend its own particularity. As I stressed in Chapter One, no-one doubts the need for the continual questioning and examination of one's own beliefs. The tension, however, between Gadamer, on one hand, and Ricoeur and Habermas on the other, concerns the nature and scope of such a critique. I have argued that we do not need, indeed, cannot have a formalized critique, or return to epistemology, if we want to remain within the flow of the Gadamerian project.

A central question for future Gadamerian studies is: is there a place in the onto-hermeneutical approach for a socio-political critique of any sort? I believe that such a critique may be developed provided it is: 1) dialogical and

self-critical, 2) initiated at the particular level, and 3) pragmatic. I will briefly trace such a path here.

First, throughout this thesis I have been arguing that Gadamer's hermeneutic project contains an incentive for self-critique in that the whole hermeneutical process involves and necessitates continual questioning. The initiation of the hermeneutic process by a question, and the repeated calling into question and exposure of our prejudices, constitute its dialogical character. (Recall Chapter Three where I discussed how the fluid, temporal, and circular aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics prevents accusations of passivity from sticking.)

The fact that the hermeneutic process never solidifies seems a stronger prevention against ideology than the formulation of a method that promises, at the very least, a sense of finality. The very nature of this self-critique precludes amending the hermeneutic process with a formalized ideological critique. For, to admit that we are always in danger of being ideological, that we are always in process, always "on the way," seems a surer way of routing out distorting prejudices than relying on a procedure that purportedly allows us to transcend our situatedness. Heidegger has described what happens when we fail to acknowledge the primacy of Being to understanding; and Gadamer's hermeneutics attempts to extend this point.

Gadamer, in his later writings, stresses the dynamic nature of the process of understanding: "Self-understanding can no longer be integrally related to a complete self-transparency in the sense of a full presence of ourselves to ourselves. Self-understanding is always on-the-way; it is on a path whose completion is a clear impossibility" (Gadamer 1992b, 103). To admit that "self-understanding is always on-the-way" is to admit something even more fundamental and provocative about our desire for a final, complete, and scientific understanding:

> One has to ask oneself whether the dynamic law of human life can be conceived adequately in terms of progress, of a continual advance from the unknown into the known, and whether the course of human culture is actually a linear progression from mythology to enlightenment. One should entertain a completely different notion: whether the movement of human existence does not issue in a relentless inner tension between illumination and concealment. Might it not be just a prejudice of modern times that the notion of progress that is in fact constitutive for the spirit of scientific research should be transferable to the whole of human living and human culture? One has to ask whether progress, as it is at home in the special field of scientific research, is at all consonant with the conditions of human existence in general. Is the notion of an ever mounting and self-perfecting enlightenment finally ambiguous? (Gadamer 1992b, 104-105)

Here we see a profoundly different view of understanding than that advanced by Descartes. The illumination and concealment of everyday life experience and of the universal hermeneutic experience cannot be captured by scientific method. There is no extracting ourselves out from our fundamental hermeneutic experience in order to proclaim

whether we are headed toward enlightenment or ideology--here is where the idea of "self-perfecting enlightenment is finally ambiguous." Given this contrast between the messiness and the ambiguity of human existence versus the need for scientific method to give final and precise descriptions, in what way can we develop or even make sense of the notion of a critical reflection we might apply to our knowledge?

This brings us to my second point regarding the way in which the hermeneutic process is initiated at the particular and concrete level. Gadamer has shown that questions such as "How can I know my tradition is not ideological?" do not make any sense when put to the whole of one's tradition. As I have argued throughout this thesis, even the framing of such questions emerge out from the tradition as a whole--there is no 'tradition-less' standpoint. Gadamer has sought to expose the problem with the impetus to reify tradition. He has maintained that it does not make any sense to view tradition as something we can stand over against as a totality and have some kind of ultimate perspective on. He has also shown how we do not need, in fact cannot have, a generalized account for detecting ideology. Does this mean, however, that Gadamer's hermeneutics precludes any delving into the potential for ideology? Not at all. For, questions like "How do we know we are not being ideological?" reveal their force when addressed at the particular level, as by an

individual qua citizen, as opposed to a social scientist attempting to transcend the influences of a culture.

I argued in the preceding chapter against Georgia Warnke's charge that Gadamer leaves us at a loss for providing any type of critique, and that we are doomed to accept the status quo. I take her criticisms to boil down to echoing Ricoeur's desire to return to epistemology to provide some sort of critique. David Hoy helps to refocus our question. He asks: "Thus central to the debate are the questions, can the tradition itself be criticized, and can reflection emancipate itself from its historical conditions?" (Hoy 1978, 118). Further on, Hoy quotes Gadamer:

> Tradition exists only in constant alteration. "To gain a connection" with the tradition is a formulation intended to call attention to an experience whereby our plans and wishes are always in advance of reality, and are, so to speak, even without connection with reality. What then becomes important is to mediate between desirable anticipations and practicable possibilities, between sheer wishes and actual intentions--that is, to imagine the anticipations in the substance of reality. (Hoy 1978, 127)

Hoy then remarks that

> [t]his statement shows the appeal to tradition to be pragmatic rather than dogmatic. As such, it is not intended to preserve old standards and methods of interpretations, nor the old results. . . . the appeal to tradition demands the possibility of criticism: it requires a move to methodological self-consciousness, to awareness of the relation between what is being said and what should be said. Instead of being yet another method, Gadamer's hermeneutics is a call for methodical self-reflection on the part of all the humanistic enterprises. In that sense, however, hermeneutics

> is still essentially linked to praxis. (Hoy 1978, 127)

My third point concerns the potential for drawing out the pragmatic emphasis within Gadamer's hermeneutics. As I mentioned above, emphasizing the pragmatic element in Gadamer's project is something that Gadamer himself has done in his later work. Hoy is not the only critic who sees the potential for Gadamer's hermeneutics moving us in the direction of praxis. Richard Bernstein has also developed the Gadamerian project along pragmatic lines. Bernstein's analysis proves insightful in that it challenges and extends the boundaries of Gadamer's project without undermining his fundamental commitments.

Although Bernstein agrees with Gadamer that hermeneutics, much less philosophy, can never, should never, claim to be able to solve all the problems of society and politics, he notes that Gadamer's own self-attributed goal of developing his hermeneutics demands more. Bernstein writes:

> The chief task for philosophic hermeneutics is to illuminate what happens when we understand--and this is essentially a philosophic question. But, such a line of defense is inadequate, and a bit too facile. Why? Because Gadamer <u>does</u> claim to illuminate the essential character of the <u>Geisteswissenschaffen</u> (although not to provide a methodological treatise on them). (Bernstein 1983, 160)

As an example of hermeneutics becoming more attuned to praxis Bernstein calls on Gadamer to tell us

> what is and ought to be the basis for the critical evaluation of the problems of modernity. . . . It is not <u>sufficient</u> to give a justification that

> directs us to tradition. What is required is a form of argumentation that seeks to warrant what is valid in this tradition. (Bernstein 1983, 155)

I think Bernstein is correct in pushing Gadamer to consider the basis by which he provides his own critiques. The problem, however, lies in the threat of infinite regress: one would then have to develop the basis by which one made a critique of the critique and so on, ad infinitum.

How then can hermeneutics manage to avoid the snares of both infinite regress and relativism? By accepting the finiteness of our particularity; for, no one individual can offer up a systematic, temporally complete, hermetically sealed critique. To put it in Heideggerian terms, we can picture ourselves as part of Being rather than isolated beings. We will then see our work as thinkers not to complete a system but as extending thought: we are part of a community into which we are called to interact with, challenge, and listen to, the ideas of others. Part of what <u>praxis</u> would look like in this context is the acknowledgement of our situatedness within a specific community and to thus see our goal as commenting on one another's work in such a way that no one individual seeks to proclaim a finished work. The temporal aspect of understanding which Gadamer develops reveals the inconclusiveness of an individual project and opens up the way for a community of thinkers as a whole to provide a critique.

There is obviously a lot more to be said on these issues; and I think it would prove fruitful to address them elsewhere in more detail, particularly by delving into the similarities and contrasts between twentieth-century German hermeneutics and American pragmatism.

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