PHILOSOPHICAL

HERMENEUTICS

AND LITERARY

THEORY

JOEL WEINSHEIMER

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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For Hans-Georg Gadamer

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PREFACE

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"Philosophical hermeneutics," in the narrow sense, refers specifically to Hans-Georg Gadamer's account of understanding, since he has applied the term to his own work—notably in the subtitle of Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik. Though "philosophical hermeneutics" might well be extended to include the ideas of Heidegger, Ricoeur, and various others as well, here I will focus on Gadamer in particular. My hope in this, as in my previous work on Gadamer, is to broaden his influence by demonstrating the fruitfulness of his thought. This book is not critical in intent; its purpose is not to review or appraise Gadamer's hermeneutics generally. That has already been done particularly well by a number of others, most recently Georgia Warnke. The field of philosophical hermeneutics has perhaps been sufficiently mapped and tilled; now is harvest time. By this I do not mean it is time to apply Gadamer's principles in order to make the practice of interpretation more efficient, accurate, or philosophically defensible. Rather, at this juncture we are prepared to discern how his insights alter our understanding of understanding as it occurs in particular areas of hermeneutic endeavor. Susan Noakes has observed that "despite the cross-disciplinary breadth of Gadamer's influence, attempts to integrate his ideas into literary criticism have been few" (Timely Reading, 231). Gerald Bruns's Inventions must be numbered prominently among these few.

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And the present book is also such an attempt. Its aim is to explore and extend the contributions of philosophical hermeneutics to literary theory and interpretation, broadly conceived.

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The survey of modern hermeneutics with which I begin in chapter 1 makes it apparent that Gadamer's work represents neither the first nor the last word in hermeneutics but is instead situated in the middle of an ongoing dialogue. This lack of finality is not unique or accidental; it characterizes post-romantic hermeneutics generally. Stipulating no interpretive canon, no fixed system of rules, principles, or guidelines, modern hermeneutics is not finally to be distinguished from the continuing history of what it has been interpreted to be. Like all things historical, hermeneutics cannot be understood apart from our changing conceptions of what it is. To survey the history of the various and in part conflicting understandings from Schleiermacher to Ricoeur is not, then, to overlook modern hermeneutics in itself but rather precisely to see it.

Hermeneutics acquired a new conception of itself when, in Kantian fashion, Schleiermacher shifted its task from establishing practical guidelines for understanding to discovering the general conditions that make it possible to understand at all. Gadamer has completed this shift by making his hermeneutics specifically philosophical, distinguishing it from hermeneutic theory in the strict sense and therefore also from literary theory insofar as hermeneutic theory is part of it. If, as has recently been suggested, literary theory consists in the attempt to regulate interpretation by appeal to a general conception of literature and the interpretation of it, then Gadamer's hermeneutics is not theoretical. It is in fact anti-theoretical in one respect, for it explores how understanding occurs at all not how it should be regulated in order to function more rigorously or effectively. Indeed, one of Gadamer's fundamental insights occurs in explaining why theory of interpretation is of itself limited in scope. Ultimately, he shows, understanding is not governed by method: it is not fully susceptible of control, being something that

happens to the interpreter. As I show in chapter 2, for Gadamer understanding (philosophically considered) is an effect of history, not finally an action but a passion.

If history is thus the condition of understanding, it is also its subject matter; and to explain the nature of history in this latter sense Gadamer draws on Kant's third critique to develop what I call an aesthetics of history, which is examined in chapter 3. He is not, of course, concerned with a feeling of pleasure in the events of history or what is written about them. Rather, in part I of Truth and Method Gadamer is suggesting that the kind of judgment Kant reserved for the aesthetic is also required in understanding history. Against neoclassical aesthetics, Kant contended that beauty cannot be decided by rules but only by the reflective judgment that he elaborates in the Critique of Judgment. Such judgment consists not in merely applying a preexistent and fixed rule to decide whether something is beautiful; on the contrary, the rule is determined and defined in the very process of applying it. Like the beautiful, Gadamer contends, the historical cannot be understood as the mere instantiation of a general rule or law, for history is essentially particular. Thus understanding history, too, requires reflective judgment. Gadamer's aesthetics of history implies that to understand the historical particular as something other than a case subsumed under a law is to understand it as in part productive of the law that applies to it.

What we need, then, is a new conception of historical understanding, one that avoids the pitfalls of the old model, which emphasized subsuming particulars under generals. Gadamer's model, the fusion of horizons, at first appears to offer no solution, since the notion of fusion (like that of subsumption) seems to ignore or repress particularity. Its whole point is apparently to supersede difference. But what Gadamer means by fusion, I think, is something like the nonrepressive relation of tenor and vehicle that occurs in metaphor. Gadamer speaks of the metaphoricity of language in general; and if, as he contends, language makes understanding possible, its metaphoricity

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must be reflected in understanding itself. In chapter 4 I show that what Richards and Black, as well as Ricoeur and Derrida, have discovered concerning the nature of metaphor can be appropriated hermeneutically to describe the nature of interpretive understanding. Conceived metaphorically, interpretation is a union of the same and the different. Like metaphor, understanding ideally maintains both the identity and the nonidentity of the vehicle and tenor, the interpreter's horizon and that of the text to be understood.

The relation of the interpreter's language to the text is not unique or special; it is fundamentally the same relation as that which always obtains between words and things. For this reason, it is not enough to emphasize their difference, as Saussurean semiology has done. Gadamer finds that the similarity theory of language, rejected at least since Plato's *Cratylus*, still has some truth to it. A word, he concludes, is something like an image—that is, it belongs to what it represents, as a mirror image belongs to what it mirrors. A word, therefore, is not just a sign, as chapter 5 explains.

Finally, I examine how the union of sameness and difference that is manifest in interpretive language and all language bears on the current debate concerning the canon. I do not pretend that philosophical hermeneutics can resolve this dispute. Quite the opposite, its effect may well be to prolong it, for the value of philosophical hermeneutics in the context of the classic lies not so much in providing answers as in opening up questions that have not been fully considered. In chapter 6 I outline three such questions: in regard to the classic, how do we maintain the dialogue between the work and its reader without silencing either? how can we combine historical continuity and discontinuity without denying either? and, considering what it means to call the classic a sacred text, how do we think truth and power together without reducing one to the other?

What is the common thread in the contributions of philosophical hermeneutics to literary theory? Wordsworth states it quite precisely. Among the chief causes of the pleasure we take in poetry, he remarks in the 1850 preface to Lyrical Ballads, "is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the arts the object of accurate reflection: namely, the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds" (1:149). Wordsworth here sounds the dominant note to which hermeneutic reflection always recurs: the multifaceted tension between the one and the many. In metaphor and application, in the complex dialogue between the past and present, and between the interpretation and the interpreted generally—in all of these is to be discerned the irreducible interplay of sameness and difference. If our time tends to celebrate plurality, diversity, and even conflict, the contrary impulse toward unity and unanimity cannot be long in reasserting itself. What philosophical hermeneutics reminds us, however, is that both extremes, homogeneity and heterogeneity alike, deaden mental activity. For understanding lives in the play of equivalence and difference.

To a number of friends and colleagues I owe a debt of gratitude for their contributions to this project. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 were written for presentation at various colloquia at the kind invitations of Joseph Buttigieg, Wlad Godzich, and Donald Marshall respectively. With the generous support of a University of Minnesota Graduate School grant, Chip Burkitt and Michael Gareffa assisted untiringly in preparing the manuscript. I cannot let pass this opportunity to express my thanks to Ellen Graham, whose graciousness, sound judgment, and good sense have not only been invaluable to me personally but have set the standard of professionalism in scholarly publishing for many years. An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared in G. Douglas Atkins and Laurie Morrow, eds., Contemporary Critical Theory (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 117-36. Chapter 4 appears in Hugh J. Silverman, ed., Gadamer and Hermeneutics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1991) and in the Journal of Literary Studies.

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I

MODERN HERMENEUTICS:

AN INTRODUCTORY

OVERVIEW

Hermeneutics is the theory and practice of interpretation. Its province extends as far as does meaning and the need to understand it. Hermeneutics names no particular method of interpretation or coherent body of theory that could be expounded in systematic form. In our time, as before, it exists only as a historical tradition. Thus hermeneutics can be understood only through a historical overview of its development.

In the form of philology, exegesis, and commentary, hermeneutics had its origin in the allegorical interpretation of Homer, beginning in the sixth century B.C., and in rabbinic midrash and commentary on the Torah. Influenced by both the Homeric and the Jewish tradition, Christian hermeneutics is commonly dated from Philo Judaeus, who, in the first century, methodized interpretation of the Bible in a way that influenced not only Origen, Augustine, and many others before the Reformation but also Dilthey and Betti long afterward. The four-tiered hierarchy of meanings appeared as early as the fifth century, and the typological, moral, and anagogical interpretations that it introduced are still employed in churches today. Hermeneutics began, then, with the interpretation of canonical texts—includ-

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ing the Homeric epics—and even in our time it has not entirely lost sight of the aim that motivates all scriptural interpretation: to disclose not just fact but truth. Yet now the domain of hermeneutics is perceived to reach well beyond theology and philology—into sociology, aesthetics, historiography, law, and the human sciences generally. And considering that post-positivist philosophy has begun to acknowledge the role of hermeneutic understanding in the natural sciences as well, there is good reason to take seriously Gadamer's claim that the scope of hermeneutics is universal.

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This broadening of hermeneutics, from a local and ancillary exegetical aid to a mode of understanding so fundamental as to be universal, involves more than quantitative extension. A fairly clear, though not abrupt, qualitative shift occurred in the late eighteenth century, when the coincidence of classical and biblical modes of interpretation could no longer be taken for granted. "Hermeneutics as the art of understanding does not yet exist in general," Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote in the outline of his 1819 lectures; "rather, only various specialized hermeneutics exist" (1). Thus the need had become evident for a comprehensive theory, uniting not only classical and biblical but indeed all interpretive activities, regardless of their subject matter. Because he was the first to focus on the general principles of understanding, as something more than an aid for specific difficulties, Schleiermacher is credited with being the progenitor of modern hermeneutics.

The significance of Schleiermacher's program does not lie solely in its description of specific cross-disciplinary methods, although his methods were unusually influential. More important, perhaps, is the fact that his hermeneutics, intended to cover every sphere of interpretation, was constructed apart from any particular sphere. What occasioned Schleiermacher's efforts were not the obstacles specific to understanding some particular canon but rather the fact that understanding itself had become problematical and in need of assistance. We cannot assume that the effort of interpretation results naturally

in understanding, Schleiermacher contends. Quite the contrary, "strict interpretation begins with misunderstanding" (8). For this reason, his hermeneutics devotes itself to the means of avoiding misunderstanding. Schleiermacher attempts not so much to understand understanding as to guide it, to methodize it, and to produce artificially the understanding that does not occur naturally.

Correct interpretation, in Schleiermacher's view, requires a regulated re-creation of the creation to be understood. Since no creation is consciously constructed by rule (for example, we follow but do not think about the rules of syntax in speaking), the re-creator who does reconstruct a text on the basis of its implicit rules can understand it better than its author did. But though rule-governed, the task of reconstruction, as Schleiermacher envisions it, is by no means mechanical or certain of its results. It involves two types of reconstruction. The first is variously called grammatical, historical, or comparative reconstruction. For Schleiermacher, the paradigmatic object of interpretation is a text. And just as a word in the text can be understood only in relation to its context in the sentence, so also the part-whole version of the hermeneutic circle applies to wider contexts: the relation of the text to the author's canon, of the canon to the language, and of the language to other languages and to previous and subsequent history generally. "Posed in this manner, the task is an infinite one, because there is an infinity of the past and the future that we wish to see in the moment of discourse" (10). Since "no inspection of a work ever exhausts its meaning" (14), it follows that every interpretation is finite and therefore provisional; but the interpretation is finite because the meaning of every work is infinite.

Second, in Schleiermacher's view the re-creation of the author's creation requires divinatory reconstruction, which is not merely supplemental to but inseparable from contextual reconstruction. "Using the divinatory [method], one seeks to understand the writer immediately to the point that one transforms oneself into the other" (14). Even if the meaning of a work is infinite because infinitely

contextualizable, the meaning is determinate because it is the creation of a particular author on a particular occasion. The interpreter of a given text cannot be content with understanding what contemporaneous authors typically thought, or even with what this author characteristically wrote; rather, the objective of interpretation is to determine what this author means in this specific text. The understanding of an original and creative author cannot be mediated solely by the typical and characteristic; it also necessitates immediate understanding of the particular as particular, and this intuitive or empathic understanding Schleiermacher calls divination. To understand the other as such, interpreters take their inspiration from the universal traits of human nature that they too possess, but further they must make a sympathetic leap beyond themselves and even beyond the common and shared. In this way individual interpreters become the individual creators whom they interpret.

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Schleiermacher's concern to lay down the guidelines of correct interpretation was preserved and intensified by his biographer and intellectual heir, Wilhelm Dilthey. But Dilthey conceived the task of providing a methodology, a general theory of valid understanding, as prior to that of specifying the methods or rules of interpretation. Complicating Dilthey's methodological task and giving rise to it were two factors: first, an acute sense of the achievements of the Historical School, including not only Ranke and Droysen but even Hegel, and, second, Dilthey's no less acute sense of the achievements of natural science and the success of Kant's attempts to legitimate it. Both factors are at work in Dilthey's contention that hermeneutics

has, beyond its use in the business of interpretation, a second task which is indeed its main one: it is to counteract the constant irruption of romantic whim and sceptical subjectivity into the realm of history by laying the historical foundations of valid interpretation on which all certainty in history rests. Absorbed into the context of the epistemology, logic and methodology of the human studies, the theory of interpretation becomes a vital

link between philosophy and the historical disciplines, an essential part of the foundations of the studies of man. [Selected Writings, 260]

The several "studies of man" that Dilthey attempted to ground by means of his methodology originated during the Enlightenment when "the general system of history was divided up into individual systems—like those of law, religion, or poetry." (205). Insofar as "history" means legal, religious, literary, or other history, it is only one among many human sciences. Yet after Winckelmann, philosophical and empirical historians began "treating history as the source of all mind-constructed facts" (159). Historical development, in this view, belongs intrinsically to all the human sciences, for it is only historically that the human can be understood. Schleiermacher's philological hermeneutics, though limited to no particular kind of text, was yet text-oriented. Dilthey affirms and expands Schleiermacher's insight—that essentially intelligible entities are texts—to include all historical phenomena. Every product of objective mind, every product of culture, including nonverbal records, must and can be understood as a text. As one expression of objective mind, historiography too has its source in history. If there is to be validity in interpreting the great book of history—if one is to resist "romantic whim and sceptical subjectivity"—the very certainty of historical interpretation itself must rest on historical foundations. History is self-certifying; that is, history is a ground of truth.

It seems that for Dilthey, nevertheless, history was not a sufficient ground, because he also suggests that hermeneutics needs to be "absorbed into the context of the epistemology, logic and methodology of the human studies" (260). This absorption necessitates a rational rather than historical grounding; it was to have been accomplished in Dilthey's *Critique of Historical Reason*, but the critique was never completed. This work was intended to show the conditions and limits of historical knowledge, just as Kant's first critique had demonstrated those of natural science. Among Dilthey's

main ambitions was to distinguish the foundations of the human sciences from those of the natural and yet to make them no less solid. Thus, like other neo-Kantians, Dilthey distinguished understanding from explanation, and he based the human sciences on understanding, while attempting to justify understanding epistemologically.

For Kant the main problem in demonstrating the intelligibility of nature occurred in applying the unifying categories to the manifold of experience, which he solved through his transcendental schemata. Because of the absence of lawlike causality in the historical world, however, Dilthey found that Kant's transcendental solution could not be transposed to explain the validity of historical knowledge. And in fact it did not need to be transferred, because historical knowledge possesses a more immediate ground of intelligibility and reliability than natural science. This ground Dilthey discerned in the unity of historical life itself:

Life consists of parts, of experiences which are inwardly related to each other. Every particular experience refers to a self of which it is a part; it is structurally interrelated to other parts. Everything which pertains to mind is interrelated: interconnectedness is, therefore, a category originating from life. We apprehend connectedness through the unity of consciousness which is the condition of all apprehension. However, connectedness clearly does not follow from the fact of a manifold of experiences being presented to a unitary consciousness. Only because life is itself a structural connection of experiences—i.e., experienced relations—is the connectedness of life given. [211]

The historical world exhibits intrinsic connection and relation among experiences instead of displaying the external, causal relation among events that characterizes the natural world. Like all organic life, experiences cannot be decomposed into more elementary units, such as discrete sensations, whose synthesis would then require explanation; rather, historical experience is already coherent. The understanding of it necessitates no imposition of alien unities because experiences are in themselves structurally connected to other experiences, and are therefore intrinsically intelligible. The hermeneutic relation of part and whole inheres not only in the interpretive apprehension of the knowing subject but also in the object known: historical life itself is an organic, intrinsically understandable text.

Whereas Schleiermacher contributed substantially to the general methods of the science of interpretation, and Dilthey to the methodology of the human sciences broadly conceived, Heidegger did not primarily intend to contribute anything further to either level of science. Yet he builds on his predecessors' efforts. "Scientific research." Heidegger writes, "is not the only manner of Being which [Dasein] can have, nor is it the one which lies closest" [Being and Time, 32). "Dilthey's own researches for laying the basis for the human sciences were forced one-sidedly into the field of theory of science" (450), Heidegger acknowledges. His own analysis of the problem of history nevertheless arises "in the process of appropriating the labors of Dilthey" (449) because "the 'logic of the human sciences' was by no means central to [Dilthey]" (450). Rather than this logic, what Heidegger learns from Dilthey is that hermeneutics names not just the methodology of the human sciences but something more fundamental to Dasein than any science. Heidegger's project is not epistemological but ontological, and for him understanding is not only a way of knowing but also of being. Thus he extends the object of hermeneutic understanding beyond individual texts and all other historical entities to an understanding of being.

In Being and Time hermeneutics figures as both the mode of inquiry and the subject matter; and these are necessarily, even circularly, interrelated. The cardinal aim of Being and Time is to reopen the "question of the meaning of Being in general" (61). Simply put, What does it mean to be? Because the answer to this question is a meaning, it is to be discovered in the way all meaning is discovered: by interpretation. Heidegger's ontology does not consist merely in describing phenomena (modes of givenness); additionally,

it is concerned with what has been covered up (preeminently the question of the meaning of being). "Covered-up-ness," Heidegger writes, "is the counter-concept to 'phenomenon'" (60). To disclose what is covered up, description does not suffice. Heidegger's phenomenology is therefore hermeneutic: first because its aim is meaning, and second because this meaning needs to be un-covered. That un-covering is the function of interpretation.

Interpretation operates in the liminal space between the hidden and the open, the concealed and the revealed. Since it cannot begin ex nihilo, it needs a clue; and if hermeneutic ontology is to uncover the meaning of being, then that meaning "must already be available to us in some way" (25). If it were not somehow already available, all ontological interpretation would be impossible and the whole project of *Being and Time* would be futile. If the meaning of being is even vaguely familiar, however, that fact is in itself highly significant, for it implies that "understanding of Being is a definite characteristic of Dasein's being" (32). Dasein is distinct from all other beings in that its own being is an issue for it, which indicates that it has at least a dim intimation of what it means to be. Thus *Being and Time* takes the being of Dasein as the clue to the meaning of being.

To take a being as the clue to being is manifestly not a presuppositionless mode of inquiry; quite the opposite, it is circular. Circular reasoning is open to obvious objections; at the same time, it finds its own kind of rigor in "working out [its] fore-structures in terms of the things themselves" (195), and this is what Heidegger has done. His own inquiry into the being of Dasein is circular, no doubt, but so is Dasein itself: "An entity for which . . . its being is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure" (195). There is thus an exact coincidence between Heidegger's method and its object:

Like any ontological Interpretation whatsoever, this analytic can only, so to speak, "listen in" to some previously disclosed entity as regards its Being. And it will attach itself to Dasein's distinctive and most far-reaching possibilities of disclosure, in order to get information about this entity from these. Phenomenological Interpretation must make it possible for Dasein itself to disclose things primordially; it must, as it were, let Dasein interpret itself. [179]

Dasein—this circular being distinguished by its understanding of being—interprets itself. Such interpretation is not introspective self-interpretation; nor is Heidegger here thinking of human being as an object of the human or natural sciences. Instead he is concerned with elucidating a more primordial kind of interpretation from which all interpretation and science derive. As a mode of Dasein's being, understanding designates a way of being in the world that is colloquially called know-how, knowing the ropes, or being in the know. So conceived, understanding consists not in knowing this or that but in being familiar with an entirety of relations in such a way that within them one can do, make, and know, even without reflection. Against this background of pre-reflective practices in which there is neither subject nor object, all reflective cognition and interpretation takes place.

Dasein, as understanding, "knows" what everything in its world can be used for, its significance and possibility; and the same is true of Dasein itself as a being in the world. "Understanding 'knows' what it is capable of—that is, what its potentiality-for-Being is capable of" (184). Potentiality, possibility, capability belongs to what Dasein not only can be, but already is. The being of Dasein as understanding consists in being able—not just in being able to do such and such but in being able to be. In a sense, Dasein never is, but always is to be. In every present, its being is futural, as it projects in understanding what other things and itself can be. Yet its present is also past, since understanding needs a clue. In other words, Dasein projects its being on the basis of the background practices that are called historical context or tradition. Dasein already (past) understands what it is (present) to be (future).

The coming to be—the unfolding or explication—of what Dasein

can be Heidegger calls interpretation. "In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is to be understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (188-89). We need to remember that Heidegger is not here describing literary, historical, or other kinds of reflexive interpretation, yet what he says has an obvious bearing on them. "Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted. This is a fact that has always been remarked, even if only in the area of derivative ways of understanding and interpretation, such as philological Interpretation" (194). Traditionally the hermeneutic circle has been expressed in spatial terms of part and whole. Heidegger, by contrast, thinks of it temporally, in terms of a circle between the "already" and the "to be." This circularity, moreover, is not a merit or defect peculiar to the interpretive sciences but rather corresponds to the historical being of Dasein from which these sciences and all other modes of understanding derive. The whole that is projected before the parts are understood is a whole historical world, a familiar network of significances, a past world already understood that is continually modified in interpretation. Simply put, life is interpretation. The coming to be of what Dasein can be is its self-interpretation, and this interpretive proliferation of being progresses toward no fullness or finality. It simply continues until Dasein itself ceases.

When Rudolf Bultmann took up Heidegger's analysis of understanding in order to explain the nature of biblical interpretation, the result was a theory that stressed the existential appropriation of the meaning of scripture. To understand the kerygma is to discover a possibility for changing one's life, for altering what one is. Understanding the Word of God means understanding it as a call to salvation, that is, as an invitation to authentic existence; and under-

standing a call in this way involves not just knowing what the Word means but heeding it, whether by acceptance or rejection. The New Testament is itself one existential appropriation of the kerygma, specifically that of the early Christians; but it is neither the only nor the definitive one. Rather than the Word of God itself, scripture is an initial interpretation of the Word, one expressed in a mythic language appropriate to its initial audience. Because mythic explications of the saving Word are now largely incredible, understanding the kerygma today requires a demythologization. Far from debunking the kerygma or exposing its pretenses, demythologization allows the call to be heard and heeded.

Like the early Christians, however, we can interpret and appropriate the Word of God because we pre-understand it; we already know what it would mean to be saved, already recognize the poverty of our existence and believe in the possibility of enriching it. This belief, common to all people though more intense in some, is the precondition of interpretive understanding. Suppressing pre-understanding therefore does not promote correct interpretation but simply renders the text nonsensical and unintelligible. Denying the prior claim of the Word cannot be the condition of rightly understanding it. The interpreter's pre-understanding needs rather to be brought into play, tested, and examined. Interpreters need to allow their very being to be called into question in the same process by which they question the text. For Bultmann it is not finally paradoxical to say that the most subjective interpretation, the one that hits closest to home, is always the most objective.

Precisely this integration of subjectivity and objectivity caused Emilio Betti to charge that Bultmann espouses what is ultimately a subjectivist hermeneutics: it lacks any means for certifying the correctness of interpretation, and in fact encourages the worst kind of sheer projection. Much in the line of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Betti writes that "it is our duty as guardians and practitioners of the study of history to protect... objectivity and to provide evidence of

the epistemological conditions of its possibility" ("Hermeneutics," 73). Betti acknowledges the principle of the "actuality of understanding," namely that in order to understand a past event one must assimilate it "into one's intellectual horizon within the framework of one's own experiences" (62). But Bultmann's mistake, Betti argues, is to neglect another, no less fundamental principle: the autonomy of the object. The object of interpretation is the objectification of a mind not our own; the aim of interpretation is to understand what someone else did or thought or wrote, not what we did. The object of interpretation must therefore be understood immanently, according to its own logic, not ours. The danger of Bultmann's approach lies in the potential for "deriving only what is meaningful or reasonable to oneself and of missing what is different and specific in the Other or, as the case may be, bracketing it as a presumed myth" (73). For Betti, by contrast, the other's alienness to the interpreter occasions interpretation in the first place; and just as this alterity necessitates objectivity in interpretation, so it makes objectivity possible. The possibility of objective interpretation should be preserved by sharply separating two questions that Bultmann confused: the "question concerning the meaning of an historical phenomenon" and the "completely different question . . . concerning its present Bedeutsamkeit (significance) and relevance in changing historical epochs" (68).1 Both kinds of inquiry are necessary. Perhaps the question of significance is even more important; but answering it, in Betti's view, first requires objectively determining the meaning in itself.

Betti similarly criticizes Hans-Georg Gadamer, who (like Bultmann) builds on the insights of Heidegger, and not just the early Heidegger of *Being and Time* but also the later Heidegger, after his turn to language. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer too seeks to dis-

close the grounds of the possibility of true interpretation; but from his point of view Betti's position rather than Bultmann's appears subjectivist—not despite Betti's objectivism, but because of it. From Gadamer's perspective, objectivism and subjectivism amount to much the same thing. Governing itself by rule, objectivity tries methodically to eliminate bias, prejudice, and all the distortions that go by the name of subjectivity. This Cartesian endeavor assumes that a methodically purified consciousness guarantees certainty. On one level, objectivity consists in humble self-effacement, but on another, it is marked by a distinct arrogance insofar as it makes individual self-consciousness the locus and arbiter of truth. Though it is by definition not subjective, then, objectivity as an ideal derives from a highly subjectivist epistemology.

This epistemology can explain how objective interpretation is possible but not why it is ever necessary. Why is it ever more than a matter of convenience or curiosity to understand another's mind if one's own is the sufficient condition of truth? If we acknowledge the subversion of the authority of reflexive consciousness accomplished by Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, or if, like Gadamer, we agree with Heidegger than consciousness always is more than it knows, then this more that it is cannot be understood by trusting solely to the self-governance of consciousness. In Gadamer's view, interpretation of tradition is capable, where introspection is not, of understanding the truth that exceeds self-consciousness—exceeds it because, however conscientious, consciousness belongs to historical tradition. Consciousness cannot, by pulling on the bootstraps of method, extricate itself from the very history of which it is a part. If there is indeed a truth that exceeds what can be methodologically certified, its disclosure invariably requires an interpretation of tradition from within tradition, which interpretation (being circular) cannot be called objective, although it is not necessarily subjective either.

Instead of seeing interpretation as an objective or subjective act, Gadamer thinks of it as playing a game. In playing, we do not stand

^{1.} This Fregean distinction plays an important role in the work of E. D. Hirsch as well.

over against the game; we participate in it. A player who does not get fully involved in the game is called a spoilsport, because toying with or playing at a game spoils it. By contrast, taking a game seriously entails belonging to it, and this belonging in turn precludes treating the game as an object. Moreover, in the same process of playing that prevents objectifying the game, players lose their status as subjects. As part of the game, participants play parts that are not merely themselves insofar as they have been assigned roles to perform. Playing consists in a performance of what is no object, by what is no subject. And if interpreting is like playing, as Gadamer argues, then it always involves something like performing a drama, for the player who takes the play seriously interprets it from within, by belonging to and playing a part in it.

The larger drama in which we cannot choose not to play is history. Human being exists historically; therefore, interpreting historical tradition from within requires no prior specification of rules because such interpretation cannot be avoided, and it is in fact the condition of methodologism itself. To assert the contrary—to say that at some point interpretation of tradition is unnecessary—is to assert that at some point consciousness is nonhistorical and self-grounding. But if this Cartesian thesis is mistaken, it follows that all interpretation of tradition (as of everything else) occurs within tradition. Negatively put, there is no presuppositionless, nontraditional interpretation. Rather, understanding always begins within and returns to an already given horizon of understanding.

The hermeneutical circle is distinct from linear induction because not only do the parts lead to an understanding of the whole but there must also be an understanding of the whole prior to any examination of the parts. This prior understanding of the whole Gadamer calls a prejudice, a judgment that precedes inquiry. The necessity of such pre-judgment indicates that understanding is always possible only insofar as understanding has already begun. To understand tradition from within tradition means to be prejudiced. But if preju-

dice is the condition of interpretation and true interpretation is nevertheless possible, then though not all prejudices are true, they are not all ipso facto false either. The function of conscientious interpretation is not to eradicate all prejudices but rather to sort out the true ones from the false; and this discrimination cannot be performed at the outset, by an act of will, but only in the very process of projection and ad hoc revision that is interpretation itself.

A true interpretation, in Gadamer's opinion, is one that has performed this discrimination of false from true prejudices, the latter being those confirmed by the text. True interpretation nevertheless remains within the horizon of prejudice that is the interpreter's world. That world horizon is not fixed and immutable, however, like a circle in which the interpreter is forever circumscribed: the horizon of understanding, no less than the visual horizon, can change. Gadamer images the process by which the interpreter's horizon is broadened as a dialectical fusion of horizons—a dialogue in which the text puts questions to the interpreter even as the interpreter puts questions to the text. This dialogue is always possible because both the author of the text and the interpreter of it speak a language, whether or not they speak the same one. For the interpreter as well as the author, to understand is to find a language to express that understanding. Interpreting, like translation, consists in finding, within the resources of the interpreter's language, a common language that can say both what the text means and what the interpreter understands of it. As the fusion of languages, interpretation is the process by which one's own horizon of language is fused with that of another and thereby expanded. In dialogue, a common language is formed that makes understanding possible. For this reason, language itself cannot be objectified. We can and do understand our language, of course, but we understand what is said and not the language per se. Language is always presupposed by objectification; it cannot be made an object precisely because it is itself the condition of objectification. Beyond the sphere of objectivity and

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including it, Gadamer writes, "Being that can be understood is language" (*Truth and Method*, 474). The scope of hermeneutic understanding is coextensive with that of being.

Gadamer's argument for the universality of hermeneutics implies that there can be no critique of tradition that is not itself traditional, no falsification of another's opinion that does not presuppose a common language in which the dispute is carried out. All thought depends on a dialogically reached consensus that cannot be called into question as a whole since it is only against this background that questions make sense. But Gadamer is tempted to equate tradition, this common ground, with truth. To avoid such a tacit legitimation of the status quo Jürgen Habermas stresses an element of dialogue that Gadamer slights: its critical, emancipating interest. Gadamer assumes, according to Habermas, that every apparent dialogue is real, ignoring the possibility that the participants may be "talking past each other" without realizing it. Such pseudo-communication will result in an illusory consensus, and no further dialogue will of itself be able to dispel that illusion. Moreover, a consensus that has apparently been reached in free dialogue may actually have been enforced by implicit forms of coercion and domination that are quite unknown to the speakers. This coercion will be least recognizable, in fact, when the forms of domination are woven into the very language that to all appearances unites the parties in unfettered debate. Insofar as language itself is a form of sedimented violence, systematically distorted communication cannot be recognized and rectified while participating in it. Rather, only a nonparticipating, external observer can provide correct diagnosis and appropriate therapy.

Habermas suggests the psychoanalyst on the individual level and the critic of ideology on the societal level as examples of observers who operate at the limit of hermeneutic universality, where dialogic understanding does not suffice. "The 'what,' the meaning-content of systematically distorted expressions, can only be 'understood' when it is possible to answer, at the same time, the 'why' questions, i.e., to

'explain' the emergence of the symptomatic scene by reference to the initial conditions of the systematic distortion itself" ("Hermeneutic Claim," 194). Extrapolating the borderline, hermeneutic-explanatory task of the psychoanalyst to the "hidden pathology of societal systems" involves the assumption that "every consensus, as the outcome of an understanding of meaning, is, in principle, suspect of having been enforced through pseudo-communication" (205). The critique of ideology involves a principled suspicion of tradition such as that given voice by the Enlightenment, a recognition that not every actual consensus is the locus of truth. For this reason, each actual consensus must be evaluated in the light of a regulative ideal "according to which truth would only be guaranteed by that kind of consensus which is achieved under the idealized conditions of unlimited communication free from domination and could be maintained over time" (205). This regulative ideal is the methodological correlative of the emancipatory interest implicit in all dialogue, a utopian impulse not just to understand reality but to change it for the better.

Whereas Gadamer, believing that language cannot finally be objectified, has little interest in the specifics of modern linguistics or philosophy of language, Habermas does not hesitate to borrow from the insights of Peircean semiotics and the linguistics of Chomsky and Piaget. Precisely insofar as any language can itself be a mode of repression, merely understanding, speaking, and listening to it cannot lead to emancipation. Instead, the analyst also needs to be able to explain the language's systematic functioning; and it is at this point, where understanding alone falls short, that the objectification performed by linguistics becomes necessary.

Structural linguistics in particular has come to be seen not merely as a supplement or alternative to hermeneutics but as its antithesis; and although this is not the place to elaborate on the antihermeneutic impetus of the 1960s and 1970s, it must at least be mentioned in even so brief a survey as this. "Linguistics is not hermeneutic,"