May 2007

Interpreting Interpretation: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory in Language and Politics

Desiree Weber
Macalester College

Honors Paper

Macalester College

Spring 2007

Title: Interpreting Interpretation: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory in Language and Politics

Author: Désirée Weber

SUBMISSION OF HONORS PROJECTS

Please read this document carefully before signing. If you have questions about any of these permissions, please contact Janet Sietmann in the Library.

Title of Honors Project: Interpreting Interpretation: Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory / in Language and Politics

Author's Name: (Last name, first name) Weber, Désirée

The library provides access to your Honors Project in several ways:

- The library makes each Honors Project available to members of the Macalester College community and the general public on site during regular library hours.
- Using the latest technology, we make preservation copies of each Honors Project in both digital and microfilm formats.
- Every Honors Project is cataloged and recorded in CLICnet (library consortium OPAC) and in OCLC, the largest bibliographic database in the world.
- **To better serve the scholarly community,** a digital copy of your Honors Project will be made available via the Digital Commons @ Macalester (digitalcommons.macalester.edu.

The DigitalCommons@Macalester is our web based institutional repository for digital content produced by Macalester faculty, students, and staff. By placing your projects in the Digital Commons, all materials are searchable via Google Scholar and other search engines. Materials that are located in the Digital Commons are freely accessible to the world; however, your copyright protects against unauthorized use of the content. Although you have certain rights and privileges with your copyright, there are also responsibilities. Please review the following statements and identify that you have read them by signing below. Some departments may choose to protect the work of their Honors students because of continuing research. .In these cases the project is still posted on the repository, but content can only be accessed by individuals who are located on campus.

The original signed copy of this form will be bound with the print copy of the Honors Project. The microfilm copy will also include a copy of this form. Notice that this form exists will be included in the Digital Commons version.

I **agree** to make my Honors Project available to the Macalester College community and to the larger scholarly community via the Digital Commons@Macalester or its successor technology.

Signed Desiree J Weber

OR

I **do not want** my Honors Project available to the larger scholarly community. I want my Honors Project available only in the library, **NOT** for interlibrary loan purposes, and **NOT** through the Macalester College Digital Commons or its successor technology.

Signed _____

NOTICE OF ORIGINAL WORK AND USE OF COPYRIGHT PROTECTED MATERIALS:

If your work includes images that are not original works by you, you must include permissions from original content provider or the images will not be included in the electronic copy. If your work includes discs with music, data sets, or other accompanying material that is not original work by you, the same copyright stipulations apply. If your work includes interviews, you must include a statement that you have the permission from the interviewees to make their interviews public.

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL WORK CONTAINED IN THIS PAPER IS ORIGINAL WORK BY ME OR INCLUDES APPROPRIATE CITATIONS AND/OR PERMISSIONS WHEN CITING OR INCLUDING EXCERPTS OF WORK(S) BY OTHERS.

All students must sign here.

Signature: Dejuee J Weber Date: 4/30/07

Printed Name: Désirée Weber

Interpreting Interpretation:

Gadamer's Hermeneutic Theory

In Language and Politics

Désirée Jasmin Weber

Submitted April 30, 2007

Dr. Frank Adler, Adviser

Department of Political Science

Macalester College

Table of Contents:

" Being that can be understood is language."

– Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

Abstract:

Questions about the way language functions, how language relates to the world, and how we use it, are prior to political questions. By investigating Hans-Georg Gadamer's model of interpretation and understanding, this thesis seeks to draw out and clarify the inner workings of language, in an effort to determine a basis for consensus formation and critique of political ideologies. This thesis also considers whether a dialogic model proscribes a limited view of the self, which may preclude political action on the part of the unknown "Other." By surveying the debates between Gadamer, Jürgen Habermas and Ludwig Wittgenstein, this paper reveals the contours of Gadamer's hermeneutic model in an effort to evaluate its suitability as a foundation for politics.

INTRODUCTION

> It is the task of hermeneutics to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but a sharing of a common meaning.
>
> – Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*[1]

Language and its utilization circumscribe the politics of our future. The nature of language, whether seen as a mirror of reality or the medium of human society, plays a powerful part in structuring our interactions with the world. Investigating the nature of language should therefore produce some insight into the way we can bring about a better future.

Yet how do we go about such a task? A relevant theory of language and politics in contemporary thinking must engage in a two-part answer that yields a sound explanation of *what language is* and how it relates to the world, and how that impacts the politics that governs human forms of life. Much more than some arbitrary test, the intertwined nature of the answer is evidenced by the importance of language as a primary means of expression in contemporary society, which has made linguistic meaning a vital part of social life. In other words, the problem of understanding language is intimately tied up with, "[t]he problem of understanding the other, and of coming to an appreciation of the other's form of life, [which] comes to center on understanding other's use of language."[2]

In the following pages, I will conduct a theoretical investigation into the relationship between language theory and the hermeneutic model as presented by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002). Such an investigation takes shape against the backdrop of

numerous inquiries into the nature of language and its function in society, questions which have saturated 20th century thought. It is not a mere coincidence that language, linguistic meaning, rhetoric, speech and the written word have come to dominate our every day lives at the same time that major theories have re-examined that nature of language. Many of the changes underfoot since the mid-nineteenth century came to fruition in the early years of the twentieth century. In philosophy, the anti-foundationalist currents in the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and even Friedrich Nietzsche bubbled to the surface as even more stinging criticisms of philosophy's trajectory. The shift in the philosophical landscape was "characterized by the critique of the presupposition of philosophy under the reign of epistemology, or of what is now being called foundationalism."[3] In this respect, Gadamer was uniquely situated to witness the changes in philosophy. As one of Gadamer's translators put it, "part of [Gadamer's] great charm, stems, I believe, from the fact that his career spans the great cultural and philosophical shift from the nineteenth to the twentieth century."[4] In any case, the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics is substantiated by the centrality of linguistic questions in the last century of philosophy.

To fully explore these themes, I will conduct my investigation in several parts: Chapter One outlines the development of the hermeneutic tradition, from the ancient Greeks to its resurgence in the modern era. The thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey are instructive in how interpretive models have evolved in the modern era, but it is the work of Martin Heidegger that radically changed the hermeneutic practice. I investigate the parts of Heidegger's thought that most directly influenced Gadamer's own conception of human understanding. Additionally, I trace Gadamer's

emphasis on language as a central mechanism of interpretation. The second half of the chapter will contextualize Gadamer's contributions to hermeneutics in the larger frame of language theory. The work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951) bears striking similarities to Gadamer, both in how language relates to society and how individuals communicate. Nonetheless, I argue that the historical dimension in Gadamer's thought surpasses the analysis that Wittgenstein produced.

In Chapter Two, my focus shifts to the debate between Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas (1900–). In a review of *Truth and Method*, Habermas raises several points of contention which at once highlight the disagreements between ontological and critical theory, and also draw out the central themes of Gadamer's work. Habermas locates the model of translation at the base of Gadamer's explanation of how language is structured and argues that Wittgenstein's theory is incompatible because it relies instead on a model of socialization. Furthermore, Habermas presents potent criticisms against Gadamer's claim that the hermeneutic model is universally applicable. Approaching the matter from a social science perspective, Habermas argues that the shift between the part and the whole inherent in hermeneutic interpretation guts any chance of producing useful knowledge. Habermas' most potent attack is leveled at hermeneutics' apparent inability to critique the tradition on which is relies or political ideology.

I take up Gadamer's response in Chapter Three, where I explicate his essay on the scope and function of hermeneutic inquiry. Gadamer argues, and I believe rightly so, that the only access to the world is linguistically mediated, meaning that ideology and tradition cannot be located outside of hermeneutics. Instead, the 'linguisticality' of the world provides hermeneutics with a unique vantage point from which to be critically self-

reflective. In a fashion befitting a debate about hermeneutics, no definitive conclusions are reached, which is why I focus on additional questions that are raised in the last section of the chapter.

Chapter Four transplants the theoretical debates of the previous chapters into a political context. Gadamer's model of interpersonal communication is broadened to a hermeneutic speech community, which raises attendant political questions. The first part of the chapter explores several different angles of possible critique, querying whether a political vision based on hermeneutics carries with it normative prescriptions about the types of selves that engage in interpretation. The second part of the chapter answers the presented criticisms from the perspective of the hermeneutic tradition, ultimately concluding that Gadamer's hermeneutic model provides a sound model for political consensus-building.

But before I begin the retracing of the hermeneutic tradition, I would like to provide a brief overview of the main tenets of Gadamer's work. As a foundation for his interpretive framework, Gadamer argues that the act of creating meaning constitutes the ontology of human beings. As he puts it: "Human beings are self-interpreting animals."[5] It is not just our natural activity to interpret the world around us and ourselves, but interpretation is the most fundamental way that we can *be* in the world. What Gadamer means is that interpretation is what happens when a self encounters something, whether that is an object, the world or itself. Mediating between a person and the world thus takes on the mode of interpretation.

Interpretation also provides a framework for intersubjective interactions. Using the model of a dialogue between two people, Gadamer posits that each has a unique

horizon that circumscribes their history, experience and position. The *fusion* of these horizons is what happens when a common understanding is reached: the limits of each person's horizon is negotiated with regard to their interlocutor's horizon. While 'fusion' makes it sound seamless, continuous repetitions of this basic cycle enacts a type of kaleidoscope effect, continually refining previously held ideas, customs and prejudices. From the standpoint of a community, the interplay between horizons creates new meaning which is the basis for changing traditions. Gadamer indicates that, " [T]he horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come.[6] Extrapolated beyond the individual, this process crystallizes into a speech community, where individuals all contribute different particularized traditions to the discussion.

Notes:

[1] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985. p. 260.

[2] Gadamer, as quoted in Arnswald, Ulrich, "On the Certainty of Uncertainty: Language Games and Forms of Life in Gadamer and Wittgenstein," in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Malpas, J; U Arnswald, J Kertscher (eds). Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press. 2002. p. 29.

[3] From the Introduction by Frederick G. Lawrence, in Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Reason in the Age of Science*, Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983. p. xiii-xiv.

[4] Lawrence, Frederick G., "Introduction", in Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Reason in the Age of Science*, Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983. p. xiii.

[5] Quoted in Taylor, Charles, *Philosophical Papers*: 2 *Volumes,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. pg. 72.

[6] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 273.

CHAPTER 1

The Hermeneutic Tradition: Gadamer Situated Between Heidegger And Language Theory

In ancient times, the problem of interpretation was recognized as a threat to the traditional mechanisms of myth and saga that anchored particular worldviews. Introduced by the Sophists, the idea that multiple interpretations could emanate from the same source was, at the time, a radical notion. In a slight shift, the Socratic and Aristotelian versions of interpretation were more generally aimed at the "problem that something *distant* has to be brought close, a certain strangeness overcome, a bridge built between the once and the now."[1] Such themes are echoed in modern times, when interpretation was utilized as a tool aimed at overcoming the temporal distance that separates current society from the source of ancient texts. Giving rise to the early religious hermeneutics, the Reformation refocused attempts at biblical exegesis, that foreshadowed the importance of hermeneutics in a world where tradition was being challenged. Even so, the true ascendancy of hermeneutics "came about only when a 'historical consciousness' arose in the Enlightenment ... and matured in the romantic period to establish a relationship (however broken) to our entire inheritance from the past."[2]

In light of such a disparate history, this chapter will explore the hermeneutic tradition, from its modern reformulation by Schleiermacher to Heidegger's significant contribution. As a student of Heidegger, Gadamer's own hermeneutic theory is greatly indebted to *Being and Time*'s careful examination of the structure of understanding. Yet Gadamer's introduction of linguistic concerns into ontological investigation is also

significant. In the second section, I will cast Gadamer's hermeneutics against the backdrop of general language theory, as represented by Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose latter work comes to similar conclusions about the role of language in society. Situating Gadamer's hermeneutics also lays the groundwork for a more nuanced reading of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Not only do their respective traditions play a role, but Habermas also pays special attention to the broader concerns of language theory implicated by Gadamer's hermeneutic model.

The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Schleiermacher to Heidegger

The modern use of the term 'hermeneutics' can be traced to Friedrich Schleiermacher's attempt to formulate a general theory of interpretation. Prior to his efforts, the guidelines to interpretation varied according to the type of text at hand, whether they be legal or religious. His 1819 lecture on hermeneutics focused on the need to formalize the method of interpretation by combining elements of biblical exegesis, juridical understanding and philology. While Schleiermacher's lasting contribution to the tradition of hermeneutics is his emphasis on understanding language, it must be noted that even in his theory, linguistic meaning was subordinated to the goal of understanding an author's mental life. In effect, Schleiermacher's interpretive efforts rested on the belief that the true meaning of a text would be revealed by reconstructing the mental content of the author at the time of writing. This overtly psychological approach to interpretation, however, inculcated serious limitations on Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Conceived in this way, hermeneutics is bound by the mental content of the author, and the sole function of exegesis is to replicate that original content.

Wilhelm Dilthey followed Schleiermacher's call for a general hermeneutics, but abandoned Schleiermacher's psychological emphasis as well as his focus on solely written texts. Instead, Dilthey conceived of hermeneutics as necessary for defending against "the inroads of romantic caprice and skeptical subjectivity" which, in his view, had eroded proper historical knowledge.[3] It is Dilthey's insistence on building a philosophical foundation for interpretation that had a lasting effect on the hermeneutic tradition. Nonetheless, Dilthey's interpretive framework was plagued by his insistence the hermeneutics could reconstruct the "mental objectification of another mind," by which he means that understanding a text was dependent upon understanding the historical, political and personal circumstances in which it was produced.[4] While such a task called for the hermeneutic circle to be 'widened,' in the sense that historical factors were taken into account, it also meant that hermeneutics became cumbersome. Before a text could be properly understood, it would require mapping the entire range of possible influences.

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*[5] represents a radical break from these earlier formulations and lays the groundwork for a new understanding of *understanding* itself. Because of the seismic impact of his work, I will take a more in-depth approach to understanding Heidegger's position in the hermeneutic tradition, especially in relation to Gadamer.

In *Being and Time,* language is a tool that enables discourse to highlight the situatedness of human activity. Such a formulation of language is a departure from the traditions of critical reason to be sure; no longer was language seen as subservient to the categories of transcendental reason. Yet how complete is Heidegger's view of language?

Does Being's notion of 'discourse' take into account the malleability inherent in language; a malleability which seems at the very core of philosophical progress since Heidegger? This project will seek to explore Heidegger's hermeneutic theory, both on its own grounds and as a precursor to Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics in *Truth and Method*[6].

The role of language in *Being and Time* is especially interesting when contrasted to Gadamer's emphasis on language as a medium of hermeneutical experience. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer assumes much of Heidegger's groundwork, yet he sees language as much more central to the process of understanding. This shift in the position of language is significant because it threatens Heidegger's reliance on language as a way to illuminate Being (via 'discourse'). Is language itself actually more complicated than that, since it is no longer definable as a totalizable system of stable significations?

Several factors contribute to this shift in what 'language' means. Successive currents of thought since Heidegger have eroded the foundations of critical and positivist conceptions of language. No longer can language be seen as a neutral, static grid that allows the world to be interpreted. Instead, language itself has become unmoored from its stable referents and this inherent ambiguity has to be incorporated into new theories of how traditions are formed and how intersubjective understanding can occur. Secondly, Gadamer's own contribution to ontological investigation necessarily took into account the criticisms lobbied against Heidegger, among them his fetishization of authenticity and his totalizing view of language. Gadamer saw language not as 'the totality of meaning' but as an ever-shifting and adjusting medium of understanding. Such a conception of language in turn informed Gadamer's reformulation of Heideggerian ontology.

Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-world is meant to convey the situatedness of Being, yet it also begs the question of exactly how Being has access to or interacts with that world. Or rather, what is the constitution that allows Being-in-the-world to grasp the structures of the world? Heidegger identifies state-of-mind, understanding and telling as the three equi-primordial modes of Being-there, as ways of 'clearing' or finding ourselves in shared situations. Heidegger acknowledges that language plays an important role in understanding and telling, yet he keeps his analysis of language rather brief and circumscribed, and explains it as that which allows understanding to happen. Given that Heidegger posits language as related to Being's disclosedness, it becomes necessary to investigate what role it plays and how he conceives of 'language' in the first place. Perhaps as a disclaimer, Heidegger argues:

> Attempts to grasp the 'essence of language' have always taken their orientation from ... the ideas of 'expression,' of 'symbolic form,' of communication as 'assertion,' of the 'making-known' of experiences, of the 'patterning' of life. Even if one were to put these various fragmentary definitions together in a syncretistic fashion, nothing would be achieved in the way of a fully adequate definition of "language." We would still have to do what is decisive here – to work out in advance the ontologico-existential whole of the structure of discourse on the basis of the analytic of [Being].[7]

It is understandable that Heidegger attempts to distance himself from a singular definition of language, perhaps because it is hard to formulate one but also because it engenders the same pitfalls for which he criticizes previous philosophers. Yet throughout in his drive to uncover the whole structure of discourse, language is implicated as a reliable tool – subservient to mapping the structures of Being. In fact, Heidegger goes so far as to articulate language as the "totality of words ... [which] can be broken up into world-Things."[8] Discourse, as a mode of 'clearing,' uses language to uncover Being. So much is clear, but he also posits Discourse as the articulation of intelligibility, which he terms the

"totality-of-signification."[9] In both of these passages, Heidegger uses language as a tool to illuminate the concrete structure of Being, and thereby runs the risk of conceptualizing language as an equally concrete structure.

Understanding incorrectly is an instance that can shed further light on Heidegger's conception of language. In a further discussion, the connection between Discourse and understanding is made clear by considering the case of hearing. In the setting of a dialogue, "if we have not heard 'aright,' it is not by accident that we say we have not 'understood.' Hearing is constitutive for discourse."[10] Mistaken understanding thus stems from an incorrect picking up of "a multiplicity of tone-date."[11] If, however, incorrect or mistaken understanding can occur even from perfect language usage, then it seems to point the finger back at (the structure of) language itself. In other words, the source of error is the ambiguity in language itself and not the inability to hear things properly or interpret them.

The implications of a static notion of language are many-fold, yet it most directly impacts Heidegger's explanation of understanding and interpretation, and thus hermeneutic activity in general. The relationship between understanding and interpretation is explained in the following manner: "The projecting of the understanding has its own possibility – that of developing itself [sich auszubilden]. This development of the understanding we call 'interpretation.'"[12] Alternately, interpretation is explained as laying out the explicit meaning in implicit understanding; what is encountered in understanding is categorized in interpretation. Not surprisingly, Heidegger complicates the issue further by describing the co-constitutive relationship between the (implicit) encounter and the (explicit) interpretation: "Any mere pre-predicative seeing of the

ready-to-hand is, in itself, something which already understands and interprets... In the mere encountering of something, it is understood in terms of a totality of involvements; and such seeing hides in itself the explicitness of the assignment-relation (of the "in-order-to") which belongs to that totality."[13] The assignment-relations aren't made explicit, yet Being's pre-ontological knowledge serves as the foundation for our understanding.

While the preceding explanation of hermeneutic investigation is complex, Heidegger simplifies the role of language as the tool that allows interpretation and discourse. There is no step between the pre-ontological knowledge of Being and its ability to understand the world. Yet this is precisely where the ambiguity of language's referents would play an important role. Most notably, this is demonstrated in Heidegger's description of the hermeneutic circle, consisting of fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. In order for the ready-to-hand to be understood in terms of the totality of its involvements, it need not be grasped explicitly. Instead, "interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance* – in a *fore-having*."[14] A sense, even if vague, enables Being to grasp the world. Yet this grasping entails what Heidegger would call *fore-sight*, which indicates an 'unveiling' of understandings that are as-of-yet hidden. Heidegger explains the progression between *fore-having* and *fore-sight* in the following way:

> This fore-sight 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-having, and it does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted. Anything understood which is held in our fore-having and towards which we set our sights 'foresightedly,' becomes conceptualizable through the interpretation.[15]

Finally, Heidegger explains that the fore-had and fore-sighted object of interpretation is further 'shaped' by Being's *fore-conception*, which is the pre-understanding which allows Being to decide for a definitive way of conceiving what has been interpreted. Importantly, these three parts of interpretation are the 'taken for granted' steps that come naturally to Being, according to Heidegger. In a move made explicit by Gadamer, Heidegger himself fails to elaborate on the mechanisms necessary for successful interpretation, namely language.

Analyzing Heidegger's notion of fore-conception [*Vorgriff*] is a useful way to explore the role of language in hermeneutics, yet it also provides a bridge to Gadamer's thought. While Heidegger certainly advanced the study of hermeneutics, it was Gadamer who elaborated upon the theories set forth in the thought of his predecessor. Accordingly, and much to his credit, Gadamer thought that language's role in the hermeneutic circle was much more prominent than a static medium to facilitate understanding. In truth, it is not that Heidegger theorized about language incorrectly, but rather that he did not go as far as is perhaps needed in his explanations. As Fred Dallmayr put it, the elements of Heidegger that criticize transcendental reason are made all the more robust by Gadamer's emphasis on language: "Critical cognition gave way to a renewed ontological inquiry into the meaning of 'being' and the 'world' – as exemplified in Heidegger's turn to a fundamental ontology. Ontological reflection was seconded and reinforced by the upsurge in language in the thinking of our time."[16]

Gadamer himself dedicates an entire Part of *Truth and Method* to language as the medium of hermeneutical experience. While sheer page count certainly doesn't indicate superior analysis, it is clear from the content that Gadamer's nuanced understanding of

language complicates hermeneutic practice. As he puts it, "language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning an object takes place."[17] Gadamer uses interpretations of texts and interpretations in dialogue as his models for investigating understanding. Even this move makes his analysis more specific and concrete than Heidegger, who simply asserts that fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception are the three steps to any interpretation irrespective of context.

More importantly, Gadamer's emphasis on language allows him to explain *mis*-interpretation more effectively than Heidegger's reliance on hearing incorrectly. In the instance of fore-conception, "the gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be accepted. It is a gap that can never be completely closed."[18] It is clear from this that language's inherent ambiguity or openness places a hurdle between Being's pre-ontological knowledge and its ability to interpret the world. In fact, "the hermeneutical problem is not one of the correct mastery of language, but of the proper understanding of that which takes place through the medium of language."[19] By correct mastery, Gadamer is no doubt referring to a notion of language that is totalizable and explicatable; linguistic meaning can be pin-pointed and perfected by the user so as to achieve agreement between understanding and the world. Such a view of language is not only misleading, it also shouldn't be the focus of hermeneutics; meaning is not extricated or distilled from language, which makes it incumbent upon interlocutors to be open to the meaning that is *created* in dialogue.

Gadamer's views on language implicate not only the 'steps' of the hermeneutic process, but also the *object* of hermeneutics, since Being's situatedness are linguistic in character. Put crudely, a fore-concept is inherently mediated by language long before a

specific encounter. Just like specific languages and family customs, tradition (in Gadamer) and situatedness (in Heidegger) is handed down or inherited. More importantly, the process of inheritance and what is inherited only makes sense with language as the medium of transference. Additionally, because of this linguistic mediation, the distinction between future and present is upset when it comes to written tradition:

> In the form of writing all tradition is simultaneously *with* any present time. Moreover, it involves a unique co-existence of past and present, insofar as present consciousness has the possibility of a free access to all that is handed down in writing. No longer dependent on repetition, which links past knowledge with the present, but, in its direct acquaintance with literary tradition, understanding consciousness has a genuine opportunity to widen its horizon.[20]

The understanding, or widening of horizons, which results from encountering a written text does not come to us *through* time, since the meaning we gather is *created* in the process of our encounter. Gadamer sees the continuity of memory as that which transmits meaning, not the text itself. It is not as if the text revealed a meaning that was there all along; it is more like a co-constitutive creation of meaning via language, which happens when the text is read in a new situation.

If language is the medium of understanding, as Gadamer purports, the hermeneutic process is affected in another way. Not only is tradition itself shaped by the contours of language, but Being cannot grasp a concept without itself filtering that understanding *through* language. In other words, a fore-concept cannot be arrived at without first using linguistic skills to recognize fore-having and to interpret fore-sight. Understanding thus "involves relating [the object of understanding] to the whole complex of possible meanings in which we linguistically move."[21] Only through the process of relating the object to the rest of our linguistic horizon, does meaning emerge.

The differences between Heidegger's hermeneutic theory and that of Gadamer, in the end, does not revolve around specific disagreements or points of discord. Rather, Gadamer's emphasis on language seeks to supplement and expand the basic categories that Heidegger formulated. Perhaps Gadamer was influenced by the ascendance of language in intellectual thought, marked by the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, or perhaps it was his attempt at avoiding Heidegger's critics who sensed neo-Kantian murmurs under the veneer of authenticity. What can be said for certain is that Gadamer's hermeneutic theory makes explicit what is implicit in Heidegger, thereby replicating the very nature of the hermeneutic circle.

This Chapter so far has outlined Gadamer's own tradition, from Dilthey and Schleiermacher, to the key aspects of Heidegger's thought regarding hermeneutics. Such background is important, not only to more fully understand an author, but also as a basis for parsing the debate between Habermas and Gadamer. The next section will try to expand that basis a little further by placing Gadamer in the context of general language theory.

The Upheaval of Tradition: Reading Wittgenstein and Gadamer

At first glance, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hans-Georg Gadamer may not seem like philosophers that share many affinities. These two thinkers hail from vastly different traditions, yet not even their opposition ever brought them into contact. So why endeavor to bridge this apparent gap? While many reasons can and will be given, I will start with the fact that both can be situated in the philosophical changes that precipitated in the early twentieth century. As noted in the Introduction, the anti-foundationalist stance of

Nietzsche and Hegel became even more influential in early twentieth-century philosophy. In this respect, both Wittgenstein and Gadamer were uniquely situated to witness and help spur the coming changes in philosophy. For example, Gadamer's reading of Nietzsche lead him to study the ancients, while Wittgenstein's earlier work established him as an influential source for logical positivism. Gadamer's work thus spans the great cultural and philosophical shift from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, that was noted earlier. Such a comment could easily be applied to both of these thinkers. Elucidating each author's theory and its concepts will help to illustrate why reading Gadamer in the context of language theory brings new insights to the fore

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein conceptualized the meaning of any given linguistic expression as determined by the way in which a community uses it. Insofar as a word can be said to have an external referent, it would be dependent on the use of that word. Thus, the usage of words within specific language games determines what specific utterances mean and how they changes over time. Just like a playground game has a set of interlocking and self-referential rules that provide meaning, so does each language game have a set of rules that provide language with meaning. For Wittgenstein, there is no separation between the internal logic of language games and reality – usage of language, or playing the game, itself constitutes reality. Most fundamentally, language games are the necessary method for interacting with the world.

The context and content of Wittgenstein's work is relevant to understanding the applicability of the *Investigations* to questions about human relations in a world of language games. Wittgenstein explains the malleability of language as a product of changing particulars affecting wider usage, and vice versa. The role of the community is

to not only define the parameters within which language can change, but also to adapt to those changes once they are made. This reciprocal relation is the mechanism that Wittgenstein uses to explain the fluidity of everyday language. Remarkably, Gadamer's treatment of tradition, and especially his rejection of a stable, knowable truth as a foundation of language, echoes Wittgensteinian themes. Ultimately, understanding Wittgenstein allows Gadamer's attempt to be a fuller more-comprehensive theory of language, incorporating aspects prior language theory and, as shown in the last section, post-Heideggerian insights.

The similarities, while not apparent in name, run quite deep between Wittgenstein and Gadamer. The role of the community in Wittgenstein and the role of tradition in Gadamer both speak to the relative stability of language and how it is possible for different speakers to attach different meaning to the same concept. Similarly, language games and the fusion of horizons explain how meaning is adjusted when two (or more) speakers are in dialogue. Where the symmetry perhaps breaks is in the notion of interpretation, which signifies a specialized language game of abstracting concepts for Wittgenstein, while Gadamer thinks that interpretation is the very essence of being human.

A closer examination of Gadamer and Wittgenstein concerning the question of interpretation reveals an even more nuanced picture. According to the neo-Wittgensteinian view espoused by James Tully[22], Wittgenstein would dispute the ease with which the hermeneutic process accesses meaning. For Gadamer, interpretation is a relationship of certainty between what we do with language and the something we understand. Is there a natural linkage between our ontologically-necessary interpretation

of something and our understanding of that same something? Humans always-already interpret and really cannot refrain from doing so, otherwise we would not be relating to the world at all. This means that for Gadamer there must be some connection between the act of interpretation and understanding, yet how close is the link?

Tully claims that for Wittgenstein interpretation certainly occurs, yet it is not naturally and immediately linked to understanding because it is a level of abstraction removed from an object of interpretation. Tully explains that for Wittgenstein, interpretation simply means "the substitution of one expression of the rule for another"[23] where rule is the use of language. In that sense, interpretation is really just creating a better or more nuanced sign to replace the old use of language. For example, in interpreting ourselves, we refine the category of 'person' and replace it with a more specific example that takes our uniqueness into account. Interpretation becomes a way of calibrating the meanings of already existing signs to make them applicable in different or more specialized circumstances. This is obvious when we consider that the word "person" is far more likely to be used as a general description than the word "Mary." In another instance, a process of self-interpretation refines the general descriptor "American" with a more specific idea of what it means for that person to be American. Perhaps the second example is even more illustrative of Tully's argument, that interpretation itself does not provide meaning, since it simply substitutes one notion of the word for another. While it is true that the new sign has a slightly different meaning, it does not produce new understanding because for that, the new word would actually have to be used or implemented as a rule. As Wittgenstein elucidates further:

> [A]n interpretation is a reflection on a sign; an opinion or belief about how it should be taken. To interpret a sign is to take it as one expression rather than another. In contrast, to understand a sign is not to possess a sedimented opinion about it or to take it as something, but to be able to grasp it; that is, to act with it, using it in agreement with customary ways.[24]

In a sense, Wittgenstein's objection could well be that the step of interpretation actually creates a semantic gap or level of abstraction between the interpreter and the thing that is being interpreted. A more immediate understanding of oneself sans interpretation would take the form of actually experiencing the understanding that is gained, i.e. living it, rather than reflecting on it.

If a Wittgensteinian account is correct about the conceptual gap that is created through interpretation, then Wittgenstein's view of interpretation is incompatible with that of Gadamer. As discussed earlier, for Gadamer interpretation is at the heart of human activity – we cannot cease interpreting since it is our form of interacting with the world. Yet, what happens when the mechanism of interpretation ends up removing us from the world, at least one step, instead of giving us access? Tully explains:

> [C]onventional understanding does not involve implicit interpretations (or representations) to bridge the gap between thought and action, language and reality, because no such gap exists. Our conventional understanding of the world *is* just the way we are in the world, "like fish in water," not an interpretation of or perspective on it. The everyday moves in our language-games do not implicitly raise interpretations that need to be made explicit and adjudicated before we can go on rationally...[25]

Clearly, Wittgenstein would posit that playing language games is a more necessary and fundamental interaction with the world, while interpretation is a tool that abstracts us from the world. That is not to say that interpretation is not useful in certain instances, but it certainly cannot be the primary means of understanding the world.

The Wittgensteinian criticism of a hermeneutic understanding elucidated above seems plausible, yet in some ways Tully's dismissal of Gadamer seems too convenient. Is

it really possible that the primary mode of interacting with the world proffered by Gadamer is in fact the exact opposite; a distancing from the world? Perhaps an examination of the exact terminology in use will shed light on the nuances of this disagreement. For Wittgenstein, the word *Deuten* signifies interpretation, the connotation for which is also to suggest, to imply or to indicate. In this sense, by interpretation Wittgenstein means an act of pointing out a specific instantiation of a more general concept, which seems to fit with the notion that interpretation is a calibration of already-existing meaning. Yet that begs the question whether Gadamer used the same word, or even had the same notion in mind when using the word interpretation. To this, the answer is a definitive no. Again, it seems implausible that the hermeneutic tradition according to Gadamer rests upon such a weak definition of interpretation. Remember that interpretation is at the very foundation of humans' interaction with the world. In the original German, Gadamer consistently uses the word *Interpretazion* to signify interpretation, and not simply implying or indicating. This is perhaps the first clue pointing to the real difference that Tully identifies between Gadamer and Wittgenstein.

Furthermore, Gadamer himself reformulated the hermeneutic tradition from a positivist method for getting at the truth in an author's mind, to a method of understanding language as lacking a stable, determinable referent. Georgia Warnke describes the turn from pervious hermeneutic conceptions, "[Hermeneutics] no longer seeks to formulate a set of interpretive rules; rather, ...Gadamer turns to an account of the conditions of the possibility of understanding *in general*..."[26] Gadamer's refinement of the hermeneutic approach clarifies his intent: interpretation is the most fundamental and necessary way of being in the world. It is not simply an intellectual method for analyzing

a text or refining the meanings of previously articulated speech. In fact, there is no way of being in the world that can escape or circumvent interpretation as a primary means of understanding; in effect, being 'a fish in water' *is* interpretation itself.

Regarding the question of interpretation, Tully's attempt to drive a wedge between Wittgenstein and Gadamer, at the basic level of ontology, does not seem to hold much water. The semantic differences washed over by Tully's assumption that "interpretation" was used identically by both philosophers undercuts the strength of his argument. If Wittgenstein's argument, that interpretation is a move of abstraction, is based on a different notion of the word, then his criticism does not weigh against Gadamer. In fact, a re-examination of the offending section bears this out. The full conclusion of Section 201 reads:

> [T]here is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases. Hence there is an inclination to say: any action according to a rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.[27]

What Wittgenstein seems to be arguing is that, since there *is* a way to grasp a rule that is not interpretation, the meaning of "interpretation" itself should be limited to those instances that do not accord with the general case. He does *not* argue that if interpretation means the necessary way of *being* in the world, that interpretation is still a move of distancing ourselves from understanding the world. In light of the more nuanced explanation of the concept in question, and a refinement of what Wittgenstein actually wrote, it seems conclusive that Tully is mistaken. His assertion that there is a gaping chasm between how Wittgenstein and Gadamer conceive of interpretation is correct only

in so far as they attached radically different meanings to the word, not that interpretation is eschewed by one and embraced by the other.

The ultimate implication of this exploration, in a broad sense, is to provide tangible evidence that even seemingly disparate traditions can come to compatible conclusions, a kind of hermeneutic action in practice. In an environment of radical changes, both philosophical and political, Wittgenstein and Gadamer re-examined the function of language in relation to society and arrived at theories that are similar in key respects. By reading Gadamerean hermeneutics against a backdrop of language theory, it highlights the significance of Gadamer's points about the linguisticality of the world. In a sense, Gadamer's infusion of language as a new cornerstone of Heidegger's ontological investigation is contextualized; it is not a seemingly random occurrence, but as a step that was appropriate, or perhaps even necessary, for the continued usefulness of ontological investigation in a new historical situation.

Furthermore, Gadamer's relation to Wittgenstein was an important undercurrent, even in *Truth and Method.* To this end, Gadamer touched on Wittgenstein's theories in relation to his own in his 1979 collection of essays entitled *Vernunft im Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, which was translated two years later as *Reason in the Age of Science.*[28] Prior to that, Jürgen Habermas' review of *Truth and Method* also focused a considerable effort on the affinities between these two thinkers. As will be explored in the next chapter, the assessment that Habermas provides varies in some respects to the conclusions I have drawn here.

Notes:

[1] Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986. p. 281.

[2] Ibid., p. 281.

[3] Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Selected Writing*, Ed and Trans. H.P. Rickman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976. p. 261.

[4] Ibid. p. 276.

[5] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*. Trans. John Maccquari and Edward Robinson, London: SCM Press Limited, 1962.

[6] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985.

[7] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 206.

[8] Ibid., p. 204.

[9] Ibid., p. 204.

[10] Ibid., p. 206.

[11] Ibid., p. 207.

[12] Ibid., p. 188.

[13] Ibid., p. 189.

[14] Ibid., p. 191.

[15] Ibid., p. 191.

[16] Dallmayr, Fred. *From Freiberg to Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991, p. 14.

[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 345-346.

[18] Ibid., p. 346.

[19] Ibid., p. 346-347.

[20] Ibid., p. 351-352. Emphasis mine.

[21] Ibid., p. 357.

[22] Tully, James. "Wittgenstein's Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection" *Political Theory*. Vol. 17, No. 2. (May 1989). p. 172-204.

[23] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 201.

[24] Ibid., Section 241.

[25] Tully, "Wittgenstein's Political Philosophy", p. 197.

[26] Warnke, Georgia, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. p. 3. Emphasis mine.

[27] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Section 201. Original emphasis.

[28] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Reason in the Age of Science*, Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983.

CHAPTER 2

Habermas' Critique: Universality, Ideology And Language

The debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas reveals the main issues of contention leveled at the hermeneutic model, but also those issues which divide their respective traditions. I will focus in this chapter on the first foray penned by Habermas, entitled "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method.*"[1] Gadamer's response, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" will be elucidated in the following chapter.[2] For reasons of time and space, my explication of the debate will focus on the first exchange, relegating the subsequent essays to secondary importance. They will be used mainly to fill in where the points articulated in the first round are unclear. While focusing on the first exchanges is certainly a pragmatic choice, it is also justified by the flagging focus of the latter exchanges and their tendency to tread the same ground as earlier essays. Habermas' second iteration entitled "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,"[3] covers much of the same ground, while Gadamer's response actually lumps all of his critics together, and is hence titled "Reply to My Critics."[4] It is clear from this brief history of the Gadamer-Habermas debate that the initial discussion raised the central themes of disagreement and provides an adequate basis for understanding the tension between hermeneutics and critical theory.

With the sequence of the debate sketched, let me now turn briefly to the historical and philosophical situation in which the debate took place. Both traditions had to take account political changes that transpired in the early years of the twentieth century, which significantly altered the role of philosophy as well. The role of language in philosophy

was undergoing changes just as the political landscape (or the landscape for politics) had shifted after the two world wars. The outbreak of the two world wars and the banality of violence threatened the Enlightenment project, and with it some fundamental tenets of modernity. As Fred Dallmayr puts it, the metaphysics that dominated earlier philosophy was "challenged or called into question by several developments – particularly by the turn to language seen as the matrix of human reason and, more broadly, by renewed concerns with the situatedness of thought or its embeddedness in the 'life-world.'"[5] In effect, modernity's emphasis on universal reason was being eroded in favor of a more situated, genealogical or perhaps contextualized understanding of the world. Despite the apparent simplicity of this move, it would be reductionist to assign Gadamer to the side of contextual knowledge, while relegating Habermas to the side championing reason above all else. Despite their nuance, however, both thinkers still retain a striking affinity for transcendental notions, leaving many critics to accuse both of neo-Kantian aspirations.

The publication of *Truth and Method* set forth Gadamer's hermeneutic project. While this work covers aesthetics and the *Geisteswissenschaften* in general, several specific claims attracted Habermas' attention, and eventually his criticism. Against the backdrop of language's changing role, Gadamer defended hermeneutics as universal – not in the sense of an Archimedean vantage point from which to survey everything, but rather as a claim that the historical nexus foregrounded in hermeneutics embraced everything that could be interpreted. In the Introduction to *Truth and Method*, Gadamer justifies his stance toward universality: "It is not due to caprice or a one-sided over-accentuation of its role, but rather accords with its very nature if the movement of

understanding is seen as comprehensive and universal."[6] Judging this aspect of Gadamers' hermeneutics as a central point, Habermas' criticism starts to take shape.

In his review, Habermas focuses on the universal aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a locus for his criticism, which he then develops into three major themes: translation, application and the critique of ideology. He first takes up a problem of language theory itself – in order for a theory to describe language, it must itself *use* language. This runs the risk of totalizing the linguistic sphere, yet at the same time, holding that the theoretical language used to describe it falls outside of that totality. The answer to this apparent riddle lies in the process of translation, which Habermas describes as allowing a language to transcend itself into another language. While the exact nature of translation will be described later, it is important to note that Habermas uses this concept to differentiate Gadamer from Wittgenstein. Secondly, Habermas' review is concerned with the relationship between hermeneutic inquiry and scientific pursuits. What is the place of empirical study, if hermeneutics claims to cover all human understanding? In addition to claiming universal status, hermeneutics eschews the transcendent framework of reason that science relies on, without which the *application* of knowledge becomes untenable. Blending the first two strains, Habermas' third avenue of attack focuses on the critical potential of the hermeneutic model. Can the tradition which guides inquiry be effectively challenged from *within* the hermeneutic frame? And perhaps more pressingly, does hermeneutics offer any chance for critiquing ideology and domination? The disagreements between ontological investigation and critical theory come to a head in the third section, where Habermas cites Gadamer's rejuvenation of tradition as a crippling blow to the critical capacities of the hermeneutic tradition.

With this brief sketch of the arguments out of the way, let me now turn to the text more closely and the themes of translation, application and the critique of ideology.

Totalizing Language: Translation as the Model of Hermeneutics

Habermas begins his review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* by addressing a problem that has vexed linguistic theory since its inception, and in the process defending Gadamer against the "general linguistic" approach to understanding. Historically, language analysis theorizes exactly how language works, what relation it has to the world and so on. The problem is that such philosophizing itself makes use of language, which in turn requires further explanation, which in turn uses language. The circularity is apparent. Habermas' first point of attack is that language analysis conceives of language as a totality; something that can be seen as a whole, and as an object of inquiry. In doing so, traditional theories have faced the tricky choice of either having any explanation blunted because it has to be contained within existing language, or 'stepping outside' existing language which then engenders the circularity explained above. The goal, as Habermas identifies it, is to "break through the grammatical barriers of individual linguistic totalities."[7] Of course, a challenge set is not quite a challenge met.

The trick to meeting Habermas' goal, simply put, is to stop conceiving of language as a totality (that either entails meta-theory, or trapped theory). Instead, Habermas argues for a historical, dialectic understanding of language, in which the structures of language are not static but evolving. Wilhelm von Humboldt may have been the first to posit a close correlation between specific languages (or grammars) and the worldviews that they entail. Habermas explains that "the unity of word and thing"[8] does

not mean that we are locked into a specific grammar, and thus we are also not locked into a specific, circumscribed worldview. Again, language is not a totality out of which we cannot escape. In a nod to linguistic debates, Habermas points to the act of translation as an example of the inherent permeability of languages, saying that "we can study the problem of linguistic understanding by focusing initially on ... learning a foreign language."[9] When we encounter a new language, we are able to use the existing rules and conventions of our language to make the foreign concept intelligible, and then to incorporate it into our own understanding.

While Habermas concedes that this translation may not be perfect, its very fallibility allows for further refinement of ideas or even new meaning to be created. The inherent, inexact back-and-forth involved in translation proves both that languages are not self-contained totalities, and that a dialectic understanding of language escapes the circularity of previous attempts. Interestingly enough, Habermas' next move is to acknowledge the link translation has to the hermeneutic approach described by Gadamer in *Truth and Method.* Habermas notes that "translation ... expresses in one language a state of affairs that cannot be literally expressed in it, but can nevertheless be rendered 'in other words,'"[10] which Gadamer has identified as the very essence of the hermeneutic experience, when he says that "the hermeneutic problem is thus not a problem of the correct mastery of language but one of correctly coming to an understanding about what happens in the medium of language."[11] From this passage it is clear that Habermas agrees with Gadamer regarding the totality of language and the role of translation.

Habermas' description of the inner workings of language also closely mirror Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to language. The grammatical rules that are used to

translate and thus produce meaning are "delimitations of horizons."[12] Simply put, the better one knows grammar (and thus the better one is at translating), the wider one's horizon. This may sound simple, but the point is deeper than that: the 'grammar' of communication, which allows understanding and new meaning, also entails one's own horizon. Neither the grammar nor the horizon are fixed however. They are co-constitutive insofar as grammar allows for new meanings which alter the horizon, while the horizon is reflective of the original grammar.

One further question is raised by Habermas regarding Gadamer's language theory: what happens to the notion of reason in this dialectic, non-totalized understanding of language? How can a basic sense of reason be preserved as a fundamental necessity when language itself is always being mutated? Habermas answers this potential fault by explaining that, "languages themselves possess the potential of a reason that, while expressing itself in the particularity of a specific grammar, simultaneously reflect on its limits and negates them as particular. Although always bound up in language, reason always transcends particular languages; it lives in language only by destroying the particularities of languages through which alone it is incarnated."[13] His point is that, since all specific languages are translatable into one another, any *one* language cannot be conceived of as a totality. Yet that very translatability also illuminates the dialectic whole created by *all* languages together. The interplay, back-and-forth and translation possible between specific languages proves: first, that individual languages are not totalities; second, that a dialectic approach is needed (as embodied in hermeneutic analysis); and third, that this dialectic approach preserves the place of reason by allowing new meaning to be created in the very act of translation.

Translation or Socialization?: Wittgenstein as Habermas' Foil

The agreement about translation cited in the last section is significant for two reasons: first because it lays the groundwork for Habermas' criticism of Gadamer's universal aspirations later in his review, and second because Habermas consistently cites Wittgenstein's emphasis on *first* language acquisition as radically opposed to Gadamer's incorporation of translation. To make the second point more clearly, I will cite Habermas' criticism of Wittgenstein, explicate the main arguments and then examine the validity of Habermas' claims. While the role of translation is complex, I conclude that Habermas mischaracterizes Wittgenstein's theory of language games as static, thereby assigning him a conservative role.

Habermas introduces his discussion of translation with this aside about Wittgenstein: "Wittgenstein, the logician, interpreted 'translation' as a transformation according to general rules" which, according to Habermas, are insufficient to explain both coming to understandings in linguistic exchanges and how language can change over time.[14] Habermas uses this initial pejorative reference to construct an argument against Wittgenstein consisting of several parts:

> For [Wittgenstein] understanding was limited to the virtual repetition of the training through which "native" speakers are socialized into their form of life. For Gadamer this understanding of language is not yet at all a "real understanding" [*Verstehen*] because the accompanying *reflection* on the application of linguistic rules emerges only when a language game becomes *problematic*. Only when the intersubjectivity of the validity of linguistic rules is disturbed is an interpretive process set in motion that reestablishes consensus. Wittgenstein conflated this hermeneutic understanding with the primary process of learning to speak. Correspondingly, he was convinced that learning a foreign language has the same structure as growing up in one's mother tongue. This identification was necessary for him because he lacked a dialectical concept of translation. [15]

Here Habermas argues, as before, that Wittgenstein based his analysis on first-language acquisition or socialization, and not the process of translation. In contrast, Habermas argues, Gadamer's understanding of language is more thorough because he realized, with translation as a guide, that meaning emerges only after a *break-down* of the learned linguistic structures spurs a re-examination and re-building of consensus. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's prioritization of first-language usage disregarded the back-and-forth move between languages inherent in translation, thereby collapsing the hermeneutic process to a single langugage. Habermas uses this argument to prove both that Wittgenstein lacks a dialectical model of language and also that, following his theory, one could never *arrive* at a dialectical understanding of language because every linguistic act occurs *within*, not between, languages. The ultimate implications of Wittgenstein's 'mistake' are revealed in the subsequent passage:

> For translation is not a transformation that permits the reduction of statements in one language system to statements in another. Rather, the act of translation highlights a *productive* achievement to which language always empowers those who have mastered its grammatical rules: to assimilate what is foreign and thereby to further develop one's own linguistic system. This happens daily in situations in which discussion partners must first find a 'common language.' This language is the result of coming to an understanding [*Verstandingung*], the structure of which is similar to translation.[16]

According to Habermas, Wittgenstein's model is not dialectical, and precisely because of that, it is also reductionist insofar as it assumes that statements are perfectly translatable from one language to another. Furthermore, Habermas sees the fallibility of translation as a *positive* situation because it allows for new meaning to be created, which in turn empowers the masters of grammar. In the end, Habermas comes full circle and argues that translation is *necessarily* the primary model for communication because even within one's own language, there is no other way to explain both *mis*-communication and the

possibility for new meaning. Once again defending Gadamer, Habermas notes that "hermeneutic self-reflection goes beyond the socio-linguistic stage of language analysis marked by the later Wittgenstein" as evidenced by the fact that Gadamer incorporates translation as a model for understanding.[17]

Here too, Habermas accuses Wittgenstein of having an under-developed understanding of how language changes within a community. While Wittgenstein posited that a language game sets forth the rules for its own application, Habermas points out that such rules also delimit the possible interpretation of that game. In other words, learned rules of language allow us to apply and execute *our* half of any given communication. We choose which words to use, whether to be sarcastic and so on. Habermas expands that notion, by saying that, "it is proper to the grammar of a language game not only that it defines a form of life but that it defines a from of life as one's own over against others that are foreign."[18] What does this relationship between one's own articulation and a 'foreign' one entail? Habermas seems to be arguing that Wittgenstein cannot account for changes in language from *within* language games, because only contact with that which is foreign can challenge understanding and spur re-formualations that yield new meaning.

While Habermas' arguments regarding Wittgenstein seem compelling, it is my position that Gadamer and Wittgenstein's approaches are actually more closely aligned than the radical opposition between socialization and translation makes them out to be. In describing this break, Habermas mischaracterizes Wittgenstein in several key respects. First, contra Habermas, Wittgenstein's language game model is not purely based on socialization, as opposed to translation. Second, language games are not the monological or self-enclosed spheres Habermas makes them out to be. On these two counts,

Habermas' interpretation falls short of the nuance in Wittgenstein's theories, which in turn affects how Habermas portrays Wittgenstein in contrast to Gadamer.

Yet, Habermas is not wrong on all counts. Habermas contends that Wittgenstein's analysis, while an important stage in language theory, was ultimately supplanted by Gadamer's incorporation of a historical dimension. As evidenced in Chapter 2, my own reading of Gadamer and Wittgenstein bears out this supplementary relationship. Though, it is also important to note that Wittgenstein's aim was not the same as Gadamer's – he did not set out to explain the historical process of interpretation, but rather a more limited understanding of how language works. For a closer look, I will now turn to Habermas' major arguments and my own analysis of their validity.

First, Habermas accuses Wittgenstein of having a static view of how language is acquired and produces meaning, when he says, "for him understanding was limited to the virtual repetition of the training through which 'native' speakers are socialized into their life form."[19] However, Wittgenstein's language games are not simply exercises in repetition, because *within* the process of learning language games, one also learns how to formulate *new* language games. There are not just rules about language usage and understanding; there are also rules about how to make new rules, and thus new meaning. Inherent in the process of learning language games is the same kind of *transmission* that Habermas credits Gadamer with, when he says "tradition is not a process that we learn to master but a transmitted language in which we live."[20] Thus, the ability to produce new meaning out of existing language games is strikingly similar to Gadamer's use of translation to explain the same process.

Secondly, language games are not "monadological" and "sealed off," as Habermas claims.[21] Instead, Wittgenstein conceives of language games as porous and overlapping, making them very similar to the Husserlian life-worlds which Habermas links with hermeneutics. Learning a language (or a language game) does not simply consist of rote memorization and parroting back that which already has meaning; even in a simple exchange, there is a moment of verification. Has the person really understood what was being said? Does he or she use the new word correctly the next time? These moments replicate the "problematic" that Habermas sets as a prerequisite for meaning. More importantly, language games are not isolated settings, which means Wittgensteinian theory explains the intersubjectivity required for meaning-creation just as well as hermeneutics. Even if the congruity between hermeneutics and Wittgenstein's language game is not perfect, Habermas certainly overstates his case when he accuses Wittgenstein of remaining "enough of a positivist to conceive of [the inculcation of language] as the reproduction of fixed patterns – as if socialized individuals were subsumed under a total system composed of language and activity. In his hands the language game congeals to an opaque unity."[22]

On the previous two counts, Habermas characterizes Wittgenstein in a rather harsh light, saddling him with a neo-positivist, static and hopelessly naïve theory of language. I have elaborated in Chapter 2 why the hermeneutic and language theory are generally compatible, and so will not spend more time on it here. Ultimately, it is my contention that Wittgenstein's theory adequately accounts for how linguistic understanding "happens daily in situations in which discussion partners must first find a 'common language.'" [23] That notwithstanding, Habermas' analysis does point out one

critical fact: namely, Wittgenstein's theory does not account for the historical context in which language games themselves arise. As he puts it, "Along with their possible application, grammatical rules simultaneously imply the necessity of interpretation. Wittgenstein failed to see this; as a consequence he conceived the practice of language games unhistorically."[24] Since using a word implies someone interpreting it, Wittgenstein's failure to theorize the historical and cultural setting is indeed where he falls short.

Universal Application: Hermeneutics and the Social Sciences

The first two sections of this Chapter recounted Habermas' review of Gadamer concerning the role of translation, which he opposed to Wittgenstein's apparent emphasis on socialization. In this third section, I will turn to Habermas' own criticisms of the hermeneutic model. In his effort to blunt the universality of the hermeneutic model, Habermas argues that scientific understanding is distinct from hermeneutics, and cannot be explained via the dialogic model. The "logical dependence of interpretation on application and the interlacing of normative anticipation with cognitive experience" are flaws that disqualify hermeneutics from being the universal model of understanding. Yet, for Habermas, these factors should not be taken as altogether "banishing hermeneutic understanding from the realm of substantial research and possible knowledge."[25] Apparently there is some middle ground between universality and banishment to be found for the hermeneutic model.

It is helpful to note that Habermas' own framework for knowledge at the time was a tripartite of 'sciences.' In his *Knowledge and Human Interests*[26], Habermas divides

human knowledge into three areas: empirical science, hermeneutics, and critical self-reflection. He identifies each area with underlying motivations, respectively: "the technical interest in control, the practical interest in understanding, and the emancipatory interest in self-realization."[27] Many authors have commented on the links between Habermas' framework and Kant's three *Critiques*, yet Habermas attempts to rescue this triad from their transcendental weight. Whether or not he succeeds will be saved for a later discussion; the important thing is that the three realms of human knowledge inform his critique of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Clearly, Gadamer's claim that the interpretive method encompasses all knowledge is something with which Habermas disagrees.

More pointedly, Habermas doubts the applicability of the hermeneutic model to scientific or empirical pursuits. In order for scientific investigation to produce a "moment of knowledge," it requires recourse to a higher, transcendent framework; namely, reason.[28] Because such a framework is always in flux in hermeneutics, Habermas contends that, even if knowledge is possible, it can never be accurately *applied* to the world.

When interpreting a text hermeneutically, the *standards* of interpretation (e.g. literary theory or the tenets of orthodoxy) and the *meaning* of what is being interpreted (e.g. the Bible or a novel) are in a dialogic flux. For Habermas, the hermeneutic process succeeds in interpreting texts and fixed traditions. Yet, he thinks that when hermeneutics is brought to bear on empirical data and experiments, it is entirely more problematic. Instead of having both the criteria and the subject matter situated in tradition, empirical or scientific data needs to be in some sense verifiable or correspondent to the world.[29] As he puts it, the "methodology of the empirical sciences pulls the two apart – theoretical

constructions from the observations on which they can founder. But both aspects are previously coordinated in a transcendent framework."[30] For Habermas, then, scientific knowledge rests on a transcendent framework which weaves together the empirical observations and the theoretical structure. In astronomy, Kepler's observations of planetary motion *resulted* in a theoretical structure, namely the Laws of Planetary Motion. In time, those laws have come to be used as a standard against which other studies of planetary motion are measured, especially if new observations seem to contradict hypotheses. In that sense, the combination of Kepler's empirical data and theoretical tenets are part of the accepted transcendent framework that allows new scientific observations to gain meaning. Yet what happens when, as in hermeneutics, there is no stable transcendental framework against which experience can be compared? Habermas identifies this as the problem of application: the constant tarrying between objective and subjective positions in the hermeneutic circle prevents it from comparing empirical data with the laws of nature or overarching rationality. In other words, a hypothesis or a result cannot be compared to the previous body of scientific knowledge, because that very same scientific body of knowledge is itself being brought into question by the hermeneutic process.

The lack of a transcendental framework in which understanding and interpretation can be grounded is, to Habermas, a major flaw of Gadamer's hermeneutics. In other words, if we attempt to understand and interpret the world in a setting which no longer makes reference to a transcendental schema, Habermas thinks that hermeneutics will be forever mired in the worst kind of relativism. If the overriding framework which organizes understanding is no longer there, or no longer "a production of reason

apprehending itself,"[31] then, Habermas argues, hermeneutic interpretation will always be playing catch-up in an effort to link the world and sentences in a meaningful way. As he puts it, we are left with a situation in which "a transcendental framework that coordinates sentences and facts is not yet established once and for all but is undergoing transformation and must be determined ad hoc."[32] This ad hoc status is what troubles Habermas, mostly because it erodes the very foundation on which he wants to anchor understanding.

According to Habermas, the continuous need to formulate, maintain and amend a transcendental framework in which understanding can take place is especially problematic because it hinders the clear application of theoretical knowledge to facts. In order to illustrate his point, Habermas first offers an example regarding the empirical sciences (which is a counter-example to hermeneutics). Habermas argues that the empirical sciences coordinate theoretical construction and observation into a transcendental framework, even though the actual *practice* of empirical science seems to pull them apart. (A hypothesis or theoretical tradition is a separate entity *against which* observations can be tested; thus, the two are 'pulled apart' in scientific methodology, but are united in the transcendental framework of the empirical sciences.) As Habermas says, "with this constitution, the rules according to which theoretical sentences can be applied to facts are predecided; thus they are unproblematic within the sciences."[33] He takes the situation within the sciences as a point of departure for his argument against hermeneutics.

Unlike the sciences, hermeneutics cannot, and does not, rely on a transcendental coordination between theory and experience; it cannot play experience off theory in an

everyday context and rely on the transcendental unity to provide the ultimate basis for meaning. Instead, hermeneutics eschews that ultimate unity all together. There *is only* interpretation, the interplay between theory and experience. Because the very *grounds* for understanding are determined within the same process that produce understanding, Habermas sees the circular nature of hermeneutics as a drawback, instead of an asset, to further understanding. This is why Habermas claims that "it is senseless to assign hermeneutic understanding either to theory or to experience; it is both and neither."[34] Interestingly, though perhaps as a side note, Heidegger identifies this very same circle as a positive move within ontology in the beginning of *Being and Time*.[35] Gadamer, in his response to Habermas' review will follow a similar line of argument.

Habermas pursues one further argument regarding a transcendental framework, in which he attempts to circumscribe the cases for which hermeneutics is apt. He claims that unlike a unified scientific discourse, the various individual horizons on which hermeneutic interpretation relies guts any chance at a *coherent* understanding that is shared between people. He explains that, "the brokenness of intersubjectivity renders the continuous coordination of views in a common schema a permanent task."[36] While this point echoes his earlier claims about the need for a transcendental framework for application to work, Habermas goes further and actually contends that the *suspension* of a transcendental framework is only *necessary* in a small number of cases, since "only in extreme cases does this inconspicuously ever-present transformation and development of transcendental schemata of world-interpretation *become a problem that has to be explicitly mastered* through hermeneutic understanding."[37] In effect, Habermas circumscribes the scope of the hermeneutic model by limiting its usefulness to 'extreme

cases,' while at the same time using this assertion as another reason to doubt hermeneutics' relevance to scientific pursuits.

For Habermas, both the relation science-hermeneutics relation and the latter's ability to critique ideology are linked by an emphasis on *critical distance*; both scientific pursuits and critical theory aim to be a step removed from the messy, linguistically-mediated happenings on the ground. Dallmayr encapsulates it thusly: "the *distancing* operative in both cases, that is, their critical removal from taken-for-granted beliefs or traditions...had to be seen as a crucial corollary of the liberating aims of modern rationalism or rational critique.... challenging the "rehabilitation of prejudice" propounded in *Truth and Method*, the review suspected Gadamer's work of harboring a latent 'conservatism' or traditionalism deeply at odds with emancipatory goals."[38] As will be shown in the next chapter, Gadamer rejects the premise that critique requires a consistent distancing. In fact, the tarrying between objectivity and subjectivity in the hermeneutic circle would seem to undercut the justification for a method that privileges *only* distance. Gadamer will show that Habermas' insistence on reason as a framework will hinder his own ability at understanding. Thus Gadamer's response will tackle both the ability of hermeneutics to produce meaning intersubjectively and its relation to science.

Critiquing Tradition and Ideology

Tradition, according to Gadamer, is a precondition for understanding. Likewise, tradition must be *recognized* as such; that is, tradition must be conceptualized not just as a backdrop for understanding, but as an always-already given starting point *from* which and

within which understanding can take place. For Habermas, such circularity makes the role of tradition problematic because tradition itself must be criticized and reformulated from *within* hermeneutics. Put another way, the application of tradition is a problem for Habermas because it seeks to replicate the transcendental framework of reason, or at least fill a similar function, and yet it is to be critiqued and eroded by the hermeneutic process. How is it possible for hermeneutics to use tradition as a starting point and at the same time be critical of the assumptions inherent in tradition?

In this section, I will focus on Habermas' argument regarding the ability of the hermeneutic method to critique ideology. His essay, and my analysis, will explicate two major strains of this argument: the first questions whether hermeneutics can 'self-correct,' or critically reflect upon its own tradition, once that tradition is recognized as the starting point for understanding. The second examines whether the hermeneutic model is an effective tool for critiquing ideology in general. Throughout, Habermas explicates the relationship between science and hermeneutics more pointedly than before, arguing that science, along with labor and domination, falls outside realm of hermeneutics.

Regarding the critique of tradition, the argument against Gadamer is framed around the concept of reflection. As explained in Chapter 2, reflection is the step in the hermeneutic process after the prejudgment [*Vorurteil*] has been appropriated, in which one's critical faculties are brought to bear on both the tradition which informs one's understanding and also the new understanding at hand. Habermas argues that because prejudice is embedded in the tradition that shapes interpretation, it is impossible to meaningfully challenge that same tradition from *within*. In Habermas' estimation, "on-going tradition and hermeneutic inquiry merge to a single point [for Gadamer]. Opposed

to this is the insight that the reflected appropriation of tradition breaks up the nature-like [*naturwüchsige*] substance of tradition and alters the position of the subject in it."[39] This passage is a renewed attack on the universality of hermeneutics, since Habermas accuses Gadamer of collapsing all traditions into the domain of interpretation. Yet, Habermas also opens the door to a more effective form of reflection to critique tradition when hermeneutics fails, which he calls *scientific* reflection. As outlined earlier, the scientific process is not under the purview of hermeneutics, for Habermas, and consequently he sees it as the foundation for a *truly* critical reflection:

> This type of reflection is no longer blinded by the illusion of an absolute, self-grounded autonomy and does not detach itself from the soul of contingency on which it finds itself. But in grasping the genesis of the tradition from which it proceeds and on which it turns back, reflection shakes the dogmatism of life-practices. [Instead,] Gadamer turns the insight into the structure of prejudgments [*Vorurteilsstruktur*] involved in understanding into a rehabilitation of prejudice as such.[40]

From this passage, it is clear that Habermas has no intention to grant Gadamer's hermeneutics any critical capacity. In fact, he accuses Gadamer of being motivated by "conservatism of the first generation" which hinders him from realizing the tradition-reinforcing nature of hermeneutics.[41] Furthermore, this conservatism is grounded in Gadamer's refusal to label all authority as necessarily authoritarian, which leads Habermas to ask whether there are *legitimate* prejudices. If Gadamer allows for the possibility of legitimate prejudice, then interpreters are faced with the spurious task of always figuring out *when* to be critical and when to let a legitimate prejudice stand. On the other hand, if prejudice is never legitimate, then the task of critique is even more daunting, requiring a constant vigilance which Habermas thinks is unlikely given the structure of the hermeneutic process.

Here, the example of education is particularly relevant. While both agree that the authoritarian, or at least conservative, interests are present in state-run formal education, what happens at the micro-level, where education is passed on from teacher to student? Is that a chance to prove authority is not always authoritarian? Habermas thinks not: "That authority converges with knowledge means that the tradition that is effectively behind the educator legitimates the prejudices inculcated in the rising generation; they could then only be *confirmed* in this generation's reflections."[42] Ultimately, effectively critiquing tradition from *within* the hermeneutic frame requires either an ability to shrewdly discern *bad* authority from good, or constant vigilance against *all* authority; conditions which Habermas does not think are realistic or feasible. The only viable alternative is to emphasize reflection, as Habermas states:

> Gadamer's prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection. ... But reflection does not wrestle with the facticity of transmitted norms *without leaving a trace*. It is condemned to be after the fact; but in glancing back it develops retroactive power. ... Reflection recalls the path of authority along which the grammars of language games were dogmatically inculcated as rules for interpreting the world and for action. In this process the element of authority that was simply dominant can be *stripped away* and *dissolved* into the less coercive constraint of insight and rational decision.[43]

Habermas thus concludes Section III of his review with a stinging indictment of Gadamer's position toward tradition, or rather the inability of hermeneutics to critique tradition. All of the powers reflection entails – retroactive critique, reversing inculcated authority and dissolving domination – are denied by Gadamer's prejudice for prejudice. The implications of such conservatism are systemic and threaten to undermine hermeneutic's ability to negotiate difference and viably dissolve ideology.

While the preceding sections outlined Habermas' arguments regarding tradition, the final section of his review attacks Gadamer's position on language and the critique of

ideology. Instead of probing hermeneutics' ability to reflect critically on *tradition*, Habermas questions whether hermeneutics can effectively critique ideology in general. Put another way, the point of attack shifts from instances of prejudice to the systematic distortion that ideology perpetuates. In doing so, Gadamer's supposed "idealism of linguisticality" is identified as the root of hermeneutics' inability to critique ideology.

What effect does a certain conception of language have on the ability to critique social institutions? For both Gadamer and Habermas, there is an undeniable link between the function of language in society and how one characterizes, and critiques, that society. Their disagreement emerges around the universality of language and what, if anything, is 'outside' language. As will be shown in the next Chapter, Gadamer thinks that language is a medium that covers all aspects of the intelligible world, through which understanding can be achieved. Habermas concedes that in the *social* realm, it makes sense to think of language as a meta-institution because "social action is constituted only in ordinary language communication."[44] His objection arises when such a notion of language is applied *universally*, that is, to all phenomena and aspects of the world. In a crude characterization, the debate revolves around a question of priority: does language influence *everything*, or are there real facts of the world that actually influence and are in some sense 'outside' of language? When Habermas points out that "language is also ideological," he means that language is subject to such fundamental distortion that it cannot be used as a tool of critique.[45] This again is why he attempts to isolate forces outside of language, namely: "the non-normative forces that infiltrate language as a meta-institution originate not only from systems of domination but also from social labor. ... [As well as] the institutional changes brought about by scientific-technical progress

[which] indirectly exert an influence on the linguistic schemata of world-comprehension."[46] The effect of these forces is dire: "behind the back of language, they also affect the very grammatical rules according to which we interpret the world."[47]

To clarify, language and its ability to enable critique is undercut by the systems of domination and social labor that exert pressure on it from an external position. As an example, Habermas cites the historical change in the means of production and the attendant changes in linguistic usage and the 'schemata of language' in general, as evidence of ideology's superior position. If he is correct, then working from 'within' language and using interpretation as a critical tool will fail from the outset; ideology will always be there before, during and after.

Of course, Habermas does not end on such a dire note: not surprisingly, he identifies the scientific method as the "objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labor and domination" which can objectively comprehend social actions.[48] Only such a reference system can identify the "conditions outside of tradition under which the transcendental rules of world-comprehension" can actually be *changed.*[49]

Such an apparent blow to the entire hermeneutic project did not go unanswered, of course. Chapter 4 is dedicated to Gadamer's response on the most pressing issues that Habermas presented in his review.

Notes:

[1] Habermas, Jürgen. "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry*. Eds. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

[2] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

[3] Habermas, Jürgen. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Eds. Gayly L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

[4] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Reply to My Critics," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Eds. Gayly L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

[5] Dallmayr, Fred. *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press. 1991. P. 1.

[6] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985.

[7] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 335.

[8] Ibid., p. 335.

[9] Ibid., p. 337.

[10] Ibid., p. 336.

[11] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 362.

[12] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 339.

[13] Ibid., p. 336.

[14] Ibid., p. 336.

[15] Ibid., p. 338. First parenthetical is mine. All emphasis is mine.

[16] Ibid., p. 338. Emphases mine.

[17] Ibid., p. 339.

[18] Ibid., p. 339.

[19] Ibid., p. 338.

[20] Ibid., p. 359.

[21] Ibid., p. 340.

[22] Ibid., p. 340.

[23] Ibid., p. 340.

[24] Ibid., p. 340.

[25] Ibid., p. 354.

[26] Habermas, Jürgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Beacon Press: Boston. 1972.
See also McCarthy, Thomas. *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1979.

[27] Dallmayr, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt,* p. 19.

[28] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 354.

[29] As will be shown later in this discussion, Habermas' argument rests on the conception of a world outside of language. Or rather, a world consisting of the laws of nature, which we can access via empirical study. Such an underlying assumption is certainly at odds with Gadamer's epistemological tenets regarding horizons and interpretation, since language mediates all knowledge, making 'direct access' or 'empiricism' a hollow concept. While this area of disagreement is interesting, I chose to focus on the disagreements specifically raised by Habermas, instead of his underlying assumptions.

[30] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 354-355.

[31] Ibid., p. 354.

[32] Ibid., p. 355.

[33] Ibid., p. 355.

[34] Ibid., p. 355

[35] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962. P. 27.

[36] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 355.

[37] Ibid., p. 355.

[38] Dallmayr, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt,* p. 18.

[39] Habermas, "Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 356.

[40] Ibid., p. 357.

[41] Ibid., p. 357.

[42] Ibid., p. 358.

[43] Ibid., p. 358. Emphases mine.

[44] Ibid., p. 360.

[45] Ibid., p. 360.

[46] Ibid., p. 360.

[47] Ibid., p. 361.

[48] Ibid., p. 361.

[49] Ibid., p. 361.

CHAPTER 3

Gadamer's Response: On Language And Universality

The opening salvo of the Gadamer-Habermas debate focused on the hermeneutic model's tenets and assumptions. Habermas questioned whether interpretation that acknowledges tradition as its context can ever adequately overcome the prejudices it inherits. Intricately bound up within that are concerns about science's place in an interpretive scheme focused around language, or 'linguisticality' as Gadamer puts it. This latter concern crystallizes into an opposition between Gadamer's claims to universality and Habermas' insistence that science, along with labor and domination, are forces *outside* of the hermeneutic realm.

While Habermas advances convincing arguments, as should be clear from the preceding chapter, his *Review* did not go unanswered. In 1971, Karl-Otto Apl's H*ermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* included Gadamer's response to the charges of universalism and the 'idealism of linguisticality' advanced by Habermas.[1] In the following chapter, I will outline Gadamer's stance on the major aspects of Habermas' review, drawing mainly from his essay "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection."[2] The essay, and thus my explication, does not always follow the structure of Habermas' arguments, yet the most insightful criticisms are certainly addressed. With recourse to Gadamer's other writings and secondary sources, I will then contextualize the debate, and perhaps fill in where Gadamer's response itself fell short. The exchange between these two thinkers is often credited as bringing each closer to the other's position, yet few commentators argue that the debates themselves were conclusive. Many

scholars, most notably Paul Ricoeur and Alasdair McIntyre, have attempted a synthesis of the hermeneutic model and critical theory. Following in those footsteps, the last section of this chapter will provide my own attempt at resolution, taking into account Gadamer's basic model with Habermas' emphasis on critiquing ideology.

Gadamer's Response: Linguisticality and Universal Hermeneutics

What emerged in Habermas' arguments about universality and critical distance is the double-edged sword that Gadamer must negotiate: at once, he must deny the superiority of critical, objective analysis (á la Enlightenment reason), while at the same time defending himself against accusations of being too reliant on tradition, an inherently conservative force (á la pre-critical metaphysics). Without a doubt, Gadamer's approach in his response does not temper the claims to universalism that he established in *Truth and Method.* His opening lines read:

> Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection.[3]

Besides setting expectations high, Gadamer's remarks make it clear that hermeneutics is not only fundamental to interacting with the world and society, but also a path to the political critique that Habermas is after. The remainder of the response will focus on the universality of hermeneutics or, as he puts it, "the linguisticality of man's relation to the world" which is the basis of the interpretive model.[4] Additionally, he defends

hermeneutics against the charge of encroaching on the social sciences, while at the same time presenting several counter-criticisms to Habermas. Interestingly, he situates his arguments in relation to the historical developments of language's function in society. He likens the transition in language, from the written tradition to more fluid forms of communication, to the changes that took place within the hermeneutic tradition itself. The increase in distance, both temporal and geographic, between the author and the reader was one of the factors that spurred the need for translation as the basic model of interpretation. Yet at the same time, Gadamer disavows translation as the all-encompassing blueprint for hermeneutics because it does not "fully come to grips with the manifoldness of what language means in man's existence."[5] Instead, the actual problematic of interpretation is more fundamental to the human experience than translation can capture.

In justifying the universality of hermeneutics, Gadamer aims to ground it in the everyday practices of human interaction. He likens hermeneutics to rhetoric, not only the theories' traditions but also their function in society and practice. He states: "the art of understanding, whatever its ways and means may be, is not dependent on an explicit awareness of the rules that guide and govern it. It builds, as does rhetoric, on a natural power that everyone possesses to some degree."[6] By claiming hermeneutics as innate in human practice, Gadamer is not only entrenching the universality of it, but he is also countering Habermas' argument that critical *distance* is required for emancipatory meaning to emerge, since everyone has an innate capacity to re-interpret tradition. In the everyday practice of interpretation, the interrelatedness of human interpretation and the

world as constituted by tradition is highlighted. It is that mutual dependence that allows criticism from *within* tradition.

Taking the argument one step further, Gadamer posits that, because of the everyday nature of hermeneutics, any scientific pursuit that wishes to have some practical application is necessarily reliant on interpretation. In effect, Gadamer is side-stepping Habermas' argument about the lack of transcendent schema that guides hermeneutics, and reversing it. It is *because* science relies on a transcendent framework, and sees itself as removed from messy questions of interpretation, that it needs hermeneutics to make it meaningful in everyday human practice and society. To conclude, "the phenomenon of understanding, then, shows the universality of human linguisticality as a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it – not only the 'culture' that has been handed down to us through language, but absolutely everything – because (in the world and out of it) is included in the realm of 'understanding' and understandability in which we move."[7]

Having grounded the universality and linguisticality of interpretation, Gadamer moves on to a counter-criticism of Habermas' review. As a start, Gadamer faults Habermas for assuming that the 'brokenness of intersubjectivity' is an aberration of human interaction, and not the norm. It is true that there would be no hermeneutical task if meaning were never disturbed or if meaning were coordinated by transcendental reason, but Gadamer thinks continued faith in such a system is no longer warranted (if it ever was). As he puts it, "those involved in a conversation must search for and find again together" the meaning of their world.[8] In fact, the "increasing self-alienation of human life in our modern epoch" stems from *ignoring* the fact that reason can no longer be relied

upon to furnish meaning. Because of this misplaced faith, Gadamer accuses Habermas of not only *ignoring*, but whole-heartedly embracing the "intentional alienation and distancing present in sociological methodology." [9] Not surprisingly, Gadamer claims that a hermeneutic perspective is the only way to remedy such a misstep. Habermas' reliance on the objectivity of reason should be rejected in favor of a more nuanced understanding of meaning-creation. Hermeneutics is needed to "overcome the positivistic ossification of sociological logic and move sociological theory beyond its historical failure to reflect upon its linguistic foundations."[10]

Gadamer has clearly succeeded in criticizing Habermas' position, yet how does hermeneutics solve the problem of methodological alienation, as Gadamer terms it? His first point is that, unlike Habermas, his analysis does not start with the assumption that hermeneutics serves the methodology of the social sciences. In fact, Gadamer's focus in the first and second part of *Truth and Method* is on art and aesthetic experience, areas that lie 'beyond' science, to prove that hermeneutics is not a supplement to scientific endeavors. This means that Gadamer's starting point does not assume the necessity of a *methodology* of understanding at all. Second, Gadamer refers back to the universality of the hermeneutic experience when he claims that "it is *prior* to all methodical alienation because it is the matrix out of which arise the questions that it then directs to science."[11] This is reminiscent of his earlier claim that, in order for science to have any practical application, it must recognize the necessity of interpretation. In a final salvo, Gadamer transforms the negative argument, about science failing to understand social life, into a positive attack on the very role of science in society:

> What kind of understanding does one achieve through 'controlled alienation'? Is it not likely to be an alienated understanding? Is it not the case that many social scientists are more interested in using the sedimented truisms inherent in linguisticality (so as to grasp 'scientifically' the 'real' structures, as they define them, of society) than in really understanding social life?[12]

The implications of this argument should be clear: hermeneutics does not prevent critical reflection, nor does it engender the methodological alienation at the core of the social sciences. In fact, only a hermeneutic approach can overcome such methodological alienation, and in turn, only a hermeneutic approach starts from a position able to critique tradition and ideology.

So far, Gadamer's essay has justified the universality of hermeneutics, especially in opposition to the social sciences, yet the next critical step is proving that hermeneutics not only has the *capacity* for criticism, but that it actually does so effectively. To preface his defense, Gadamer problematizes the seemingly clear distinction between tradition as a conservative force and criticism as an emancipatory force. It is a necessary consequence of seeing the historical situatedness of interpreters that "allows us to see through the dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing, natural 'tradition' and the reflective appropriation of it."[13] Eradicating such an opposition allows Gadamer to claim that hermeneutic reflection goes hand in hand with the reliance on tradition. Coupled with his earlier stance that scientific methodology results in even worse alienation, this argument effectively proves that prejudice and criticism are two sides of the same coin, both inherent in the hermeneutic circle.

Thus far Gadamer has succeeded in establishing the critical capacity of hermeneutics, but the question returns yet again how hermeneutics interacts with the 'social forces' that Habermas identified; namely, labor and domination. And again

Gadamer defends himself against Habermas' suggestion that a hermeneutic model means material being and 'life-practice' are determined by linguistically articulated consciousness. He goes on:

> It *only* suggets [sic] 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, it happens rather behind the backs of those who live in the subjective opinion that they have understood 'the world' (or can no longer understand it); that is, reality happens precisely* within *language.*[14]

Gadamer's insistence on this point – the linguisticality of the world – is not misplaced, since it undercuts the premises on which Habermas' critique is based. His attempt to locate a place 'outside' of language on which to found critical reflection is not only bound to fail, but is actually counterproductive, since the social forces to be attacked are 'within' language itself. As a concluding remark, Gadamer's response shows how only through hermeneutical reflection can one deem what aspects of prejudice or tradition are justified and what aspects are worthy of critique.

Interpreting the Debate: Additional Questions Raised

In a telling way, the hermeneutic model is itself borne out in the way different authors have characterized the Gadamer-Habermas debate: each comes at them from a specific tradition, which certain pre-understandings and prejudices. Of course, such an observation alone should not and does not grant Gadamer's entire position. Yet, the situatedness of any analysis, at least in a small way, influences how the is perceived and ultimately how it is resolved for a specific person. It seems intuitive, then, that the varying approaches and conclusions reached by previous attempts at synthesis, most

notably by Paul Ricoeur and Fred Dallmayr, bear out at least some aspect of the hermeneutic model.

Ricoeur, in an essay entitled "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" attempts to bridge the gap between hermeneutic and critical theory. He first identifies the, in his view, four major disagreements between Gadamer and Habermas. He then proceeds to offer a remedy for each area of contention, trying to find a 'zone of intersection' in which to ground his synthesis. While I will not engage in a full review of Ricoeur's proposals, I will point out two of his remedies: the first regarding Gadamer's focus on verbal communication over the written text, and the second regarding Habermas' theory of interests as outlined in *Knowledge and Human Interest.* In a throwback to the earlier hermeneutic tradition, Ricoeur suggests that a return to the *text* as the basic model of hermeneutics would allow for a natural distance between the interpretation and the thing being interpreted.[15] In other words, interpretation modeled on text is more innately critical because a distance – whether temporal, historical or otherwise – appears between the *writing* of the text and the subsequent act of interpreting it. I am highlighting this aspect of Ricoeur's essay because it jars with the analysis provided earlier that, to put it bluntly, the age of the written text is over. In an increasingly globalized world, the interaction between different traditions and cultures seems to be more urgent and happening at a more rapid pace. In some sense, the *luxury* of analyzing fixed text is something that is not afforded in the contemporary world.

While I disagree with Ricoeur's stance on the previous question, I am intrigued by his analysis of the affinity between Habermas' tripartite model of human interests and Heidegger's own tripartite description of the fore-structure of understanding. As outlined

in Chapter 2, the three bases of interpretation for Heidegger are fore-sight, fore-having and fore-conception. On top of these, Ricoeur superimposes Habermas' distinction between technical, practical and emancipatory interest, and concludes that at a basic level, Habermas' theory of interests is actually dependent on hermeneutics. Again, space does not permit a full exploration of this conclusion, but it does point to the plethora of analyses that have been wrought out of the Gadamer-Habermas debates.

Turning now to my own attempt to mediate the debate, I will focus on the two predominant themes: the universality of language and its relation to the sciences. Even after studying the primary texts and analyzing their interaction, however, I do not expect to come to a definitive conclusion. Instead, I hope to bring my own experiences to the debate, thereby raising interesting questions and proposing certain resolutions to specific points of contention.

Much of the debate between Gadamer and Habermas hinges on the definition of language, the relationship it has to other social forces and institutions and how it functions to shape the hermeneutic process. If language is one in a series of social institutions, then Habermas' inquiry into the interconnections between labor, domination and language is a necessary part of critiquing ideology. If, on the other hand, language is the medium for accessing *any* understanding, then labor and domination cannot be located 'outside' of language. Clearly, the question around language is central, if not pivotal for this debate.

Accurately describing language, linguisticality, or its relation to the world is a perennially difficult task. Theories of language often used metaphors, likening language to a mirror or an index, which are quickly stretched beyond the point where they lend

clarity to the debate. As much as possible, then, I will avoid introducing new characterizations of language, and will instead focus on dispelling some of the *mis*-characterizations that I believe plagued the debate between Gadamer and Habermas.

One of Habermas' claims in the *Review* is that social domination and labor exist as forces outside of language, as a way to deflate Gadamer's claims to universalism. Despite the importance of this particular issue, this is an instance where the two sides do not actually hold truly opposing viewpoints. In my estimation, Gadamer's argument *isn't* that there are no other institutions besides language, nor that language is the only thing that shapes the world. If that *were* his argument, it would mean that 'language' is a autogenic, purely self-referential sphere, totally isolated from the world - which is clearly not his argument. Instead, Gadamer refers to the 'linguisticality of the world' which does imply an *identity* between language and the world, but instead points to a much more complicated relationship. Harkening back to Heidegger, perhaps Gadamer could have written it as language-in-the-world, thereby indicating the co-constitutive nature of both concepts.

Following such an interpretation, language is still the medium through which Being accesses the world to gain understanding, yet it does not seem to imply a *causal* relationship between forces in the world and language itself. Just as the ontology of Being is intimately bound up with the World, in Heidegger's sense, Gadamer's claim is that *language* is what constitutes that bond.

Put a different way, I do not read Gadamer's stance on language as an attempt to *causally* explain the relationship between it and all other social institutions. It is not as if spontaneous changes within the linguistic field precipitated actual, material changes in

the realm of sociology, or in physics even. In that light, it is unfortunate that Habermas' argument is based on his attempt to prove that labor and domination causally affect language. For him, the changes in language usage come about because the means of production shifted in different phases of capitalism. Yet this does not undercut Gadamer's stance that material changes can only be understood and rendered meaningful through language.

The upshot is that Gadamer could potentially concede Habermas' claim that ideology alters the very grammar of language, because the historical, cultural and political forces that Habermas claims systematically distort language are the very reason why tradition and prejudice must be foregrounded. Recognizing the non-linguistic structural factors in society is not a concession; instead, it reveals why interpreting from one's own horizon needs to be a self-reflective act.

The drive behind Habermas' attempt to find extra-linguistic forces makes sense: if he succeeds, then he has recourse to a foundation from which ideology can be critiqued. Yet it seems unlikely that Gadamer would claim language as the medium through which the world is accessed, and at the same time allow for 'extra-linguistic' forces to distort that access. Not surprisingly, Gadamer focused much of his response on refuting the notion that forces can operate 'behind the back' of language, and I think in this regard that he is correct. Language, in that sense, is universal. Interpretation is impossible without it, and so is meaning, which means that subjects are always stuck in a hermeneutic frame, and only from within it can effective criticism arise.

While I find Gadamer's side of the language-ideology debate more convincing, allow me to raise one worry related to his approach. In his review, Habermas uses the

example of a teacher and his or her students to illustrate the force which tradition assumes when prejudice and authority are embodied together. Granting for a moment that Gadamer is correct when he claims an inherent critical power to hermeneutics, my question is whether there are varying *degrees* of success within critique. For example, imagine that a teacher conveys the conventional story of Christopher Columbus landing in the New World, and then also attempts to illuminate the prejudices that such a telling entails. Is it fair to say that such an instance, where the authority itself undercuts the 'naturalness' of the prejudicial frame, actually succeeds in *more* effective critique? As noted earlier, Gadamer thinks that reflection occurs in the hermeneutic model whether or not a prejudice is successfully challenged. But does that also imply that reflection can be seen along a scale of effectiveness when it does in fact erode pretexts and pretensions?

Since I am only raising the question, I will not attempt a definitive answer. Nevertheless, the potential exists that such a variegated scale of critique manifests itself when individuals interpret and seek understanding. And in turn, such a possibility raises proto-political concerns about *who* is in a position of constant criticism. Fred Dallmayr, in his book *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt*, credits Gadamer for "subduing and confining" Heidegger's "ontological radicalism," presumably because Gadamer abandoned the drive for authenticity at the heart of Heidegger's Being. [16] But does one's ability to critique not rest on the same foundation as being authentic Being, since both require a commitment to constantly bringing to light the background assumptions of everyday life? In other words, is the drive for authenticity in Heidegger reincarnated as the drive for critical self-reflection in Gadamer's hermeneutics? While this line of inquiry is not conclusive, it does foreshadow other political questions that arise when

hermeneutics is posited as a model for consensus-building. Such concerns will be more fully explored in the next chapter.

My emphasis on the question of language likely betrays my own interest in the debate, yet I do believe its relevance to concerns of universality and the social sciences is undeniable. As has been my contention throughout, the evolving theories of language are at the very core of political, ethical and certainly ideological debates. Perhaps Gadamer and Habermas' stances on the language-ideology position betray their own underlying traditions as well. An analysis of Habermas' stance in particular would be remiss if it didn't point to his project in *Knowledge and Human Interest* as a guiding force behind his criticism of hermeneutic universalism. Likewise, Gadamer's attempt to side-step the discussion about structural, institutional forces in favor of focusing on language's position vis-à-vis hermeneutics, betrays his grounding in a tradition not usually concerned with such questions.

As I noted before, few scholars believe that the debate between Gadamer and Habermas produced a definitive conclusion, and on this point I must agree with them. Perhaps the real result of the debate can be seen in the changes both thinkers made as a result of their interaction. Habermas' latter writings, especially his *Theory of Communicative Action*, moves much closer to the intersubjective nature of communication as a basis for consensus-building. Likewise, Gadamer's subsequent responses showed a willingness to closely examine the critical implications of hermeneutics.

Notes:

[1] Apl, Karl-Otto, *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971.

[2] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

[3] Gadamer, "Hermeneutical Reflection," p. 277.

[4] Ibid., p. 278.

[5] Ibid., p. 278.

[6] Ibid., p. 279.

[7] Ibid., p. 283. Emphasis in original.

[8] Ibid., p. 283.

[9] Ibid., p. 284.

[10] Ibid., p. 284.

[11] Ibid., p. 284. Emphases mine. In this quotation, Gadamer uses the phrase 'methodical alienation' instead of his earlier 'methodological alienation.' It is unclear whether this is a typographical error or intentional, but it does not appear to a *distinct* concept, and so should be read interchangeably with the other phrase.

[12] Ibid., p. 285.

[13] Ibid., p. 286.

[14] Ibid., p. 292. Emphasis mine.

[15] Ricoeur, Paul. "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricouer*. Eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. P. 310.

[16] Dallmayr, Fred, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press. 1991. P. 31-32.

CHAPTER 4

Toward A Hermeneutic Politics: Fusing Self And Other

Hans-Georg Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* covers many issues and has a broad aim: to theoretically justify human knowledge, to explain hermeneutical consciousness, to settle the score between interpretation and the sciences.[1] Yet hermeneutics engenders political questions as well. In this Chapter, I will thus ask: can the hermeneutic model be used as a foundation for consensus-building politics? And if so, on what normative assumptions does such a speech community rest? As Gadamer himself concedes, the hermeneutic model is formalized in a speech community, and "out of this speech community, absolutely no experience of the world is excluded. [Not even the] the political institutions of domination and governance which bind the society together find themselves outside this universal medium."[2] What is implicit in this description is that hermeneutic action is itself political, especially when it is crystallized in a speech community. In effect the question then becomes, what *kind* of a political model does this hermeneutic speech community embody? What are the ground rules for politics?

In answering these questions, I will first explore the potential micro-political implications of building a consensus-oriented community around the hermeneutic model. On an individual level, what kind of a subject engages in hermeneutics? Or rather, to what *end* does a subject pursue hermeneutic practice? Most importantly, I consider whether the very act of engaging a hermeneutic speech community itself has normative implications. I then bring these same concerns to bear on a wider scale. If a hermeneutic

model were adopted as the basis for interacting with other cultures or cross-global exchanges, what would be the result? In the final section, I will defend the general effectiveness of a hermeneutic politics against the criticisms raised.

To preface this inquiry a little further, hermeneutics describes the natural or automatic way in which we interpret the world (and thus come to understand new things). As Habermas puts it, "hermeneutic understanding is the interpretation of texts in the knowledge of already understood texts."[3] When applied to the world in general, hermeneutic understanding is only possible when one's own horizon (or sphere of understanding) interacts with another such horizon. What happens then is what Gadamer neatly terms a "fusion of horizons;" the knowledge entailed in each horizon is mediated by "the encounter" with the other horizon. New meaning is produced and old meaning is mediated in light of the new.

While the hermeneutic model makes sense in the context of language acquisition and translation , the more interesting questions arise when these descriptions are transferred into the political realm. If politics is the pursuit of normative goals or ideas in a collective setting, then what happens when political questions are decided based on hermeneutic understanding? The realm of politics is necessarily laden with normative markers regarding ethics and equality. What then, if these seemingly "neutral/natural" descriptions of fusing horizons actually carry with them a particularly normative ideas of what constitutes a subject at all?

While the Gadamer-Habermas debate revolved mainly around issues of how well, if at all, hermeneutics can critique political ideology, the criticisms considered here will instead focus on what assumptions the hermeneutic model *itself* makes about politics in a

speech community. On what base assumptions does consensus-formation rely? The present inquiry thus operates on a different plane than the debate for several reasons. First, their disagreement involved questions of hermeneutics' place in relation to the sciences. Such an inquiry nicely foregrounds the questions regarding linguisticality, yet it does not culminate in a political vision. Second, the political questions I am considering are targeted at the prospects of a hermeneutic model being used to facilitate consensus-formation. In fact, Habermas' latter writing is instructive in this regard. His theory of communicative action, with its ideal speech situation, rests in some sense on the model of bourgeoisie publics as the foundation of liberal politics. As has been pointed out by authors such as Seyla Benhabib, this reliance affects even the present day conception of who is included and excluded in the public sphere, or who is granted the authority to speak.[4] Likewise, the speech community that Gadamer envisions rests on certain assumptions that are inherent in the hermeneutic tradition. Such normative underpinnings are what I seek to understand.

Pitfalls of Interpretation?: Hermeneutics as a Model for Speech Communities

In this section, I will explore the possible normative implications of positing hermeneutic speech communities as the basis for building political consensus. Numerous questions and potential criticisms arise out of such a scenario. What kind of a self participates in such a community? And to what end? The hermeneutic tradition enjoyed its modern renaissance because the ties of tradition were beginning to loosen. The motivation behind biblical interpretation was not necessarily emancipatory, but served to re-establish the foothold of religious authority. In this light, the hermeneutic enterprise seems to have

inherently conservative interests. How, then, does the tradition of hermeneutics itself impact speech communities? It is at this juncture that a political criticism of hermeneutics must be considered. Further exploring the political implications of Gadamer's interpretive framework will require a re-examination of the basic mechanisms involved in hermeneutics.

One possible criticism of the hermeneutic model is based on the process of fusing horizons itself. To understand another subject, Gadamer posits that one must 'transpose oneself' into the situation of the other subject as a part of the hermeneutic process. Such self-transposition is "neither the empathetic projection of one individuality into another nor the subjection of the other to one's own standards; it means, rather rising to a higher level of generality on which not only one's own particularity but that of the other is overcome."[5] While it is laudable that an exchange between individuals is not based on empathy or subjugation, my worry is that such a 'transposition' still eradicates the very qualities that identify a subject. Ironically, Gadamer in this instance sounds close to accepting Habermas' rationalism as a basis for entering the hermeneutic community.

Charles Taylor articulates a similar point from a different perspective. As he puts it, "the very ideas of objectivity ... seemed hard to combine with that of fundamental conceptual differences between cultures; so that real cultural openness appeared to threaten the very norms of validity" on which consensus rested.[6] Luckily, Gadamer's hermeneutic model improved upon pure objectivity by positing that a 'scientific' approach could not grasp the inherent linguisticality of human interactions. Instead, understanding requires that a subject foreground its own tradition and simultaneously engages in a dialogic process of meaning-creation. The interplay of subjects in the

hermeneutic speech community does, however, impact the very foundations of those subjects' identities. Taylor proposes that the inherent risk to one's own tradition is the "identity cost" associated with dialogic engagement.[7] Building consensus requires that every subject is willing to accept not only criticism of his or her own beliefs, but the possibility that those beliefs should be abandoned altogether. While most instances of communication do not present dire costs to self identity, it is perhaps prudent to be aware of such a risk.

The contemporary political theorist Rey Chow has raised a similar concern in a more concrete manner. Commenting on the increasing self-referentiality of Western political theory, she notes that theorists in non-Western traditions are still expected to have a thorough understanding of the Western cannon, in that way accommodate themselves to the 'dominant' tradition. She writes:

> [One] can't expect specialists of ancient Greek tragedy, the Italian Renaissance, German semiotics of the eighteenth century, the English novel, or the French *nouveau roman* to know about happenings in the Pacific region. But that alibi – of not having enough time or not being available to know everything – is precisely the heart of the matter here because it is, shall we say, a one-way privilege. Such an alibi is simply not acceptable or thinkable for those specializing in non-Western cultures.[8]

I raise this example as a parallel to the 'identity cost' that Taylor cites and wonder whether transposing oneself is a similar 'one-way privilege.' The hermeneutic circle requires tarrying between the subjective and objective positions, yet the ability *to occupy* the position of objectivity is in itself a question of politics. It is at the beginning of the discussion that the normative assumptions of a hermeneutic speech community are most powerful. Setting the agenda and defining the terms at hand are not neutral tasks. In light of this, it is especially important to be aware of the potential for conservative undercurrents to swamp emancipatory political gains.

Even in situations without such potential pitfalls, a further question arises: how does hermeneutic consensus-building actually reach a state of consensus? While it may be tempting to think that hermeneutic politics is a process toward distilling truth, it is a temptation that should be dismissed. Gadamer's hermeneutic certainly does not rest on the assumption that a preordained truth will be revealed via hermeneutic refraction. If Gadamer's metaphor of fusing horizons is carried a bit further, it seems logical that the community's aim should be to *broaden* its horizons. This sort of liberal cosmopolitanism is reminiscent of Richard Rorty's attempt at bringing as many cultures and viewpoints under one umbrella as possible. While it is not my aim to summarily critique such a notion, I do think that such an approach has potential political ramifications. In some instances, the goals of consensus-building and emancipatory politics are very much at odds with the appropriation of cultures and ideas that is suggested by cosmopolitanism. It is not my intention to champion parochialism, yet the fusion of horizons does seem to imply that all traditions start from an equal playing field. On the other hand, the multiplicity of interpreters certainly provides a mechanism for mediating between those traditions that are justifiable and those that are not. The hermeneutic explanation of an intersubjective community is in that way reminiscent of the notion of the public sphere. While this leap may be premature, it does raise the question of who participates in the public sphere? For Gadamer, the answer is anyone involved in a dialogue, whether that be deliberation on public policy or the news of the day.

In raising one final concern about the politics of hermeneutic speech communities, I return to the work of Paul Ricoeur, who recognized a potential for hermeneutic inquiry to slide into deep skepticism.[9] In his essay on Freud, Ricoeur

identified hermeneutic endeavors that were "characterized by the desire to unmask, demystify, and expose the real from the apparent" as mired in suspicion.[10] Such attempts at understanding are on the opposite pole of hermeneutic style from what Gadamer describes, since *Truth and Method* describes hermeneutics as a the process by which linguistically-mediated meaning is understood. Ricoeur sees a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' in the work of Nietzsche, Marx and Freud because they make "the decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as 'false' consciousness."[11] Tracing this doubting nature back to Descartes, Ricoeur notes that the entire approach of such a hermeneutic detracts from the goal of understanding because it asks (and answers) the wrong questions.

Ricoeur's overall argument clearly has implications for a politics that is modeled on hermeneutic premises. Consensus cannot be built in speech communities where underlying suspicions override the inherent commonality of intersubjective understanding. Ricoeur himself concludes that a political project based on such skepticism actually runs the risk of paralyzing activism and political decision-making because one can never really be sure that an action will have the intended outcome. Additionally, the position of a skeptic erodes the egalitarian nature of a model that otherwise stresses the importance of giving weight to all viewpoints. Of course, it is clear that Gadamer does not advocate for a speech community built on a skeptical hermeneutic model. Yet, the actual risk is more likely to come in the form of a *slide into* suspicion. In this respect the Gadamer-Habermas debate was instructive as a reminder that the forces of ideology and domination are not external to hermeneutic practice.

While the prospect of hermeneutic consensus-building is an attractive consideration, the possible risk factors of such a politics should be taken seriously. The concerns about particular identities, as described by Charles Taylor and Rey Chow, indicate that while the *intention* of hermeneutic understanding is to mediate differences, it has the potential to also eliminate differences. Paul Ricoeur's admonition about a skeptical hermeneutics should also be taken seriously. Yet, having surveyed the possible risk factors of a hermeneutic politics, it is incumbent upon me to explore the safeguards that such a speech community would enjoy as well. It seems intuitive that hermeneutic practice, with its model of translation and a recognition of inherent differences, is all too aware of the cultural or historical hurdles it must overcome. The next section of this chapter will turn to those assurances as they are formulated in Gadamer's own work and those of more contemporary commentators.

Toward What Future?: Defending Hermeneutic Politics

The points explored in the previous section sketched the potential pitfalls of a hermeneutic approach to politics that entails certain normative assumptions. Namely, does the hermeneutic model, when stretched and applied to form democratic consensus models, carry with it the certain notions of self or society? In other words, does Gadamer's approach to understanding others privilege a notion of the self that comes at the cost of particular identities? Does a hermeneutic approach presume an equality among who can effectively interpret the world? And if so, what impact do all of these concerns have on a vision of hermeneutic politics?

While these are all valid questions, I believe that in the final analysis the likelihood and impact of these concerns are mitigated by the very facets of hermeneutic practice. Turning first to the issues described by Taylor and Chow, it seems that no other model of cross-cultural understanding could hope to do better in protecting and respecting the various historical and cultural traditions described. While this may seem like a weak argument, it is perhaps the best defense of the hermeneutic model against these issues. Again I return to the debate between Gadamer and Habermas, this time to point out that the *scientific* approach to understanding other cultures seems to magnify the risks of 'one-way privilege' and identity cost. Such an approach, with its recourse to universal reason, seems to engender even more of the normative assumptions that threaten effective communication. Additionally, the hermeneutic imperative to critically reflect upon one's own traditions act as an internal safeguard to the type of interactions that could present a 'cost' to identities.

Even Charles Taylor himself noted that Gadamer's contribution has the potential of "carrying us beyond the dilemma of ethnocentrism and relativism."[12] This is because hermeneutic encounters are based on coming to understanding with an interlocutor, not "knowing an object," as he puts it.[13] Among several important differences, Taylor notes that coming to an understanding inherently eschews the drive toward finality which guides scientific investigation. From the very beginning, it is clear that while the conversation itself can come to an end, the meaning is never closed off and fixed.

Other authors have made similar points, as Berman does in the conclusion to his essay. In his estimation, the hermeneutic model, more than any other approach, leaves room for empathy to guide the interactions with others. The hermeneutics of suspicion

"creates a dichotomy: those ensnared by false consciousness, and those who can get out from under it and see the snare," yet the hermeneutics of hope can avoid that pitfall by actively embracing the equalizing nature of coming to a shared understanding.[14]

The importance of a new approach to consensus building is highlighted by Georgia Warnke, in her definitive book *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason.* She emphasizes the need for a theory of dialogue in the context of contemporary society, where increasing rates of migration and cultural intermingling have complicated political issues long endemic to all nations. As a remedy, Warnke places hope in the hermeneutic approach:

> To the extent that individuals and cultures integrate this understanding of others and of the differences between them within their own self-understanding, to the extent, in other words, that they learn from others and take a wider, more differentiated view, they can acquire sensitivity, subtlety and a capacity for discrimination.[15]

Another commentator has dubbed the hermeneutic approach an "urbanization"[16] of pervious theories of language and dialogue. In his view, it is not so much the world which has changed, but how research about language and politics must be applied to the world. In any case, the advantages of a hermeneutic approach to inter-cultural or even inter-personal dialogue cannot be easily discounted, even faced with the risks inherent in such a process.

The preceding analysis may provide some hope that a politics founded on the hermeneutic model could succeed, but what about Ricoeur's concern that such a model could devolve into skepticism? Again Berman makes recourse to the empathy inherent in a hermeneutics of hope, where the interlocutor is recognized as "possessing inherent meaning on its own terms."[17] A similar hope is shared by Gadamer, when he indicates

that "[t]he problem of understanding the other, and of coming to an appreciation of the other's form of life, comes to center on understanding other's use of language."[18]

If language is cast as the currency of intersubjectivity, then the work of Gadamer provides an valuable tool for understanding and critiquing the interpretive mechanisms at work.[19] The hermeneutic approach affords a theory of language and politics that guides us toward a critical examination of all aspects of society. With a grounding in language theory and an eye toward the political, Gadamer's hermeneutic analysis has the potential to lead the way toward a new politics of consensus.

Notes:

[1] All of these, incidentally, are suggested by the reviewers of the 1985 Crossroads Edition of *Truth and Method.*

[2] Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Reply to My Critics" in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricouer* Eds. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. p. 277.

[3] pg. 344 – U&SI

[4] See Benhabib, Seyla, *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

[5] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 288.

[6] Taylor, Charles, "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian view on Conceptual Schemes" in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer.* Malpas, J; U Arnswald, J Kertscher (eds). Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press. 2002. p. 279.

[7] Ibid, p. 284.

[8] Chow, Rey, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. p. 13.

[9] Ricoeur, Paul, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Trans. Dennis Savage., Yale Univ. Press, 1970. 32-36

[10] Berman, Paul Schiff, "Approaches To The Cultural Study Of Law: Telling A Less Suspicious Story: Notes Toward A Non-Skeptical Approach To Legal/Cultural Analysis" in the Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities, 2001. p. 103.

[11] Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 33.

[12] Taylor, "Understanding the Other," p. 279.

[13] Ibid., p. 280.

[14] Berman, "Approaches to the Cultural Study of Law," p. 119.

[15] Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and, Reason*, California: Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 174.

[16] Arnswald, *Gadamer's Century,* p. 41.

[17] Berman, "Approaches to the Cultural Study of Law," p. 103.

[18] As quoted in: Arnswald, Ulrich, "On the Certainty of Uncertainty: Language Games and Forms of Life in Gadamer and Wittgenstein," in *Gadamer's Century*. p. 29.

[19] Rabinow, Paul and William M Sullivan, *Interpretive social science : a second look*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1987.

POSTSCRIPT

My study of the hermeneutic tradition has been as much a personal journey as an intellectual one. I came to this project with several interests in mind; some intellectual and some personal. Among them was an interest in gaining a deeper understanding of language and its role in society, or rather the *changing* nature of language. From reading Renée Descartes's *First Mediations on Philosophy* as a freshman to tackling Heidegger's *Being and Time* as a senior, my intellectual curiosity has consistently gravitated toward questions of how exactly humans make themselves intelligible to one another. In a somewhat naïve way, I am sometimes still incredulous that we manage to do it at all.

On a more academic note, I was drawn to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer in a somewhat circumspect fashion. Having been exposed to the works in the Marxist tradition that dealt with alienation, ideology and emancipatory politics, I was eager to form my own conclusions about which model provided our best hope for changing our society. The latter writings of Jürgen Habermas especially influenced my understanding of how ideology operates in the public sphere. But I was also drawn to more theoretically abstract understandings of language in general. In an ongoing cascade of metaphors, language was described as a mirror, or a window, or a picture – and yet none of them come close to explaining *exactly* what goes on when two people communicate. As a result of these dual influences of philosophy of language, on the one hand, and political theory on the other, I came to wonder how communication was possible across great differences in culture, tradition and viewpoint. My wondering thus led me to Gadamer,

whose hermeneutic theory seems to combine the philosophical and the political quite well.

Through my work, I have come to the belief that a theory of language and politics relevant to contemporary thinking must engage in a two-part answer: The inquiry must yield a sound explanation of *what language is* and how it relates to the world, and it must also theorize how the nature of language is compatible with *human forms of life*. The two answers are clearly intertwined since language is the primary mechanism for meaning in human society which means linguistic expression is placed at the center of social life.

To my delight, I soon came to realize that Gadamer and Habermas had the type of exchange in which I was originally interested. Better yet, their concerns and points of contention mirrored my own interests. Was domination outside language? How does ideology influence the grounds for communication? What is the most effective model for self-reflection and criticism? Despite my original reluctance to choose sides, I have come to the conclusion that Gadamer's emphasis on linguisticality explains more about how the world works than Habermas' insistence that labor and domination are external forces. This is perhaps borne out by the fact that Habermas' own theory of communicative action comes much closer to a linguistically-mediated understanding of society.

In hindsight, my goal in this study was to highlight Gadamer's most significant contribution to the knowledge of human understanding, which is the role that language plays in our everyday lives. Gadamer's departure from the Heideggerian investigation of ontology is even more significant when it is seen in the broader scope of twentieth century philosophy. With the advent of post-modern thinkers especially, it is clear to me that the language itself has transformed. I get the sense that – with a shifting, a break and

finally a torrent of words –we have come to the present state of affairs, where language and linguistic meaning is everywhere, and in a certain sense everything.

The changes in language have also affected politics in ways too numerous to count. But here I'm not so much concerned about the current manifestations of the political sphere, but rather the foundations upon which politics is even possible. In this regard, I believe hermeneutics provides a vision of consensus-building that may actually work. In an increasingly globalized world, it seems that Gadamer's model of 'interhuman understanding' is becoming more and more apt. Perhaps the political changes are a corollary to the linguistic shift noted above. But in any case, it does not seem like increasing one's understanding of how to deal with other human beings can every really be time wasted. Perhaps the real task, then, is to find a way to apply the insights of hermeneutic practice to the real-world contexts of our everyday lives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apl, Karl-Otto, *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971.

Arnswald, J., et. al., Eds. *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer.* Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002.

Benhabib, Seyla. *Critique, Norm and Utopia: A Study of the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Chow, Rey. *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Dallmayr, Fred. *From Freiberg to Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology.* Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.

-- and Thomas McCarthy, Eds. *Understanding and Social Inquiry.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Selected Writing.* Ed and Trans. H.P. Rickman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Reason in the Age of Science*, Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983.

-- *Truth and Method.* Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1972.

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time.* Trans. John Maccquari and Edward Robinson, London: SCM Press Limited, 1962.

McCarthy, Thomas. *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas.* Cambridge: MIT Press. 1979.

Ormiston, Gayly L., and Alan D. Schrift, Eds. *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Rabinow, Paul and William M Sullivan. *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, Dennis Savage trans. Yale Univ. Press, 1970.

Taylor, Charles. *Philosophical Papers*: *2 Volumes,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Tully, James. "Wittgenstein's Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection" *Political Theory.* Vol. 17, No. 2., May 1989. p. 172-204.

Wachterhauser, Brice R., Ed. *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Warnke, Georgia. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations,* Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.