Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Detours and Distanciations: A Study of the Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur

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PAUL RICOEUR’S HERMENEUTIC DETOURS AND DISTANCIATIONS: 
A STUDY OF THE HERMENEUTICS OF 
HANS-GEORG GADAMER AND PAUL RICOEUR

a dissertation

by

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Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur have each proposed remarkably similar hermeneutic approaches to the interpretation of texts. They both approach hermeneutics starting from particular insights in Husserl's and Heidegger's respective phenomenologies. They both are wary of the claims of the need for objectivity to provide adequate interpretations of texts. They both turn to Plato and Aristotle to provide models and insights for the interpretation of texts. Gadamer and Ricoeur both devote considerable attention to the critique of prior significant figures in hermeneutics. They both utilize and exploit the difference between the structures and elements of a language and the actual use and expressions made in that language for the purpose of explaining how meaning is created.

For all their similarities, there are differences between the hermeneutic approaches and theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur. One significant difference between the two is the attitude that each thinker takes toward tradition or dogma. Gadamer approaches prior interpretive contexts, i.e., tradition, in a manner that privileges their capacity to provide viewpoints to adequately and effectively interpret texts. Ricoeur, on the other hand, eyes tradition more critically. His research into many of the human sciences and their methodological and philosophical foundations leads to a greater awareness and acceptance of the possible deceptive and misleading capacities of tradition.

This difference in attitude toward tradition expresses itself clearly in another difference between the two thinkers. Gadamer, unlike Ricoeur, is unwilling to accept the inclusion of methodologies and insights of the human sciences within the purview of hermeneutics. Gadamer argues that such an inclusion would be anathema to the hermeneutic and philosophical project. Ricoeur, on the other hand, argues that the inclusion of these insights leads to a broadening of hermeneutic resources and to the continued relevance of hermeneutics to the philosophical project.
The inclusion of the insights of the human sciences within hermeneutics also points to another significant difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur. Ricoeur argues that the determination of the meaning of a text must always be achieved through a detour to a viewpoint that lies outside the text. There must be some distance between the text and interpreter if the interpreter is to provide an adequate interpretation. Ricoeur recognizes that this demand would seem to place him in the camp of those hermeneutists who demand objectivity for acceptable interpretation. Ricoeur provides a convincing defense against this charge. Gadamer, on the other hand, argues that any move outside of that of the text serves to impose an interpretation upon it that is not sensitive or authentic to it. For Gadamer, recourse to an interpretive viewpoint outside of the text is merely a capitulation to the methodologies of control and domination of positivism and scientism.

In this dissertation I explore the similarities and differences among the theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur. I explore the similarities and differences that some commentators of Gadamer and Ricoeur have found. I provide a detailed examination of Gadamer's pivotal work Truth and Method. I consider Gadamer's assessments of prior hermeneutical figures, like Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and Gadamer's proposals for an alternative approach to hermeneutical interpretation. I also examine two of Ricoeur's significant works: The Conflict of Interpretations and Time and Narrative. In a short, but dense, article Ricoeur speaks directly to what he perceives to be the difference between his work and that of Gadamer and Habermas. Through the analysis of these three works, I hope to demonstrate how Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory is both similar to and different from Gadamer's. I argue that Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides resources to address some of the weaknesses present in Gadamer's thought, particularly Gadamer's assessment of the reliability of tradition for the interpretation of texts.
Paul Ricoeur’s Hermeneutic Detours and Distanciations:
A Study of the Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur

Carlos Bohorquez
In memory of Julio Cesar Bohorquez Rojas, MD
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Introduction

“Through definition, a word becomes a term: rigid, predictable, and invulnerable to the twists and turns that a word receives both in dialogue and in the history of language in general. The terminal character of terminology is appropriate to meaning that has been finally determined and about which discussion has stopped. In this sense, definition is the foundation and fruition of methodic knowledge.”¹

A text lends itself to myriad interpretations—some of them acceptable, others less so. There are interpretations of a text that hew so slavishly to the original that the interpretation is of little additional value to the understanding of the original. There are interpretations that deviate so far from the original that one doubts the integrity between original and interpretation, i.e., one thinks the interpretation is not an acceptable one. The interpreter of a text—whether the text be an actual piece of literature, a painting, a piece of music, a social institution, or the expression of historical or social forces—finds herself grappling between these two extremes of interpretation—or non-interpretation, depending on how one views the connection between the original and the proposed interpretation.

The composition of an interpretation does not occur within a vacuum; neither does the acceptance of that interpretation by its audience. Among the concerns that both the interpreter and audience must address is objectivity. Often, both interpreter and audience judge the acceptability of an interpretation by the degree to which the interpreter inserts her own ideas within the interpretation of a text. The concern to let the work speak for itself is one of the foremost challenges in the mind of the interpreter. An interpretation that depends too much on a viewpoint foreign to the text is often judged unfair or insensitive to the original. The lack of
sensitivity is a criterion that is often appealed to by the audience of interpretations to reject an interpretation. The interpreter’s sensitivity toward the text is often determined by the ability of that interpretation to provide insight to the text without adding unnecessary, extraneous, or foreign views or ideas to the text. Sensitivity toward the text often demands a viewpoint toward the text that is aware of the context within which the text was composed. This context often incorporates awareness of genre, an author’s oeuvre and biography, and cultural and societal history.

The demand for objectivity and sensitivity to the text is often addressed by recourse to methodologies that exclude the possibility of the inclusion of viewpoints or opinions not present within the text. These methodologies depend upon an insistence that the meaning of a text can be found. The difference among methodologies generally depends upon the establishment of the source or origin of that meaning by those respective methodologies. Several options for those sources are available. What is common among these myriad options is the intersection of the identification of these sources with the awareness of those aspects that create a text’s context: the genre within which a text lies, the relation of a particular text within the oeuvre of an author, the intent of that author, the cultural, societal and historical influences upon the author, etc. The multitude of methodologies for the determination of a text’s meaning often turn to the determination or discovery of a configuration of rules, regulations, or structures that serve to shape the expression of meaning. Some methodologies explain the creation and expression of meaning to be completely present within the articulation of words or symbols within that configuration of rules. Other methodologies argue that meaning is created outside that configuration, but its expression requires navigation within that configuration. Of course, there
are still other avenues of interpretation that argue that it is the very configuration itself that
obstructs the creation, expression and communication of meaning.

The methodologies for the determination of the meaning of a text, i.e., methodologies of
interpretation, privilege objectivity as a means by which to determine meaning. These
methodologies view the insertion of the interpreter’s viewpoint within interpretation as anathema
to the goal of understanding a text. Each methodology espouses different approaches to the
achievement of objectivity, but they all share in common the attitude that objectivity must be
achieved if the meaning of the text is to be uncovered.

Of course, the establishment of the origin of the meaning of the text will influence the
manner by which the interpreter will uncover that meaning. The interpreter working within a
particular methodology that identifies the origin of meaning within the genre that a particular
cultural expression shares will concentrate on finding the relations among this particular work
and those similar to it. The interpreter will consider both the similarities and differences between
the work and others like it. She will consider the novelty and resemblance of the present work to
other works. Of course, these are only a few of the considerations that the interpreter will
consider within such an approach to interpretation.

The interpreter working within a methodology that identifies the origin of meaning with
the author may consider similar factors in the determination of the meaning of a work, but that
interpreter will have to consider other factors as well. Most frequently, such interpretations take
into consideration the biography of the author to determine the intent of the author. Such
methods to interpretation privilege the author, because those methods argue that any other source
or origin for meaning would add unnecessary, irrelevant, or misleading considerations in the
determination of the meaning of a text. Put succinctly, if one wants to know what a text means, who else but the author would one ask to provide that meaning.

And yet, it is abundantly clear and obvious that the meaning of a text is frequently least determined by recourse to the intent of the author. The author himself, in the process of the creation of the work, does not necessarily know what his intent was. It is only with some distance from the text, usually achieved through time, that the author comes to appreciate his intention. Even with time, frequently, the author is at a loss as to the meaning of his work. If the interpreter is to depend upon the author to understand the work, such a phenomenon marks a serious shortcoming to the privileging of the author and her intent.

But the meaning of the text can be determined, if the interpreter overcomes the prejudice for the exclusivity of meaning to be found in the author’s intent. If the interpreter is willing to accept the possibility that she may understand the author better than he understands himself, the determination of meaning is still achievable. It is clear that such a viewpoint does not necessarily obviate the intent of the author; it merely recognizes that the author does not know her intent. And it is the goal of the interpreter to determine that intent through various methodologies. Such methodologies can take the form of those previously mentioned. The interpreter can look to genres, oeuvres, and social, cultural and historical phenomena to understand the author better than he understands himself. Such discussions and research can consider those phenomena contemporaneous with the author, but more often than not, the consideration of prior and subsequent phenomena serve to clarify the meaning of the text more effectively.

The consideration of phenomena about which the author could not have been aware in order to determine the meaning of a text leads very quickly to the view that the intent of the
author is not foremost in the determination of meaning. In fact, the view that it is possible to understand the author better than he understood himself can very easily lead to the view that the intent of the author covers over the true meaning of the text. In other words, if one hopes to truly understand the text, the interpreter must take a viewpoint outside the text and outside the view of the author in order to accurately determine the meaning of the text. The methodologies for achieving such a viewpoint can be the very ones that assume the origin of meaning to be found in the intent of the author, but the methodologies for finding meaning apart from the author’s intent are as varied as the sciences (both natural and human) and their subdivisions. Such an approach to interpretation opens up texts to many more possible meanings. Most importantly, such an approach to texts (particularly social institutions) allows the interpreter to uncover meanings of which the author was not even aware. Such an approach to interpretation can even open up the text to the discovery of meanings with which the author would disagree. The interpretive stance that denies the primacy of the author’s intent, because of the relative freedom that it provides the interpreter to find meaning in the text, brings us to the possibility that the interpreter may approach the text and arrive at an interpretation that is not sensitive to the text.

At this point, it is clear that such an approach to interpretation, for all its interpretive power and freedom, leads us to a difficult problem. What criteria are we to use to determine whether an interpretation is acceptable? We have undermined the authority of the author to determine the meaning of a text. Following the same train of thought, it is clear that the audience is not the final arbiter of the meaning of a text either. We cannot look to the text itself; it is the product of the possibly deceptive and camouflaging conditions of its creation.

Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur have each proposed remarkably similar hermeneutic approaches to the interpretation of texts. They both approach hermeneutics starting
from particular insights in Husserl’s and Heidegger’s respective phenomenologies. They both are wary of the claims of the need for objectivity to provide adequate interpretations of texts. They both turn to Plato and Aristotle to provide models and insights for the interpretation of texts. They both devote considerable attention to the critique of prior significant figures in hermeneutics. They both utilize and exploit the difference between the structures and elements of a language and the actual use and expressions made in that language for the purpose of explaining how meaning is created.

For all their similarities, there are differences between the hermeneutic approaches and theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur. One significant difference between the two is the attitude that each thinker takes toward tradition or dogma. Gadamer approaches prior interpretive contexts, i.e., tradition, in a manner that privileges their capacity to provide viewpoints to adequately and effectively interpret texts. Ricoeur, on the other hand, eyes tradition more critically. His research into many of the human sciences and their methodological and philosophical foundations leads to a greater awareness and acceptance of the possible deceptive and misleading capacities of tradition.

This difference in attitude towards tradition expresses itself clearly in another difference between the two thinkers. Gadamer, unlike Ricoeur, is unwilling to accept the inclusion of methodologies and insights of the human sciences within the purview of hermeneutics. Gadamer argues that such an inclusion would be anathema to the hermeneutic and philosophical project. Ricoeur, on the other hand, argues that the inclusion of these insights leads to a broadening of hermeneutic resources and to the continued relevance of hermeneutics to the philosophical project.
The inclusion of the insights of the human sciences within hermeneutics also points to another significant difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur. Ricoeur argues that the determination of the meaning of a text must always be achieved through a detour to a viewpoint that lies outside the text. There must be some distance between the text and interpreter if the interpreter is to provide an adequate interpretation. Ricoeur recognizes that this demand would seem to place him in the camp of those hermeneutists who demand objectivity for acceptable interpretation. Ricoeur provides a convincing defense against this charge. Gadamer, on the other hand, argues that any move outside of that of the text serves to impose an interpretation upon it that is not sensitive or authentic to it. For Gadamer, recourse to an interpretive viewpoint outside of the text is merely a capitulation to the methodologies of control and domination of positivism and scientism.

The following dissertation is divided into four chapters, not including the conclusion, in which I explore the similarities and differences among the theories of Gadamer and Ricoeur. In Chapter 1, I explore to a greater the degree the similarities and differences that some commentators of Gadamer and Ricoeur have found. I consider Aylesworth’s and Lawlor’s explorations of the differences and similarities that they find, respectively, between Gadamer and Ricoeur. Chapters 2 and 3 are a detailed examination of Gadamer’s pivotal work *Truth and Method*. In chapter 2, I consider Gadamer’s assessments of prior hermeneutical figures, like Schleiermacher and Dilthey. In chapter 3, I consider Gadamer’s proposals for an alternative approach to hermeneutical interpretation. In chapter 4, I turn to two of Ricoeur’s significant works: *The Conflict of Interpretations* and *Time and Narrative*. I also consider a short, but dense, article in which Ricoeur speaks directly to what he perceives to be the difference between his work and that of Gadamer and Habermas. Through the analysis of these three works, I hope
to demonstrate how Ricoeur’s hermeneutical theory is both similar to and different from
Gadamer’s. I hope to explain how Ricoeur’s hermeneutics provides resources to address some
of the weaknesses present in Gadamer’s thought, particularly Gadamer’s assessment of the
reliability of tradition for the interpretation of texts.
Chapter 1

The Debate

“It is widely recognized that the Gadamer-Habermas debate has had a major influence on the thought of Paul Ricoeur.”¹ Piercey points out that, though this is the case, not many commentators on Ricoeur’s work devote much attention to how his thinking developed from this debate and, most importantly, how his thought is a critique of these two thinkers. “The Gadamer-Habermas debate, I claim, teaches Ricoeur what a philosophical hermeneutics ought to do,”² says Piercey. Ricoeur himself has pointed out that his work is an attempt “to take a kind of equal distance to Gadamer and Habermas.”³

Just how much distance Ricoeur placed between himself and Gadamer and Habermas has been a central topic of debate among commentators on Ricoeur. Aylesworth and Lawlor, among many, debate the difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur. In two short essays, Aylesworth and Lawlor describe and analyze the differences and similarities between the two hermeneutists.

Aylesworth is of the opinion that there exists a significant difference between the two in their stances toward the text. He says, “Where Gadamer develops a dialogical model of interpretation, in which the text is a ‘thou’ with whom we are engaged in conversation, Ricoeur insists upon the reflective distance of the text as a linguistic object.”⁴ The import of this difference, according to Aylesworth, is a disagreement about the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and the human sciences. He says,

For Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics is more fundamental than the methods of the Geisteswissenschaften, and provides a corrective for the methodological alienation of their subject matter. Ricoeur, on the other hand, believes that philosophical hermeneutics must serve an epistemological function vis-à-vis the
human sciences, and must incorporate their critical practices into its own discourse.⁵

Lawlor, on the other hand, proposes that there is a significant similarity between Ricoeur and Gadamer. Lawlor states, “Their unity lies in the attempt to recover, from the Greeks and Hegel, the dialectical nature of understanding.”⁶ Lawlor explains that both Ricoeur and Gadamer see the purpose, or telos, of any interpretation, i.e., of any attempt at understanding, to be the making of something present. For both hermeneutists, according to Lawlor, the interplay between sameness and difference in this presentation, through language, of something is foundational. The dynamic interplay between differentiation and identity in interpreting and understanding the world, which exists in both thinkers’ theories, shows, according to Lawlor, that both thinkers are “…oppose[d to] the type of teleology in which a pre-existing, static meaning encloses the process of understanding from the outside. This type of understanding is not found in either Ricoeur or Gadamer. [My italics.]”⁷

Aylesworth sees the difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur to be partially found in the differing uses to which each thinker puts Heidegger’s insights about Dasein. Aylesworth explains, “…Gadamer emphasizes the role of the past in constituting any present or future understanding. Any understanding whatsoever, he argues, is conditioned on the affections, concepts, and practices of a cultural heritage.”⁸ In other words, for Gadamer, according to Aylesworth, the past, i.e., tradition, plays a significant role in Dasein’s understanding of itself and its world.

Aylesworth also remarks that Gadamer rejects Heidegger’s characterization of Plato as the beginning of the forgetting of Being by the philosophical tradition. This is significant, because it establishes Gadamer’s view that “…a text is best read [i.e., understood.] as a response
to a question, so that the key to interpretation is an understanding of the question that the text presupposes.”

According to Aylesworth, Gadamer sees the Platonic dialogue as an exemplar of how to allow the truth of the subject matter to be understood, rather than the imposition by one interlocutor of his view upon another. By privileging the Platonic dialogue, says Aylesworth, we see how Gadamer views hermeneutics as the attempt to understand the subject matter at hand, rather than an attempt to find the source or origin of the author’s mindset when she wrote her text.

Aylesworth proposes that Gadamer’s view of the text as a response to a question places the interpreter of a text, in particular texts from the past, in a contemporaneous position to it. In other words, when a text speaks to us—and it can only do this when the interpreter places herself at risk, i.e., she allows the text to challenge her viewpoint—then that text is “…ontologically the same as we ourselves…. [S]peaking [is] a moment of belonging (Zugehoerigkeit), in which we are already claimed and constituted by/as a tradition, a tradition that is never, as such, objectifiable.”

The belonging that exists between a text and its interpreter, when and if she allows the text to speak to her, prevents the objectification of the text and of the interpreter. In other words, when a text speaks, the interpreter cannot take an objective view outside of the text from which to interpret it. Aylesworth explains of Gadamer’s view, “As something that speaks, [the text] is inalienable from its tradition and its concomitant historicality. The dialogical model, then, does not alienate the affinity of belonging between the text and the reader, but preserves it from any objectifying moment.”

Aylesworth explains that Ricoeur’s philosophical foundation can be found in that latter’s desire “…to continue the epistemological project of hermeneutics after Dilthey.” This continuation provokes a “…moment of textual objectification…. Aylesworth explains that
this continuation of the epistemological project of hermeneutics leads to a disagreement between Ricoeur and Heidegger and Gadamer as to the final character of hermeneutics. Ricoeur, according to Aylesworth, sees a move away from the epistemological project as “…giving philosophical hermeneutics over to…a self-contained problematic, from which there is no way back to the legitimate methodological concerns of the human sciences.”¹⁴ More problematically, Ricoeur thinks the abandonment of the epistemological project creates “[a]n exclusively ontological hermeneutics [that] divorces philosophy from its integrative function and leaves the humanistic disciplines without a general hermeneutics to mediate their differences. Without such mediation, the human sciences are left to an irresolvable ‘conflict of interpretations.’”¹⁵ In other words, if hermeneutics, i.e., philosophy, is to remain relevant to the search for truth, it must be able to adjudicate and mediate among the truth claims of the human sciences, and in order to do that, hermeneutics, i.e., philosophy, must take their claims to truth seriously. Philosophy must allow for a moment of distance, i.e., objectification, in the search for truth. Ricoeur thinks that philosophy can introduce this moment of distance by considering or incorporating certain insights and aspects of narrative practice, explains Aylesworth.

Aylesworth adds that Ricoeur’s call for the continuation of the epistemological project of hermeneutics, though it places Ricoeur in agreement with Dilthey, does not suggest total agreement with Dilthey. According to Aylesworth, Ricoeur disagrees with Dilthey’s insistence upon a separation between the interpretive methodologies of the human sciences and the explanatory methods of the natural sciences. Aylesworth says, “[Ricoeur] suggests that Dilthey’s injunction against importing the methods of natural science into the humanistic disciplines can be observed without sacrificing the rigor of scientific explanation, as long as hermeneutics incorporates the methods of semiotics and structuralist linguistics.”¹⁶ The key
insight, according to Aylesworth, of Ricoeur’s thought, in relation to this question, is to see that understanding is achieved through discourse. The insights of modern linguistics provide a new characterization of explanation, i.e., the methods of the natural sciences, that is founded in language. These insights show that there can be a dialectical relation between the methods of the natural and human sciences.

Aylesworth clarifies that for Ricoeur there must be an explanatory moment, i.e., a moment of distance, within every interpretation; the presence of an explanation is not just a possibility for the human sciences. But this explanation must be part of an interpretation that makes reference to the human and his experience of the world. Aylesworth explains, “The text is a moment of distanciation within a more general narrative model, a model that includes the subject as narrator/reader and which terminates in a re-constituted life-world that offers the subject new possibilities for being.”\(^\text{17}\) But these new possibilities are only possible so long as the text allows for a critical distance from the subject and her experience of the world. This critical distance is furnished by the text itself and structural analysis. Aylesworth explains that for Ricoeur, “These…techniques [are] for overcoming the naïveté of a first reading, or for exposing the illusion of false consciousness. Without such methods, he believes that hermeneutics would be given over to the self-validation of unconscious motives and concealed interests.”\(^\text{18}\)

Aylesworth quickly explains that Gadamer’s hermeneutics rejects outright the inclusion of a critical moment within hermeneutical understanding as a “…capitulation to the unbridled calculative interest that prevails in the technological age.”\(^\text{19}\) Gadamer does not agree with Ricoeur, according to Aylesworth, that hermeneutics can be used to overcome and shatter false consciousness. In fact, Aylesworth clarifies, Gadamer maintains that the experience that we have of the world, i.e., our understanding of it, is neither complete acceptance of conventionality
nor characterized by an absolute snow job on the part of false consciousness. Rather, our experience of the world—tradition—is mostly sure about its legitimacy because it has been able to overcome the critiques and contradictions that history has thrown at it. This means, according to Aylesworth, that

…the truth about ourselves is not revealed by a critical objectification of the text, with all its techniques of disillusionment and demystification. For Gadamer, the truth about ourselves is not a matter of reflective knowledge, and the achievement of self-understanding is not the constitution of a subject-ego. Indeed, Ricoeur’s reflective tradition is implicated in the alienation and bureaucratization of life which hermeneutics is to oppose.

Aylesworth elucidates Gadamer’s opposition to a hermeneutics that might include a critical moment. Aylesworth says, “…Gadamer believes that the human sciences, insofar as they comprise a body of methods and techniques, are not distinguishable from technology and its totalizing agenda.” Gadamer proposes that hermeneutics must provide a way to view experience such that it “…does not terminate in a moment of reflective knowledge a posteriori, nor is it ruled by a reflective concept a priori, but remains open to further experience.”

Aylesworth reminds us that for Ricoeur critical methodologies are necessary if the illusions of subjectivity are to be overcome. Aylesworth explains, “[T]he critique of subjectivity is possible only via the objectivity of the text. While Ricoeur agrees with Gadamer that text and reader belong together unreflectively, he insists that hermeneutics must overcome ‘mere belonging’ through reflective distanciation.”

Aylesworth sees the different views of the need for distance in each thinker’s theory to stem from a difference in the foundation of experience and meaning. For Ricoeur, says
Aylesworth, experience is founded upon ‘lived experience,’ Erlebnis. Aylesworth explains, “For Ricoeur, ‘lived experience’ pertains to a pre-linguistic noetic plane…. This would include the unreflected heritage of customs, mores, practices, affections, etc., in relation to which Ricoeur believes linguistic meaning to be derivative.”

On the other hand, Gadamer understands experience, and thereby meaning, differently. Gadamer sees experience in terms of Erfahrung, which has a moral relation to an other. Aylesworth explains, “[F]or Gadamer, experience is always already ‘linguistic,’ and does not constitute a substratum that is only brought to language reflectively and secondarily: the relation of belonging to a cultural heritage is itself thoroughly linguistic, and does not require a secondary act for its articulation.”

In other words, a significant difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur is their views about how meaning is grounded or achieved. Gadamer sees meaning to be already present in the tradition or viewpoint from which or within which you already find yourself; while for Ricoeur, meaning is achieved through a reflection upon what is already present.

Aylesworth adds, though, that this difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur seems to stem from an even more basic disagreement about language and its role in the creation of meaning. Aylesworth explains that, for Ricoeur, dialogue occurs when two individuals speak to each other by making ostensive reference to something. In other words, the point of dialogue is to pick something out and explain it to another person. But these acts of dialogue are founded upon a prior capacity of discourse. Discourse is the foundational occurrence where one person is saying something about something else to someone else. In order for meaning to be achieved from this event, that meaning must have resiliency. Aylesworth clarifies, “[D]iscourse is an event in time whose meaning must endure. The fleeting event itself is not understood: only what surpasses it is intelligible and can be historically handed down.”

Gadamer disagrees with such
a characterization of language, according to Aylesworth. For Gadamer, language is precisely where meaning occurs. For Gadamer, says Aylesworth, “The word is a linguistic totality, from whose multiplicity all discursive speech is derived. It ‘emanates’ through works, traditions and historical epochs.” In other words, the difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur seems to be based on the ability of language to directly mean something. Ricoeur proposes that meaning must be mediated, while Gadamer sees it being achieved directly through language.

Aylesworth explains that Ricoeur bases the different understanding of the necessary mediation of meaning and the concomitant consequences for hermeneutics upon Aristotle’s ideas of poiesis. Aylesworth claims that Ricoeur considers poiesis to be “…a model of understanding that allows for the reflective constitution of the subject while accommodating the critical insights [against the Cartesian reflective tradition of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche.]” Aylesworth explains that, by looking to Aristotle, Ricoeur is able to mediate between the claims of explanation and understanding. Ricoeur uses Aristotle’s ideas of poiesis and mimesis to explain how it is possible for narrative to take distance from one’s viewpoint while still sharing and being part of it and how this is central to the creation of meaning.

Aylesworth explains that narrative, for Ricoeur, is a unit of discourse that “…refers to a speaker and a world. However, given the larger scale of the narrative and its distanciation, qua text, of meaning from event, its ‘speaker’ is an idealized and imaginary subject rather than an existential individual.” In other words, there is a distance between the event of discourse and its speaker. But there is also distance from the event of discourse and its referent. Aylesworth points out that, for Ricoeur, “…the world of the narrative is not the world of immediate perception, but a world of imaginative possibilities that the reader understands as possibilities for being.”
Narrative achieves the creation of meaning through ‘emplotment.’ Emplotment describes the structures and rules by which the characters and events of a narrative are configured into a whole that is understandable to an audience. The means, says Aylesworth, that “[t]he plot must have a beginning, middle and end, while the narrative text must be construed according to culturally sedimented rules of genre and composition.” In other words, the author of narrative must create meaning within the pre-existing constraints of particular narrative expectations of her audience.

Aylesworth contends that Ricoeur’s shift to narrative, i.e., productive reason, by which to achieve meaning, instead of looking to theoretical reason, allows him to show how understanding, i.e., interpreting, a narrative requires “…a reconstruction of the operations that produced it.” Those operations have to do with the moments of understanding that are necessary for the creation of meaning: pre-figuration, configuration, and refiguration. Each of these moments of understanding refers to different aspects of narration that allow for the creation of meaning. Pre-figuration points to the “…pre-given world of action, from out of which the text was produced.” Configuration points to the plot by which the events of the narrative make sense. Aylesworth clarifies, “The sense of closure afforded by the plot is such that we already understand the events of the story to be leading to a certain end or outcome, an outcome that need only be acceptable rather than logically necessary.” That is, the plot allows us to view the events of the narrative as a whole and to understand and judge them based on how they serve to adequately explain each other. But this explanation does not have to be reasonable in a logical sense, merely reasonable from a narrative one, i.e., one that makes sense in the realm of human action. Refiguration points to that moment after the narration, when the narrative produces an
effect upon its audience. Aylesworth explains, “[T]he narrative…refigures the world of action as a world of possibilities that a reader might appropriate.”

Each of the moments of understanding the narrative has a corresponding moment in the realm of action, what Ricoeur refers to as *mimesis*. The realm of action and its presentation has to do with the action of the author, the world of action that creates the condition for the plot of the text, and the changed world of action that the text opens up to its audience. *Mimesis* has three aspects: *mimesis* 1, 2, and 3. Aylesworth describes their interaction: “[T]he pre-reflective understanding of the world of action (*mimesis* 1) and the appropriative refiguration of that world as a world of possibilities for being (*mimesis* 3), are mediated by the objective moment of the text (*mimesis* 2).” He adds that this interplay of *mimesis* serves to move Ricoeur’s thought beyond Hegel. Through an objective stance in the text, the reader is able to alienate herself from her world, only to return to it through an appropriation that alters that world. Aylesworth explains, though, that unlike Hegel, who held out the possibility of a final appropriation, Ricoeur rejects that possibility. The text can always be re-read and re-interpreted; “…the reading subject never fully recovers itself from the alienation of the text. Its self-interpretation, or self-constitution, is an infinite task.”

Aylesworth opines that another significant difference between Ricoeur and Gadamer has to do with their respective ideas of the self and its manner of constitution. Aylesworth thinks that if one looks at Gadamer’s discussion of Aristotle, one will see that Gadamer, rather than discussing how *poiesis* might inform an alternative to theoretical understanding, looks to *phronesis* as a paradigm. The difference, for Aylesworth, is important, because *phronesis* involves an explicit concern for the formation of moral character. Aylesworth explains, “*[P]hronesis involves an other or others with whom I interact, and whose claims upon me cannot
be codified into a set of rules or laws. On the contrary, moral judgment is specific to each situation and its application cannot be guided by any schema or concept. *Phronesis* remains open to the contingencies of experience.”

The consequences of this view of understanding, in relation to the self and its constitution, brings us to very similar positions as those of Ricoeur: the moral self is not fixed, but is merely a disposition toward action that changes as it judges and performs moral actions; there is no individual identity; the individual is an openness that is always changing. Aylesworth maintains that, though Gadamer and Ricoeur arrive at similar conclusions about the self, their different starting points in Aristotle—*poiesis* vs. *phronesis*—for alternative models of understanding lead to different concepts of the self.

This difference can be seen, according to Aylesworth, in the privileging of identity rather than character for Ricoeur. Aylesworth says, “Though Ricoeur agrees [with Gadamer] that we belong ontologically to the world of action and to a tradition, he emphasizes the individuation of the subject through the production and appropriation of the text as an individual work. The moment of individuation does not follow from moral reason [i.e., *phronesis*], but from productive reason (*poiesis, technê*).”

The difference in starting points in Aristotle, according to Aylesworth, comes out in that productive *poiesis* and *technê* have a pre-determined end toward which all action is directed and by which action is judged. Also, these two models of understanding provide clear rules for the achievement of that end. Ricoeur can thereby explain, according to Aylesworth, how plot, or emplotment, creates meaning in narrative. A text is a singular totality that relates the parts to the whole. Aylesworth explains, “This circularity, or closure, is provided by the plot. We understand the work insofar as we understand the end in the beginning and vice versa.”
The connection of *poiesis* to moral formation has to do with the manner in which the individual appropriates the text and views it as a holding out of alternative possibilities to action. Aylesworth clarifies, “[T]he subject understands itself as an agent who has acted or can act in certain ways. It can thus understand itself as morally responsible for those actions, etc. But this is the responsibility of an individual agent, and pertains to a reflective conception of moral reason. It is, in fact, derivative upon the productive reason that forms the singular totality of the text.”¹⁴¹ Put differently, the moral agent sees herself as having options for action, but she only achieves this moral understanding through the kind of understanding that *poiesis* or *technē* provide—a kind of understanding that has a fixed end by which to understand actions. Under this model, thinks Aylesworth, the moral understanding is achieved secondarily and reflectively, not immediately. What the text means to the reader, the effect it has on her, is achieved reflectively and under the guise of productive creation. Aylesworth explains, “[T]he ideality of meaning accomplished by the text provides a teleological ground for the process through which the subject comes to know, and to be, itself.”¹⁴²

Aylesworth asserts that Gadamer sees no separation between the meaning of the text and the reading of it, i.e., “…there is no distanciation of meaning from the event.”¹⁴³ The significance of this lack of distance has to do with the openness of meaning. The meaning of the text is not already established merely to be discovered by the reader. The meaning occurs through the reading. Aylesworth elucidates, “As the subject-matter of the dialogue between text and reader, meaning is produced in an event of disclosure, not as something fixed by the text, i.e., not as an ideal object, but as a third moment that neither the reader nor the text already contains.”¹⁴⁴ The difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur, according to Aylesworth is that “…for Gadamer
appropriation itself produces meaning, where for Ricoeur appropriation actualizes a meaning already produced.”

This difference between the two thinkers has to do with the openness to meaning that one model of understanding creates versus the other. Aylesworth states, “[I]n Gadamer the production of meaning is…non-teleological; it is not an instance of techné. Rather production is derivative upon phronesis and so remains without a predetermined end.”

According to Aylesworth, another difference that attains because of the different models of understanding of the two thinkers has to do with the dynamic of the part to the whole, i.e., the hermeneutic circle. For Ricoeur, the dynamic was wholly grounded within the text itself, i.e., one determines the meaning and significance of different events in the text or narrative from the end (telos) to be achieved. For Gadamer, though, “…the ‘hermeneutic circle’ relates the thing itself to the process of the dialogue between the text and the reader.”

Aylesworth closes his discussion of the difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur with an analysis of “…their respective anxieties over the role of hermeneutics in relation to the human sciences and the dominant position of science and its methods in contemporary life.”

Aylesworth begins with Ricoeur’s concerns. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics is in danger of irrelevance if it does not take seriously the legitimacy of the methods of the human sciences that are not grounded ontologically. Aylesworth adds, “[Ricoeur] believes that any such grounding must be constructed from the various discourses as they are, that no mediating ground between discourses can be supposed a priori.”

Aylesworth proposes that Ricoeur is concerned that a philosophical hermeneutics that is purely ontological would become self-contained and would thereby become just one more discourse among the many of the human sciences. Aylesworth argues, “Philosophical hermeneutics is, for [Ricoeur], a secondary act that mediates the
differences between the discourses of the human sciences, and it is predicated upon the de facto legitimacy of those discourses as it finds them.” Aylesworth adds that Ricoeur views hermeneutics as an act on the part of the self “…to recover itself from its dispersion among an otherwise bewildering plethora of languages, signs, symbols and texts.” Put differently, Ricoeur sees the act of the interpretation of texts to be an attempt at self-understanding. Aylesworth argues that this self that one attempts to understand, for Ricoeur, is an individual. This individual motivates and guides the manner of reflection through the interpretation of texts. Aylesworth elaborates, “The unity and closure of an individuated ego is therefore the ideal telos that guides hermeneutical practice and its mediating constructions.”

Gadamer has a different view of the effects of the inclusion of the insights of the human sciences within philosophical hermeneutics. Aylesworth explains, “Gadamer…is anxious about the technological co-option of any discourse that is methodological in nature. He is concerned that a methodological hermeneutics would become implicated in an instrumental totalization of experience, such that openness to the new, and thus the authentic recovery of the past, is precluded.” That is to say, Gadamer is wary of any inclusion of methodological practices or analyses within hermeneutics, because they will have the tendency to close off our understanding or interpretation of texts and cultural phenomena from any interpretation or understanding that is not already pre-determined by those methodological practices. Aylesworth explains that the consequence of this view for Gadamer is to see that “…philosophical hermeneutics must distinguish itself from the methodological disciplines, rather than perform a secondary mediation at their own level of discourse.” Aylesworth contends that Gadamer’s view of the hermeneutic project, which does not include the methodological sciences, is not concerned with showing some kind of unity or connection between understanding and explanation, because Gadamer
recognizes that such an attempt would occur under the terms set by the methodological sciences. Aylesworth explains, “[Gadamer] is willing to risk ‘epistemological irrelevance’ in order to preserve a discursive domain apart from technological totalization, a domain that he believes all other discourses must presuppose.”

The hermeneutic project for Gadamer, according to Aylesworth, is directed at the maintenance of a discourse that is not concerned with a recovery of the self. The interpretation of texts is not about trying to determine what the text says about the manner of human Being; rather interpretation is directed at the “…recovery of…a response to a question, that is, the question of the subject-matter of the historical tradition. The subject-matter is, of course, we ourselves.” It would seem, here, that both Gadamer and Ricoeur agree as to the subject and aim of hermeneutics, but Aylesworth explains that they differ. Gadamer, unlike Ricoeur, according to Aylesworth, asserts that the subject-matter, i.e., ourselves, is not fixed. For Gadamer, “…our identity is…the continuity of our becoming-other in every response, in every application of the pre-understanding that we have of ourselves in new and unpredictable situations.”

Leonard Lawlor responds to Aylesworth’s assessment of the profound differences between Ricoeur and Gadamer with a short, but concise essay that clarifies their fundamental similarity. As stated above, Lawlor sees both Gadamer and Ricoeur concerned with understanding and its dialectical nature. They both accept, according to Lawlor, that understanding and interpretation are guided by the attempt to re-present something different that still has something the same as what has come before. The sameness and difference of the thing are both necessary for the interpretation and understanding to take place. Lawlor maintains that both Gadamer and Ricoeur reject the characterization of understanding as guided by a pre-existing meaning that limits the understanding of the text from a source outside that text.
Lawlor begins his analysis of the similarity between Gadamer and Ricoeur with the observation that Ricoeur rejects the characterization of language as merely the rules, codes or systems of language that serve to explain how meaningful sentences are created within a language. Lawlor explains that Ricoeur is concerned, not with the structure of language, but with the manner in which language communicates. The question for Ricoeur is “How is it possible for particular linguistic systems to bridge the gap between humans?”

Ricoeur maintains that this bridge is dialogue, i.e., discourse—what takes place between the speaker and hearer of language. This bridge consists in the dialectic between the event of discourse and its meaning. Discourse is ontologically prior to the codes and structures of language, because discourse actually occurs, but the codes are only present at the moment when language is uttered. They are virtual, while discourse is actual, i.e., present.

The actuality and presence of discourse for Ricoeur, according to Lawlor, makes every utterance unique and innovative. This innovative character of spoken language rests upon what Ricoeur calls indexical, or shifters. Lawlor explains, “Ricoeur recognizes that ordinary conversation must repeat codified formulas such as a word’s polysemy. Every discourse, however, is prevented from being a mere repetition of the codes, a mere message, by linguistic units called shifter or indexicals.”

Indexicals, like ‘I,’ always shift in meaning every time they are spoken. In order to make sense of that indexical one has to make reference to the whole discourse. In other words, the indexical gains meaning from the context within which the utterance is made. The meaning of the utterance is whole and “…results from synthesizing activity and thus consists of a synthetic ‘configuration’ or structure.”

The singularity, i.e., the uniqueness, of the utterance, along with its wholeness, makes an utterance intelligible. These characteristics also give the utterance a meaning that is singular, i.e., they provide the sentence
with the ‘codes’ by which the audience is able to eliminate unintended meaning. The configuration and uniqueness of the utterance allow the speaker and the hearer to arrive at univocality from polysemic language.

For Ricoeur, metaphoric language arrives at univocality in a different manner, according to Lawlor. The difference between metaphoric language and everyday language has to do with the novelty of metaphor. Both metaphor and everyday language function within and use the polysemy of words, but metaphor breaks beyond the confines of the rules and structures of language to create new configurations. Lawlor explains the consequence of this novelty: “Someone who reads a poem then must treat it entirely in terms of its novelty, not in terms of the genres to which it may allude. On the basis of its novel whole configuration, the reader must create meanings for the appropriated words. Such a creation comes about by imaginatively searching for a new similarity among the possible meanings accepted for the words.”61 The discovery of this new similarity on the part of the reader creates a meaning that did not exist before. This creation of meaning saves a poem or metaphor from being utter nonsense. The reader tries to give the metaphor univocality. Lawlor clarifies, “Although metaphorical interpretation, like ordinary understanding, directs itself at one unified and identical meaning, it is nevertheless, for Ricoeur, an event in the strongest sense: a discontinuity or deviation (écart). As Ricoeur would say, it productively overcomes distanciation in appropriation; it makes the new meaning present.”62 Put differently, Ricoeur explains how the activity of the reader, i.e., the audience of an utterance, is as important to the creation of meaning as the speaker, i.e., the author. When the audience tries to make sense of metaphor it makes actual what the author might have intended.
Lawlor quickly points out that the description of the discursive event of discourse can be misinterpreted as not really having any dialectical character. It is important to keep in mind, says Lawlor, that for Ricoeur there is a difference between the meaning and event of discourse. The event is short-lived but the “…meaning (or configuration)…is omnitemporal, reidentifiable across time, repeatable.” The repeatability of meaning, though, does not make meaning some kind of ideal form, structure or code; rather, what is repeated is “…the original expressed content, the same event of meaning. Meaning achieves universality by cancelling and preserving the event’s singularity.”

Lawlor explains that Ricoeur looks to Husserl’s analysis of Kant’s Idea to clarify how one might have a repeatable meaning that is not some ideal that might close off the possible interpretations of metaphorical language. Lawlor explains, “For Ricoeur, meaning, as an Idea in the Kantian sense, is infinitely repeatable (the same) and limitlessly plurivocal (different). It is open to constant redetermination, renewal, more events. Meaning never stands outside the process of time and interpretation. [My italics.]” The significance of this view of meaning is that it defends Ricoeur against charges of idealism. He leaves the possibility of the meaning of an utterance or event of discourse open. It is not determined prior to the dialogue between speaker and audience. Lawlor elaborates, “There is, for Ricoeur, always an overabundance of meaning which outstrips any attempt to understand it. Every dialogue is incomplete.” But this incompleteness does not render meaning unattainable and its search vain. Rather, according to Ricoeur, explains Lawlor, “[u]nderstanding…exhibits a ‘naïve’ teleology. It always aims at univocity, at complete determination, at perfect presence.” In other words, the search for meaning is guided by “…an insight [that] predesignates or prescribes the task of completeness… [with a recognition] of its progressive determination.” There is a guide or hope for complete
meaning with an openness to the creation of new, novel meaning and the recognition of its non-achievability.

Lawlor’s analysis of Gadamer’s similarity to Ricoeur deals with Gadamer’s description of the process of concept formation. Concept formation begins with the event of dialogue wherein the speaker speaks to another about the particularity of the dialogical situation. Lawlor explains, “In doing so, the speaker, however, must conform his or her speech to the universality of the pre-established meanings of words. This conformation does not imply simple repetition.”

Gadamer, according to Lawlor, explains that the very attempt to express something about the particularity of the thing expands the meaning of the word that is used to express that thing. As Lawlor elaborates, “In speaking therefore the word not only participates in the universal, but also come to participate in the particular of the situation…. This process, in which the universal meanings of words are particularized or differentiated, is what Gadamer calls concept formation….” Concept formation occurs not only in speech, but also in the production and interpretation of art and literature.

Lawlor observes that Gadamer’s development of concept formation draws on some of Hegel’s insights. The first is “…all thought, in order to be itself, must be expressed in statements, poetic words, works of art, in language in general.” In other words, there is no truth apart from the actual expression of it, i.e., truth must be presented. The second insight is “…in the movement of language generalization and concretization (or differentiation) of concepts take place. Presentation is the event of this differentiation.” That is, language serves to distinguish and make clear what particular concepts are. The last insight is “…the finite form of the presentation or expression can mislead.” In order to overcome the misleading quality of language one has to move beyond “…the associative senses that cling to any word [in favor of]
the thing itself. In presentation, the word or statement disappears before what is presented or expressed.” In other words, for Gadamer, one must allow the thing itself, the subject-matter of dialogue, to speak for itself. Both parties to the dialogue must allow the text to speak for itself without forcing it into preconceived structures of meaning.

This openness to new meaning is what differentiates Gadamer from Hegel. Lawlor explains that “…concept formation for Gadamer does not imply an absolute beginning. The process is not simple passage from potency to act, from a perfected thought or pre-existent universal to speech in the here and now.” Lawlor explains that Gadamer saw the process of thinking to be one in which memory plays a significant role. But memory is not a storehouse of ideas from which thought draws; rather thinking uses memory as a reference to which or from which thinking moves. The same process is present when thinking is externalized in speech. Gadamer’s concept formation also closes off the possibility of finality to speech and its interpretation. Because there is no pre-existing concept that guides dialogue, concepts remain infinitely applicable. Lawlor explains, “Language remains available for everyone to use in unforeseen ways…. Hermeneutical experience therefore…discloses and recognizes an ‘unclosable openness’ in its own process.”

The infinite openness of language “…does not stop Gadamer from asserting some sort of perfection for hermeneutical experience.” Lawlor explains that Gadamer recognizes the existence of authentic or genuine experience. Authentic experience rests upon the recognition of the reality of some actual situation or thing and upon the ambiguity of that position in the future. Hermeneutical experience recognizes that “[m]ore events can always reverse any particular understanding.” But this recognition also allows for the possibility that ambiguity and imprecision of the word, i.e., the presentation of thought, can at a certain point be overcome.
Lawlor explains, “When the listener (or reader) attends only to the thing itself and not to the significations associated with the sensible word, then the word’s tangible quality ‘disappears’….

Perfection as disappearance here means the word, on the one hand, brings about a creative event in which a new determination of the thing or meaning discloses itself. On the other, it presents finitely or sensibly what is infinite, universal or intelligible.”

In other words, perfect understanding occurs when the words or expressions of the concept no longer prevent the parties to dialogue from understanding the subject-matter of the dialogue, i.e., they are able to allow the subject-matter to disclose itself without friction from prior understanding of the expressions or words used to express the concept. But, on the other hand, the words are necessary to make concrete what the concept is.

Lawlor clarifies that Gadamer’s notion of the perfection of hermeneutic experience “…lies in the insight into its irreducible imperfection. Nevertheless, this insight occurs only when the sensible word disappears and the thing itself comes to presence in a new determination.”

For Gadamer, this dual aspect of hermeneutic experience provides hermeneutics with its project says Lawlor. Hermeneutics must attempt to get at the whole meaning of the event of dialogue, but it has to remember the incompleteness of the actual attempt. Lawlor says, “Perfect hermeneutical experience resembles then the experience of the beautiful. When the word expresses the thing without distortion, the word presents an idea, the idea of the beautiful beautifully.”

Lawlor maintains that both Gadamer and Ricoeur would agree with the characterization of the hermeneutic project. They both recognize that language is dialectical. Lawlor explains that both see that “[t]he linguistic event, a singular difference, presents sense, the thing itself, which remains the same. Unlike Hegel, however, for Ricoeur and Gadamer the movement itself
postpones completeness; language’s very nature is to be open to more events.” Lawlor recognizes that both thinkers leave language (and interpretation) open to ever new meanings, but they both see that it also has a goal or end toward which it is directed. Lawlor says, “[T]he task of hermeneutics, open as it is, lies in an appropriation of meaning, an overcoming of distanciation, a disappearance of the signifier, an event of presentation. A direction is outlined, an end is projected, a destination given, perfection promised; it makes sense.”

Interestingly, Lawlor ends his essay with a question that might serve to distinguish Ricoeur’s and Gadamer’s thought. Lawlor asks, “What happens however when the word distorts, deviates, errs, wanders from its path? Doesn’t this open the hermeneutical horizon beyond any dialectic, no matter how naïve?” This question opens both Gadamer and Ricoeur to criticism that hermeneutics cannot adequately provide a ground or basis from which to provide an interpretation that is not already part of the very text that it interprets. In other words, how can hermeneutics provide insight into the deceptive aspect of language and discourse while at the same time allowing for an interpretation that recognizes the truth that the text, or event of discourse, discloses. An answer to this question on the part of Ricoeur and Gadamer would demonstrate that Ricoeur’s ideas are more aware of the challenge that Lawlor’s question creates for hermeneutics and that Ricoeur’s hermeneutics are more capable of addressing this question. Ricoeur’s inclusion of the insights of the human sciences within hermeneutics provides it with the resources to address Lawlor’s question. It would seem that Gadamer’s ideas cannot. To adequately determine how effectively Ricoeur’s and Gadamer’s hermeneutics would respond to Lawlor’s question we need to more effectively address the difference, if any, that might exist between the two thinkers. It would seem an analysis of Gadamer’s hermeneutics might offer some insight into Ricoeur’s philosophy. It should also clarify the distinction between Gadamer
and Ricoeur, and it might clarify how Ricoeur manages to “thread the needle” between Gadamer and critical theory. Most importantly this analysis of Gadamer might show just how much Ricoeur owes to Gadamer.
Chapter 2

Gadamer’s Hermeneutical Influences

The best entry to Gadamer’s philosophy is his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*. The project of *Truth and Method* is:

“…to seek that experience of truth that transcends the sphere of control of scientific method wherever it is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy. Hence the human sciences are joined with modes of experience which lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.”

Gadamer’s project is, therefore, grounded in a critique of the scientific method and the philosophy underlying it. Gadamer wishes to provide “…a history of the nonmethodical avenues to truth that have become available through the ‘humanistic tradition’.” The goal of *Truth and Method* is:

*to make sense of and legitimate certain ideas, but not to prove them. They cannot be proved, not because of their intrinsic irrationality, still less because they are false, but rather, precisely because they call into question the belief that proof is our sole means of access to the truth. As methodical proof calls a halt to history and obviates any further need to consult tradition as a source of knowledge, so also art, philosophy, history—tradition generally—challenge the universality and exhaustiveness of method as the exclusive means whereby knowledge worthy of being called true is disclosed.*
According to Weinsheimer, Gadamer’s understanding of method is grounded in the historical intellectual response to the experience of **Fremheitd**. The experience is “...the condition of being no longer at home in the world.... [It] consists in the schism between past and present, I and others, self and world. *Method derives from this sense of living among objects that to which one no longer belongs* [My italics].”

The modern reaction to this experience according to Gadamer is the modern project of epistemology.

Method is an attempt to overcome the loss of the self-evident by regulating and quantifying the empirical realm. The problem of course is that “...method famishes that very craving for homecoming that it is designed to satisfy.”

The question of what the limits of this methodology are is precisely what Gadamer attempts to answer. He is of the opinion “...that it cannot of itself exhaust what is to be known.”

Two realms of knowledge that he thinks are beyond the scope of method are art and history, i.e., tradition. These two cannot fall under the analytic knife of method because they are “...not rule-governed and hence cannot be reconstructed artificially, by rule.”

Because of this view that Gadamer has, he thinks it is useless to attempt to “...elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences.”

The reason that method thinks that truth must be achieved methodologically is “...because the methodologically controlled mind is aware of its position at all times, knows its origin and the rules that govern its progress; and therefore the end of method is clear and distinct...” and in effect because methodological truth is verifiable. According to Gadamer, such criteria for truth make “...history...increasingly unnecessary” for the attainment of knowledge. In effect, “...the fundamental hubris of method consists in its presumption that it exhausts the sphere of truth.” Gadamer thinks that methodology’s claim is a universal one that
cannot be sustained:

[I]f the advent of truth, like other events, can happen to us without our desiring or intending it, that means that in methodological universalism, there is a distinct exaggeration of sovereignty—of its claim to control what occurs to us and in our world, to control history, and especially to control truth.12

Gadamer can make this assessment of methodology’s claim because of the Baconian justification of the scientific endeavor: “…to ‘exercise over the nature of things the authority which properly belongs’ to the mind.”13 Weinsheimer argues: “When the conditions and laws governing a process have been submissively determined so that it can be brought about artificially, the process can be dominated—that is, produced and prevented at will.”14 And so long as Gadamer’s characterization of science as Baconian is true, then, according to Weinsheimer, he “…is justified in saying that, although basic research in natural science is not directed to any particular practical end, nevertheless, it is rightly conceived as the ‘willful domination of existents.’”15

Weinsheimer argues that Gadamer’s concern is to expand the possible definition of truth beyond a purely objective one. Weinsheimer says:

It is important to recognize that Gadamer does not dispute the fact that objective science knows things as they truly are, even though that implies that everything in the world of science is subject to human calculation and control. What he does contest is the supposition that being in itself is singular and, in particular, that being as science knows it comprehends all that in truth is.16

Weinsheimer adds that Gadamer’s insistence on this point derives from the latter’s view that “…the whole truth does not and never will exist.”17 In other words because truth is historical,
i.e., it is always occurring, “science cannot claim to be exhaustive”\textsuperscript{18} in its claims to truth.

A second project (or consequence) of methodological epistemology is, not only the control of the objects of the world, but also the control of the subject. In order for science, i.e., method, to achieve its truth the objective observer must purify herself of any subjective prejudices. For methodological knowledge to occur “…consciousness [must be] maximally transparent to itself…without any alien forces influencing it unawares toward a given conclusion or directing it outside its own control.”\textsuperscript{19} According to Gadamer, modern science has taken on Descartes’ radical doubt in order “…to render tradition inert and eliminate the effects of prejudice.”\textsuperscript{20} Gadamer argues that this goal is unattainable because pre-understanding, i.e., prejudice,

…gives rise to thought and always conditions it….

[A]ll prejudices cannot be simultaneously exorcised by the exertion of self-control, because the affirmation of some prejudices is always the condition of disaffirming others. Perfect doubt would render knowledge impossible. Thus the project of a radical beginning is doomed to failure….

[N]o method can pretend to be perfectly foundational or perfectly free of prejudices.\textsuperscript{21}

The assumption that grounds Gadamer’s assessment of the scientific project is that “…self-consciousness [is] an unreachable goal and self-knowledge [is] an infinite task….

[U]nderstanding (including self-understanding) is, and always remains, conditioned by its situation; and this situation cannot be objectified or taken into account in such a way that its effects could be subtracted from the process of cognition.”\textsuperscript{22} Gadamer argues that this incapacity of consciousness is inherent to the manner of being of human being: “To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.”\textsuperscript{23}

To reiterate, the certainty of method is predicated upon its ahistoricity. But, according to
Gadamer, there is a different kind of certainty that is historical.

[T]he certainty of science is very different from this kind of certainty acquired in life. Scientific certainty always has something Cartesian about it. It is the result of a critical method that seeks only to allow what cannot be doubted. This certainty [of life, however,] does not proceed from doubts and their being overcome, but is always anterior to any process of being doubted.  

According to Weinsheimer, tradition, i.e., historical certainty, is just as certain as science. “What is in fact not doubted because one lives it is, until it is doubted, just as certain as what cannot be doubted. Prejudices of which we are not conscious possess the notorious tenacity of the obvious,” says Weinsheimer. The certainty of some prejudices is not a blind faith that is asserted prematurely. There are some prejudices that are just as firmly true and certain before as after methodological analysis. In fact, for Gadamer, even the indubitable is questionable, i.e., “what we can doubt changes as much as what we do doubt.” There is a historicality to the indubitable, i.e., it changes. Weinsheimer, therefore, asserts:

The fact that neither type of certainty is immutable suggests that the primordial understanding that derives merely from living in a historically particular world—merely from being—retains its force as the most advanced levels of consciousness. This prior understanding influences us in unpredictable and essentially uncontrollable ways. Through it, history affects and indeed effects consciousness; and consciousness so determined Gadamer calls ‘effective-historical consciousness.’

A major characteristic of this consciousness is indeterminable, i.e., it cannot be guided nor can its rules of guidance be determined. In essence, “we are, more than we know.” Because of the indeterminacy of consciousness, the task for philosophy, according to Weinsheimer, is to
become “…more aware of the preconscious determinants of consciousness, that is, of coming to know ourselves through the knowledge of our history.”

The effects of history are often unconscious and involuntary; therefore “the perfect objectification of history is impossible.”

The reason that method cannot adequately know history is that method exempts “…consciousness from influence by foreign forces and also therefore from the effects of its objects…. [I]t maximizes the dissociation of the subject from the object.”

Another reason that history cannot be objectified is that both the subject and object “…in the case of historical knowledge… [have] a shared mode of being… [where] what is to be known cannot be wholly set over against the knower.” History cannot be objectified because of the effect that history has on the subject. In historical knowledge the subject and object are not autonomous, a characteristic that is necessary for methodological knowing. Objective knowing of history is not possible because it overlooks the role of the subject in history.

The last reason that Gadamer gives for the limits of objective knowledge of history is: “Objectivity…requires a static object in addition to a static subject….” Gadamer reminds us that history is not static: “Through being re-actualized in understanding, the texts are drawn into a genuine process in exactly the same way as are the events themselves through their continuance.” Weinsheimer says, “The text is altered by its consequences. Both texts and events change precisely because they continue and endure. But a text has no consequence except in its being continuously understood.” In effect, a text is continually changing, so long as it is being understood. There is a mutual effect between the text and the knower. “The history of understanding is the effectuating history of the text. Understanding makes history, makes the past by belonging to it and adding itself to it.” In other words, objectivity cannot grasp history because the object of objectivity is always growing.
Another way of understanding the difference between the natural and human sciences is to consider their respective meanings of “understanding.” For scientists, understanding means, “…to subsume the instance under a general concept, rule, or law.” This would mean that history, i.e., the human sciences, cannot be scientific because “…history consists of unique and unrepeatable events” that cannot be subsumed under a rule. What makes science so useful is its understanding of the universe helps us to explain past events, and most importantly, it helps us to predict the future occurrences of events that fit a rule. Because history does not repeat itself, we cannot make predictions about history. So Weinsheimer says, “If the usefulness of knowledge consists in the application of generals to particulars, then such a science of history would be, of all sciences, most useless.”

Gadamer maintains that there can be applied/applicable knowledge that is not based upon subsumption under a rule. For Gadamer the purpose of the study of history is not “…to attain knowledge of a law, e.g., how men, peoples, and states evolve but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become—how has it happened that it is so.” Historical knowledge explains unique events by reference to other unique events, i.e., “historical understanding works from the concrete to the concrete, without subsuming temporal particularity into atemporal generality.” Historical understanding recognizes that each event cannot be completely subsumed under a general concept or rule. In other words, history is excessive because it always will go beyond a definitive interpretation and will always need interpretation to be understood. For Weinsheimer, this distinction between the human and natural sciences finally sets Gadamer’s philosophical project on a stable grounding. Weinsheimer argues that even nominalist arguments—that generals/generalities are really just “convenient abbreviations for collections of particular experiences” do not discredit Gadamer’s position, because “the
convenience and utility of such abbreviations [consists] in their generality, real or not.”

Gadamer does not argue that generalizations are not used at all in historical understanding—that would be patently false—but he does argue that history always moves beyond those generalizations. Understanding in history is applying oneself to one’s subject that “…is itself a way of knowing and not merely a way of subsuming a particular historical event under an already known law.” The way we know in history requires that we apply ourselves, i.e., our knowledge, in the process of gaining knowledge. As Weinsheimer says, “The human sciences are characterized by a practical knowledge that is itself knowledge, rather than merely the subsequent application of knowledge in practice.” Theory and practice are so mixed and inseparable according to Gadamer that neither one has priority.

Weinsheimer explains that Gadamer’s thesis about knowledge is not that knowledge must and will always be conditioned historically. Gadamer does hold out the possibility that people will think ‘unhistorically.’ But this unhistorical thought will occur not because of the meaninglessness of knowledge, but precisely because of the meaning of its contradictions. Says Weinsheimer, “If people begin thinking unhistorically that too will happen for historical reasons. It is historical life, not logical consistency, which is the final arbiter and ground of truth. That is Gadamer’s thesis.”

Kant’s Influence upon Gadamer

Gadamer finds the root of the distinction that the natural sciences make between themselves and the human sciences to be found in Kant’s Three Critiques. By delimiting the scope of scientific, moral, and aesthetic knowledge in his Critiques, Kant grounded the difference between these sciences. But Gadamer’s assessment of Kant is not entirely critical. Weinsheimer reminds us that Gadamer’s critique of Kant is not an all out attack against him.
Gadamer actually interprets Kant. Gadamer’s interpretation does not make Kant into a straw man. Gadamer’s interpretation, according to Weinsheimer, actually strengthens some of the insights Kant makes. Gadamer’s interpretation of Kant is the former’s and it makes the latter sound very much like Gadamer; but “…Gadamer’s hermeneutics is in significant respects, undeniably Kantian.” A “…significant example of [Kant’s] influence is Truth and Method itself insofar as it attempts to legitimate the human sciences independently from and in opposition to the natural sciences.”

Weinsheimer adds though that Gadamer is “profoundly un-Kantian.” Kant’s aesthetic theory subjectifies aesthetics. And it is this subjectification that Gadamer thinks needs to be overcome “because Kantian aesthetics knocked the foundation from under the human-sciences-to-be in the very act of establishing their independence.” Gadamer’s work in Truth and Method is to maintain the independence, but also “reassert [its] ontological foundations.”

Weinsheimer clarifies what is meant by subjective in the aesthetic realm:

[T]aste offers no knowledge of its object, and its judgments are thus subjective in the privative sense of being non-objective. Moreover, to say, ‘That flower is beautiful’ is to say nothing about the flower but rather about a subjective feeling, namely the feeling of pleasure which I have in response to it. The aesthetic judgment is called ‘aesthetic’ because it is judgment by feeling; and its opposite, therefore, might better be conceived as unaesthetic rather than unartistic.

Another way that taste is subjective is that it is limited to the individual. No one and no thing can give you taste; it is self developed.

Weinsheimer explains that taste is different from the senses because it involves the cognitive faculties. He adds that taste, although it is private also has an aspect of the public:
“[W]hen I say, ‘That flower is beautiful,’ I not only expect you and everyone to understand this judgment but also to agree with and share it. And even if in fact no one agrees, I will still think that everyone ought to agree.”

This claim to universality, which actually is not universal, is very similar to a truth claim for Gadamer. “Though subjective, an aesthetic judgment is like an objective judgment in that both are intended as binding on everyone.” Weinsheimer explains that the commonality of taste, for Kant, derives from its abstraction from the private realm and obviously cannot be derived from actual communities, since it clearly is not empirically universal. The problem that Gadamer must address is to explain how the claims of aesthetic judgment can be universal if they are derived from actual historical communities. He could also show that Kant’s ideas on aesthetic judgment include aspects of the moral and political foundations of the prior humanist tradition.

According to Weinsheimer, what most interests Gadamer is how Kant is able to maintain “the definitive indeterminacy of aesthetic judgments.” The judgments are definitive because they are not open to argument and they are intended to be binding on all. Yet they are indeterminate on several grounds.

They come to no conclusions, make no final determinations about the object such that one could have done with it and move on to something else. Aesthetic judgment never reaches conceptual determination…because it does not begin with, or judge by means of, determinate concepts. Universal concepts are not given in advance of aesthetic judgment as the criteria of the beautiful. But no more does taste judge the beautiful on the basis of previously given examples of beautiful objects or tasteful judgments.

What is central for Gadamer’s argument, though, is that if the ground of taste is moral and
political communities “...then that community cannot be conceived as an empirically given or conceptually determinate universality.” So the problem that Gadamer must address is how to conceive of a universal that is obviously not empirical but neither is it conceptually so.

To answer this question Gadamer has to address the role of the cognitive faculties in aesthetic judgment. The cognitive faculties play a role in aesthetic judgment because art is more than just about beauty. “An aesthetics that would be more adequate to the full scope of art must surpass the pure aesthetic judgment,” “...where pure means without regard to the object in any respect but its beauty.” But if art is to be more than about beauty that means that there must be some role for the understanding in aesthetic judgment. “Concept and purpose (the impulse toward unity) are thus reaffirmed as the surplus by which art exceeds pure aesthetic judgment.”

But this inclusion of the understanding in aesthetic judgment cannot revert to “aesthetic rationalism or utilitarianism.” This can only happen if the extra in aesthetic judgment does not “inhibit the imagination’s spontaneous productivity.”

This extra role of the understanding in aesthetic judgment is possible because according to Gadamer, “The nature of art...is to present man with himself.” This self-presentation of art makes art meaningful, but it is meaningful non-conceptually. So he says, “The very recognition of the non-conceptuality of taste leads beyond an aesthetics of mere taste.”

Weinsheimer proposes that the question for Gadamer is: “Can we understand art solely as the object or product of aesthetic experience? Can we do justice to art as long as we consider it exclusively as art?” Gadamer’s critique of prior aesthetic theories is not that they are necessarily incorrect, but rather that they are insufficient because they do not see that art is more than art’s non-reducibility to a concept; more than its uniqueness as experience, Erlebnis; and more than a function of subjectivity.
Weinsheimer explains that aesthetic protectionism found what it perceived to be a needed distinction between art and non-art present in Kant’s *Critiques*. The basis for this distinction is primarily a view of the world where art is seen as dealing with the ideal and not the real world, unlike the hard sciences and political and moral concerns. Thus aesthetic protectionism led to an aesthetics that rejected the claims that society placed upon art that it be or have morally, socially or politically redeeming qualities. In other words, this protectionism aspires to a permanent divorce between art and the real world. This drive to idealize art is compelling, but according to Gadamer, it ultimately leads to disappointment. After the initial romance with an ideal art wears off, “…the un-ideal realm reasserts its dominion all the more oppressively.” Put simply, the claims of art become less and less relevant to life. The push to aesthetic protectionism led Schiller, among others, to propose a divorce not only of art from non-art, but a separation of the aesthetic consciousness from its social community and the artwork as well. Gadamer says, “What we call a work of art and experience aesthetically depends upon a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work was rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function which gave it its significance), it becomes visible as the ‘pure work of art’.”

Gadamer calls the separation, or abstraction, of the audience or artist and the artwork from its community aesthetic differentiation. Aesthetic differentiation makes artistic appreciation pure, but it makes communication between the worlds of the audience and the artwork impossible. Communication is cut off because the content that makes the audience take a stand in front of the artwork is abstracted out and the interpretation or performance of the artwork by its creator is abstracted as well. This purification of art provides immediacy of the work to its audience “as pure consciousness to pure consciousness,” but it also leads to an
indifferent or tasteless art thinks Gadamer. Weinsheimer points out “Whereas taste is temporally localized…purely aesthetic appreciation brings all times into simultaneity…. Reconciling the art of diverse ages requires no effort of integration: art is eternal since the artworks of all times are co-present in abstracted aesthetic consciousness…. Aesthetic differentiation makes amends for the relativity of taste and the difference of times by abstraction and in a strict sense by indifference.” The consequence of a pure aesthetic is a breakdown of communities of taste within which art is appreciated and, just as problematically, created. Weinsheimer says, “In fact, the sense of the common never gets formed in purely aesthetic Bildung because the aesthetic proper—in its purity—is premised on alienation and abstraction without reunion.”

Gadamer finds the solution to the problem of pure aesthetic consciousness by pointing out that seeing art as art only depends upon the *as* relation. “*As* is not an equation. It presupposes difference and negation, and it strikes a cleft in self-identity. Art as art is, by reason of the difference implied in *as*, also non-art”(94). Gadamer explains,

> The logos is of such a nature that whenever anything is meant by it, that thing is meant as identical to itself and, at the same time, as different from other things. Thus Selfsameness and Difference are always present in anything which is and is recognized as what it is. Only the interweaving of Selfsameness and Difference makes an assertion (logos) possible. In any assertion something which, in *being* what it is, *is identical* to itself, is linked to something *different* from itself. But it does not thereby lose its selfsameness.\(^7^0\)

Gadamer argues that there is no original pure perception, even aesthetic perception. We do not perceive pure sounds, colors, etc. We perceive actual, real and natural phenomenon.

“Perception is instinct with meaning. Perception understands, and understanding involves the
construal of something as something,” says Weinsheimer. Gadamer’s description of the as-
structure of perception shows that the “circle of excursion and return” is central to perception.
According to Weinsheimer, Gadamer recognized Heidegger’s achievement in Being and Time to be a demonstration that the abstraction that occurs in science to arrive at objectivity is an “ontological” prejudice. The point of this discussion is to show that though it is possible to consider an object apart from its context, i.e., purely, this viewpoint is secondary to “a more primary cohesion.” Such perception is applicable to art as well. Gadamer says, “Perception always includes meaning.” Abstract art does not get us some more pure or primary perception. Weinsheimer says, “Perception is rather primordially impure in that it is imbued with meaning from the outset. It already understands, and this implies that perception construes or interprets something as something (else). Art, perceived purely as art, is already more than art. Even pure art means.”

The import of Gadamer’s assessment about the “impurity” of art shows that interpretation is part and parcel of art; it is not something foreign to art, and this “…fact suggests one of the ways of transcending aesthetic purism.” Because Kant grounded the distinction of art from non-art in genius, once genius become a dubious foundation upon which to base the unlimited interpretability of art—the seeming difference between art and non-art—“…the inexhaustibility of interpretation remained as a problem to be explained—by Gadamer as well as his predecessors,” says Weinsheimer.

A New Hermeneutic Project

With Gadamer the hermeneutic project became the “assimilation” of all other disciplines and the reunion of those aspects of the “world” that aesthetics and philosophy had broken apart. Weinsheimer says, “The assimilation of difference—of aesthetic difference, as of any other—is
not just the purpose of hermeneutics, but its essence as well.”76 But hermeneutics has to be true to art. The work of art is different from the world it represents. Must hermeneutics do away with this difference, or must it reaffirm aesthetics by instituting aesthetic indifference—“…the simultaneity of aesthetic consciousness to all times and the ability to look at anything aesthetically, without regard to its truth”?77 The job of hermeneutics is to reconnect the artwork to its world.

But how are we to achieve that reconnection? According to Gadamer, “Schleiermacher…is wholly concerned to reproduce in the understanding the original purpose of a work. For art and literature which are transmitted to us from the past are wrenched from the context of their original world.”78 Gadamer adds, “If it is acknowledged that the work of art…belongs to a world that endorses it with its significance, it would follow that the true significance of the work of art can be understood only in terms of its origin and genesis within that world.”79 As Weinsheimer summarizes, “Schleiermacher takes the position that if a tradition has become unintelligible because it is estranged from its original context, the task of hermeneutics is to reconstruct that context and reestablish that world.”80

But Gadamer argues that one cannot recreate the past to reconnect with it. “[A] hermeneutics that regarded understanding as the reconstruction of the original world would be no more than the recovery of a dead meaning.”81 The reconstruction of the creation of the original only further moves us away from it. As Weinsheimer says, “What is lost to the past is permanently lost, and the passing of time opens up a fissure that precludes any direct return.”82

Hegel’s hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, stresses difference as part of assimilation and does not attempt reconstruction. According to Gadamer,
The search for those circumstances which would add to the significance of works of art cannot succeed in reproducing them. They remain fruit torn from the tree. To place them in their historical context does not give one a living relationship with them but rather one of mere imaginative representation.\textsuperscript{83}

Hegel’s approach to hermeneutics sees understanding as occurring in a “…self-consciousness of spirit that…comprehends the truth of art within itself in a higher way, culminat[ing] in the absolute knowledge of philosophy.”\textsuperscript{84} Gadamer does not agree with Hegel’s supposition that the project of hermeneutics can achieve absolute knowledge, because the mind is finite and time and difference are real. Gadamer, though, does agree with Hegel in that “…the historical attitude of imaginative representation is changed into a thinking attitude towards the past…. [T]he essential nature of the historical spirit does not consist in the restoration of the past, but in thoughtful mediation with contemporary life.”\textsuperscript{85} This mediation preserves difference while assimilating past and present. Though Hegel and Gadamer reject a direct return to the past, return is possible through representation. Representation makes the past accessible, because tradition shows us what \textit{was} the case, not what \textit{is} the case. Weinsheimer says, “The past lives only in the life of the present; the past exists only \textit{as} it is represented. It \textit{is}/not what it \textit{was}.”\textsuperscript{86} For Gadamer, the past is accessible, but this accessibility is \textit{only} possible through representation. But our present representations are just
\begin{quote}
…a continuation of the \textit{self}-representations of tradition that is occasioned by difference from the original context. Our representations repeat that difference and affirm that distance, and yet since it is the past’s own difference that we repeat and continue, we are already at one with it. If the past lives at all, it lives in our own self-representations.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}
The past and present are connected by their relation to truth. According to Weinsheimer, “This implies that there is not access to the past that does not presuppose its truth claim. It does not imply that truth is located in the past, for the truth claim of the past is that what it has to say concerns and addresses the present too. If it does not, it is simply not true.”

In order to study the past objectively, there is no need to leave the present, because if we do that then the past won’t be able to speak to us. “The surprising conclusion that Gadamer draws is that historical reconstruction of the past as past—that is, reconstruction as opposed to mediation with the present—is the falsification of history,” says Weinsheimer. Put differently, the past speaks to us through our present. “Our present, our difference from the past, is not the obstacle but the very condition of understanding the past in its truth, and this truth is at least in part that the past to which we have access is always our own past by reason of our belonging to it,” adds Weinsheimer.

Gadamer’s reconceptualization of the hermeneutic project depends on his understanding of the history of hermeneutics. This history starts with Hegel, not Schleiermacher as Dilthey proposed. “Gadamer is not able or willing to plot the history of hermeneutics in Dilthey’s way, as the gradual emancipation of interpretation from dogma.” Gadamer rejects Dilthey’s historical plotline because the former thinks that following such a history of emancipation of interpretation from dogma would lead to “the crippling of interpretation itself.”

Gadamer’s argument for the inescapable and necessary connection of interpretation to dogma is not motivated by an assumption that dogma, because it forces interpretation, will always be correct. He recognizes that dogma can lead to false interpretation, and he would not defend that. Rather, Gadamer’s argument has to do with the question of what is the basis for the force that dogma has to push interpretation. “By what are we compelled to give a particular
interpretation to a particular text? By a tradition of interpretation, a dogma, we can answer,\textsuperscript{93} says Weinsheimer.

Gadamer argues that it is possible that rather than dogma forcing an interpretation upon us, it is possible that we force an interpretation upon the text:

This force is the pressure to understand the text as true---that is, as commensurate with truth as we know it. We integrate the text with our beliefs and our dogmas, with our traditions of interpretation. For better or worse…dogmatic interpretation is a process of integration because it accepts the truth claim of the text; and even when such interpretation rejects what the text says as false, its truth claim is thereby vindicated.\textsuperscript{94}

If we separate dogma from interpretation, then at least two results occur, according to Gadamer. First, it will no longer be possible to test our dogmas for falsity because we will not be able attempt to integrate them with our present conception of truth. Second, we will no longer be able to integrate the past to the present because such a separation …divorces past from present by dividing the truth of the interpretation from the truth of what it interprets…. By contrast, dogmatic interpretation is the endeavor to understand the past as still true, still in force, and such interpretation automatically gives rise to false interpretations only if the past itself is false, no longer in force, a dead relic from which we have nothing to learn…. Gadamer considers dogmatic interpretation in certain respects unavoidably necessary and even desirable.\textsuperscript{95}
Weinsheimer adds that Gadamer does think that dogmatic interpretation can be “the cardinal sin of interpretation” because such an interpretation makes the meaning of history static, i.e., the interpretation separates it from history.

An understanding of interpretation as shaped by dogma is in some respects in line with Dilthey’s hermeneutics. Insofar as the need to understand a part of a text in relation to the whole of it, one must have a tradition from which to view that part, namely, dogma. It may be the case that one hopes to provide an interpretation of that specific part of the text that challenges the dominant tradition, but that does not mean that one is rejecting the tradition completely. Weinsheimer provides the example of Luther’s rejection of the need for tradition to understand the Bible in order to show that Luther had to accept certain aspects of the traditional interpretation in order to view the Bible as a whole that could allow for an understanding of the part. This is the debate of sola scriptura versus tradition for understanding the Bible.

Dilthey’s hermeneutical understanding claims that the whole against which a part of a text or event is interpreted is the whole of history. So the job of a historian is to interpret a particular text according to the context within which that text was written; any specialized interpretation that deals with the text in isolation will not adequately interpret the text.

The immediate rejoinder to Dilthey’s position is: “[W]hat guarantees the wholeness of history? Is it clear that history itself comprises a unity more integral than any text? And is it possible that Dilthey is himself dogmatically guided by unacknowledged (Hegelian) traditions in his unitary conception of history?”96 Dilthey’s understanding of hermeneutics released it beyond the constraints of a purely instrumental application for the understanding of texts. By freeing hermeneutics from its connection to dogma, hermeneutics “emerges as a historical organon, a
prejudice-free method.” This release of hermeneutics makes understanding its new object for analysis. This was the task that Schleiermacher took on.

**Schleiermacher**

Schleiermacher’s approach to hermeneutics is to see that understanding cannot occur by recourse to some notion of common understanding or common humanity that connects the truths of the past and present. Rather understanding is achieved procedurally, apart from the content under analysis. According to Gadamer, misunderstanding is resolved through the application of “…a canon of grammatical and psychological rules of interpretation, which in even in the mind of the interpreter are quite distinct from commitment to a dogmatic content.”

Says Weinsheimer, “For Schleiermacher…understanding does not mean finding a common sense or sharable content; understanding consists rather in determining how the other has arrived at his opinion by reconstructing its genesis.”

Gadamer suggests that Schleiermacher’s extension of the hermeneutical project is a move to understand “…not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker, that is, the author. Schleiermacher holds that the author can really be understood only by going back to the origin of the thought.”

Gadamer rejects Schleiermacher’s assessment of understanding. Understanding for Gadamer is mutual understanding:

Our starting-point is the proposition that to understand means primarily for two people to understand one another. Understanding is primarily agreement or harmony with another person. Men generally understand each other directly, ie they are in dialogue until they reach agreement. Understanding, then, is always understanding about something.
Schleiermacher’s idea of understanding assumes misunderstanding as the primary position from which understanding is achieved. Understanding, therefore, for Schleiermacher is one-sided. For Gadamer, an attempt to reconstruct the genesis of understanding only achieves understanding of how an other reached his viewpoint, but it doesn’t achieve actual understanding about the subject at hand. Weinsheimer says:

Reconstruction of the other in his otherness and apart from what he means is not the procedure of understanding that Schleiermacher thought; quite the contrary, it is in Gadamer’s view the abandonment of the attempt to come to an understanding, to reach a shared meaning on a topic of common concern. Positing the alterity of the other is a symptom of the failure of understanding, not the principle of its success. For Gadamer, understanding is com-munication: it is either the expression of a common sense regarding a common concern or else the attempt to reach such a commonality.102

Gadamer thinks that Schleiermacher does not recognize that communal tradition is the basis and the goal of understanding. Method, according to Gadamer, will never get us understanding in a deeper sense. The reason for this is that such a methodological notion of understanding “…means…that the structure of thought that we seek to understand as an utterance or as a text is not to be understood in terms of its objective contents, but as an aesthetic construct, as a work of art or ‘artistic thought’.”103 ‘Artistic thought’ means for Schleiermacher those “…life-moments which…remain…individual thought, a free construction unbounded by the being (object)…. What has to be understood…is not a common thought about an object, but individual thought that by its very nature is a free construction and the free expression of an individual being.”104

Weinsheimer points out:
Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic is directed toward reproducing the production of an expression and not to what the expression means—its content—because he considers expression as an aesthetic form. In this respect Schleiermacher follows Kant’s suggestion that the work of art is a free construction of subjectivity, unlimited by the object it represents.105

According to Gadamer, Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic is a failure because it gives up the attempt at understanding truth, i.e., it assumes that aesthetic expressions have no cognitive value. Gadamer thinks that Schleiermacher achieves this shift by a reinterpretation of the basic hermeneutic principle—“to understand a writer better than he understood himself.” Schleiermacher’s interpretation of this principle moves hermeneutics away from any kind of objectivity because,

Schleiermacher’s formula…no longer includes the object itself under discussion, but sees the statement that a text presents as a free production, independent of its knowledge content…. The speech of the individual is in fact a free creative activity…. Language is an expressive field, and its pre-eminence in the field of hermeneutics means, for Schleiermacher, that as an interpreter he sees the texts, independently of their claim to truth, as pure expressive phenomena.106

The interpreter can better understand the writer then he can himself, not because the interpreter can better understand the topic under discussion, i.e., the object of the author’s text, but because the former understands the text, i.e., “what the author meant and expressed” better than the author. Gadamer says, “This understanding can be called ‘better’ insofar as the explicit—and hence worked out—understanding of a statement involves a greater degree of knowledge of its actual contents.”107 Weinsheimer summarizes Gadamer’s estimation of Schleiermacher thusly:
The cognitive value of aesthetic expressions is minimal, and so the criterion for interpreting them is not agreement between author and interpreter concerning a common object but rather psychological reconstruction of the genius of the author, whose individuality is conceived as being opposed to that of the interpreter. The interpreter is not attempting to understand himself or his world, or even both his own life and that of the author, but solely what the author had in mind and how it came to be there. Even if such reconstruction succeeds, however, the interpreter has already given up trying to understand any truth that pertains to him as well.  

Complete understanding of the author’s intent is possible by the “miracle of divination” on the part of the interpreter according to Schleiermacher. Gadamer says, “…Schleiermacher’s particular contribution [to hermeneutics] is psychological interpretation. It is ultimately a divinatory process, a placing of oneself within the mind of the author, an apprehension of the ‘inner origin’ of the composition of a work, a recreation of the creative act.” Gadamer argues that this divination can occur because of “…Schleiermacher’s presupposition…that all individuality is a manifestation of universal life and hence ‘everyone carries a tiny bit of everyone else within himself, so that divination is stimulated by comparison with oneself’.”  

This comparison and divination that is necessary for psychological interpretation achieves an important shift in the justificatory dynamic between the interpreter and the author. The interpreter’s position “…sees every thought construct [of the author] as an element in the total context of a man’s life.” So, the interpreter attempts to contextualize the creation of the work of art and through this process reproduces the original moment of creation. The interpreter
becomes like the author. But this similarity between the author and interpreter is not a "simple identification." Gadamer says,

"Production and reproduction remain essentially distinct operations…. [T]he act of understanding [is] the reconstructive completion of the production. This inevitably makes conscious many things of which the writer may be unconscious…. The mode of creation of the artistic genius is the model on which [Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic] theory of unconscious production and necessarily conscious reproduction is based."\[112\]

The project to understand the author better than he understood himself, with the introduction of the psychological aspect of creation, is achievable. This achievement is accomplished through a diminution of the authority of the author about the meaning of his text. The distance that the interpreter has from the context of the creative act allows her to employ explicit knowledge about that context that the author had implicitly or unconsciously. According to Gadamer, Schleiermacher’s “…idea of production by genius performs an important theoretical task, in that it does away with the distinction between interpreter and author. It makes it possible for both to be placed on the same level….”\[113\]

Schleiermacher’s project to reconceptualize understanding brings with it a reconceptualization of the scope of the hermeneutic project. Schleiermacher accomplishes his psychological interpretation of the author by an interpretive process that is universally applicable. No longer is interpretation limited to classical text or Scripture. This move to a universal hermeneutics “…liberat[es] interpretation from dogma and tradition and convert[s] it into an independent procedure,… [and] aims at an undogmatic interpretation of scriptural dogma and an untraditional interpretation of classical tradition.”\[114\] But this expansion of the scope of
hermeneutics, for the sake of a “scientific” understanding of texts, was founded upon a suspension of the truth of those texts under study. Gadamer says of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, “Neither the saving truth of scripture nor the canonical exemplariness of the classics was to influence a procedure that was able to grasp every text as an expression of life and ignore the truth of what was said.” Gadamer thinks that Schleiermacher does not address the issue of truth in his hermeneutics because he takes truth as a given. Gadamer says, “His hermeneutics, in fact, had in mind texts whose authority was undisputed.” The consequence of Schleiermacher’s assumption and his expansion of the scope of hermeneutics is the undermining of the truth claim of the text. Says Weinsheimer, “Schleiermacher’s theory actually falsifies in practice what it would understand because it suspends, as a matter of methodological principle, not just the truth of the text but its truth claim. This, ultimately, is the effect of psychological interpretation. [My italics.]”

The Historical School

As fruitful as Schleiermacher’s achievement in hermeneutics was, his ideas could not be used as the basis of a “historical organon, a prejudice-free method,” because Schleiermacher’s ideas and goals were limited to the interpretation of biblical texts. Gadamer says of Schleiermacher: “For this reason his hermeneutical theory was still a long way from a historiography that could serve as a methodological organon for the human sciences. Its goal was the exact understanding of particular texts, which was to be aided by the universal character of historical contexts.” According to Gadamer, hermeneutics had to overcome the limitations of the Enlightenment view of universal history in order for it to serve as the “organon for the human sciences.” But hermeneutics was able to overcome this limitation by turning to the insights of the historical school for the understanding of history:
Historians saw their task as that of investigating what has been transmitted, and thus making the past available to the present. The basic scheme, according to which the historical school conceives the methodology of universal history is therefore really none other than that which applies to every text: the schema of the whole and part.\textsuperscript{119}

In other words, historians had to turn to philology.

The need of the historical school for a whole by which to ascribe meaning to historical events was problematic. On the one hand, the historical school lacked a philosophical justification for their rejection of a universal history based in reason. They merely recognized, according to Gadamer, that philology provided a method that allowed for the consideration of the meaning of a text without consideration of a criterion outside the text. The historical school’s use of the basic hermeneutical principle was motivated by a romantic theory of individuality, which was the school’s implicit philosophic foundation. Gadamer thinks that Dilthey was the first historicist to make the assumptions of the historical school explicit:

Dilthey’s logical analysis of the concept of continuity in history is, in fact, the application to history of the hermeneutical principle that we can understand a detail only in terms of the whole text, and the whole only in terms of the detail. We find that our texts are not only the sources, but historical reality is a text that has to be understood. \textit{But in thus applying hermeneutics to the study of history Dilthey is only the interpreter of the historical school.} [My italics.]\textsuperscript{120}

Gadamer thinks that Schleiermacher’s concept of individuality, one basis of his Romantic attempt to reject the Enlightenment, was the impetus behind the historical school’s position of a continuity in history, i.e., a whole history.
The problem, of course, with the notion of a continuous and whole history by which to understand particular events is that history is never complete in the way that one can speak of a complete and finished text. As Gadamer says, “The universal framework of history lacks the self-containedness that a text has for the critic and which, for the historian, makes… [history] into a complete unit of meaning, a text intelligible within itself.”121 Gadamer suggests that it might be the case that hermeneutics cannot fulfill the needs of the historical school for a whole. But as Gadamer points out, “Even the ‘historical school’ knew that fundamentally there can be no other history than universal history, because the unique significance of the detail can be determined only from the whole.”122

Some historians solved this problem by calling for more historical research, i.e., contextualize history in order to understand it. Others proposed that one could look at the ancients and see their achievements as a whole against which to compare the present. (Undoubtedly, the present would never be able to measure up.) Herder proposed that each age had its own perfection. But Herder’s solution was problematic. First, universal (democratic) perfection makes the notion of perfection (á la the ancients) meaningless and second, the insistence on the variety of excellence in each age makes a historical unity impossible. In other words, if each age has its own perfection, then there is nothing that we can point to that ties them together.

Ranke got unity back by showing that all historic present actions are future oriented. A historic event creates a unity of sequential events by giving them intentional futural meaning. But, this futural meaning was limited by those forces that move history, which, according to Ranke, are political states and the “thoughts of God.” Such an approach would be antithetical to the Romantic understanding of the role of the individual in history. In addition, Gadamer thinks
that Ranke’s hermeneutics makes the historian a god by ascribing to her a viewpoint from which to view the scope of history and become fully self-aware. Gadamer says,

[T]he idea of infinite understanding (intellectus infinitus) for which everything exists simultaneously (omnia simul) is transformed into the original image of historical impartiality. It is approached by the historian, who knows that all epochs and all historical phenomena are equally justified before God. Thus the consciousness of the historian represents the perfect culmination of human self-consciousness. The more he is able to recognize the unique indestructible value of every phenomenon, that is, to think historically, the more his thought is God-like.  

Gadamer explains that the historical school’s insistence upon a universal history was the foundation for understanding and self-understanding that is achievable through historical science. But the school rejected Hegel’s explanation of the unity of history as being derived from Spirit, because “…the goal of Spirit is achieved in the perfect self-consciousness of the historical present which constitutes the significance of history as an eschatological self-interpretation which basically destroys history by turning it into a speculative concept.” The school’s rejection of Hegel forced it to become theological, according to Gadamer: “If it was not to do away with its own nature of thinking of itself as continuous research, it had to relate its own finite and limited knowledge to a divine spirit, to which things are known in their perfection. It is the old ideal of infinite understanding applied to the knowledge of history.”

Droysen clarified Ranke’s theological view of the historian. Droysen thought

…the reality of history is [not] pure spirit. To behave ethically involves, rather, not seeing the world of history as a sheer expression of the will or wholly
malleable material. Its reality consists in the constantly renewed effort by the mind to grasp and form the ‘ever-changing finite systems’ to which every actor belongs.  

In other words, to understand the “expressions” of an individual, be they literary, artistic, cultural, political, etc., one must see these expressions in their context. An individual can only be understood as an element of a larger, communal whole. These communal projects are what make individuals historically understandable. Outside these projects individuals do not make historical sense: “The individual, in the contingency of his particular drives and purposes, is not an element in history, but only inasfar [sic] as he raises himself to the sphere of ethical commonality and participates in it. The movement of these ethical forces, which is conceived through the common work of men, constitutes historical development.”

Now, some would argue that such an understanding of human endeavors serves to limit those endeavors to the extreme. In other words, such an understanding of human action limits human freedom by tying human action to necessary preconditions. Gadamer argues that this is not the case: “The movement of history is not an extrinsic limitation to freedom, for it depends not on rigid necessity, but on the movement of the moral powers, to which one is already related. It sets the task, in the performance of which the moral energy of the actor proves itself [My italics].”

Gadamer, and Ricoeur, both will pursue and elaborate upon the consequence of this principle for the possibility of human action and understanding. According to Gadamer, Droysen’s viewpoint of history as the site of human freedom has consequences for any metaphysics of history. Droysen’s understanding of history does not allow for some historical force or power apart from human action to guide or move history in some particular direction. For Droysen, “The moral power of the individual becomes an historical power because it is active in work on the great
common goals…. Hence, power is no longer…an original and direct manifestation of universal life, but exists only in the mediation and only thus comes in to historical reality.”\textsuperscript{129} Gadamer adds that Droysen thinks “…freedom is the fundamental pulse of historical life and does not exist only in historical cases. The great personalities of history are only one element in the progress of the moral world, which is as a whole and in every detail a world of freedom.”\textsuperscript{130}

This insight about the comprehensibility of individual actions applies to the project of the individual historian as well. Weinsheimer says, “[T]he historian raise[s] himself above his own individuality. He achieves impartiality not by epic detachment, aesthetic abstraction, or self-extinction; rather he transcends his own particularity only by involving himself in the communal life of his own time and place—that is, in his own traditions.”\textsuperscript{131} Put differently, the historian does not have to approach her historical subjects with the same methodology of the natural sciences, because she achieves impartiality precisely by grounding herself in her historical, cultural, political, etc. biases, not by trying to remove them prior to her research. As Gadamer paraphrasing Droysen, points out,

\begin{quote}
The historian is defined and limited by his participation in particular moral spheres, his native land and his political and religious persuasions. \textit{But participation depends upon this onesideness} [sic.]. Within the concrete conditions of his own historical existence…he sets himself the task of impartiality. ‘This is his impartiality, namely, that he tries to understand’ [My italics].”\textsuperscript{132}
\end{quote}

This approach makes understanding possible because tradition is what ties the project of the historian to those of her ‘research subjects’. Gadamer explains that the difference between the historical and the natural sciences is the basis for this connection between the historian and
her subjects. In addition to the different procedures of these sciences, their objects are different as well. The objects of history are never unambiguous and clear like those of the natural sciences. As Gadamer puts it, “In order to know, historical research always consults something else, namely tradition, ever afresh and ever fresh tradition. Its answer never has, like the experiment, the clear unambiguity of what has been seen with one’s own eyes.”

This ambiguous object of historical research would seemingly make the object inaccessible to knowledge by the historian, but Gadamer explains that this ambiguity makes the historian much closer to her subject: “Although he does not see his object, as in the clear establishment of the facts by experiment, the historian is connected with it, through the intelligible and familiar nature of the moral world….“ Droysen argues that understanding is possible in the historical sciences because: “‘The possibility of understanding consists in the fact that the utterances that are presented to us as historical material are connatural to us’. ‘In the face of men, human utterances and forms, we are, and feel ourselves to be, essentially similar and in a condition of mutuality.’”

The unity that Droysen propounds between the traditions of the historian and those of her subjects is only “ultimately” actual; it is never actually present. This is the case because of the kind of “evidence” that the historian has: tradition and its expression. As Gadamer points out, “[T]he historian is separated from his object by the infinite intermediacy of tradition.” Droysen thinks that history is understandable, because of its connection to human expressions. Because history is like a text, and because a text is utterly understandable, according to Droysen, history, too, is understandable. This connection between the text and understanding, according to Gadamer, shows that Droysen “…conceive[s] the task of historical research only in aesthetic, hermeneutic categories.” Weinsheimer goes further: “In this respect, Droysen…conceives of
history only in terms of an aesthetic hermeneutics: the aim of the historian is to understand expression—the communal and communicable expressions of historical communities—but not things, not truth.”

Dilthey

Gadamer’s reassessment of the development of hermeneutics and historicism of the late 19th century, in an attempt to demonstrate the possibility of the foundation or discovery of truth apart from or in contradistinction to the human sciences, seems to come to naught with Droysen’s philosophy. As promising as the latter’s thought was for grounding history upon an alternative basis, Droysen’s understanding of historical research as limited to the aesthetic realm ultimately could not be useful for Gadamer’s project. Gadamer looks to Wilhelm Dilthey to show how the attempt to overcome Hegel’s idealism within the constraints of Romantic hermeneutics is ultimately faulty. According to Gadamer, “The tension between the aesthetic, hermeneutic element and that of the philosophy of history reaches its height with Wilhelm Dilthey.” He adds, “Dilthey’s attempt to provide a philosophical foundation for the human sciences seeks to draw the epistemological consequences from what Ranke and Droysen asserted against German idealism.” Dilthey’s assessment of the historical school was that it attempted to combine the incompatible views of empiricism and idealism to arrive at a universal historically objective viewpoint that was not speculative like Hegel’s. Gadamer succinctly explains Dilthey’s problem and project:

If history is considered to be no more a manifestation of mind than is nature [because of a rejection of Hegelian speculative thought], then the knowledge of history becomes as problematic as the knowledge of nature through the constructions of the mathematical model. Thus…Dilthey had to answer the question how historical experience can become a science. Hence…he sought to
discover the categories of the historical world that would be able to support its construction within the human sciences.\textsuperscript{141}

Dilthey thought he could overcome this tension through recourse to experience (\textit{Erlebnis}). Experience, when considered appropriately, seemingly addresses the tension between a universal, objectively necessary viewpoint of history that does not adequately ground itself in actual history with an empiricist viewpoint that grounds history in individuals’ experience, but does not allow for an objective viewpoint that allows for the determination of truth, i.e., necessity, from history. Dilthey thought that a reassessment of experience might solve the dilemma. His understanding of experience is different from that of the human sciences. As Gadamer points out, “[I]n the investigation of nature…verifiable discoveries arising from experience are all that matter, i.e that which detaches itself from the experience of the individual and constitutes part of the reliable stock of experimental knowledge.”\textsuperscript{142} Dilthey proposed an alternative understanding of experience that was grounded in history:

“[T]he structure of the historical world is not based on facts taken from experience which then acquire a value relation, but rather on the inner historicity which belongs to experience itself. It is a living historical process and its paradigm is not the discovery of facts, but that strange fusion of memory and expectation into a whole that we name experience and that we acquire through experiences.”\textsuperscript{143}

Dilthey thought he had addressed the epistemological problem of historical knowledge by this shift in understanding of experience, because historical experience does not need to inquire about the accuracy of that experience with “reality,” in the same way that the natural sciences do: “For the historical world…is always a world that is constituted and formed by the human mind.”\textsuperscript{144}
But the connection between the individual and historical experience, i.e., “the homogeneity of subject and object that makes historical knowledge possible,”145 does not really address the epistemological problem, according to Gadamer.

The epistemological problem that Dilthey had to overcome, thinks Gadamer, is how to explain the move from individual experience to historical knowledge. In other words, how is it possible to go from individuals’ lived experience about which they have direct knowledge to historical knowledge about which no individual can possibly have direct knowledge? Dilthey privileges direct individual experience because in experience “…is where immediate certitude is to be found, for experience is no longer divided into act, ie a becoming conscious, and a content, ie that of which one is conscious. It is rather indivisible consciousness.”146 With experience as his starting point, Dilthey moved to explain how it could serve as a basis for historical knowledge.

The continuity of experience is the basis for the capacity of having experience while at the same time having knowledge of it. Dilthey explained that experience has a structure that unifies it in a manner different from the unity achieved through a temporal or causal explanation: “It is life itself that unfolds and forms itself in intelligible unities, and it is in terms of the single individual that these unities are understood….The continuity of life as it appears to the individual…is created through the significance of particular experiences. Around them, as around an organizing centre, the unity of life is created….“147 Gadamer explains the unifying structure of experience:

[A]n individual…acquires his individuality by developing his talents and experiencing at the same time the conditioning effect of circumstances. What emerges, the actual ‘individuality’, ie the character of the individual, is not a mere
consequence of the causal factors to be understood only in terms of causes, but it constitutes a unity that is intelligible in itself, a unity of life that is expressed in every one of its manifestations and hence can be understood in each of them. Something becomes fused here to form a unique figure, independently of the system of cause and effect. This is what Dilthey had meant by ‘structural continuity’….148

The unity of individual experience is a necessary starting point if Dilthey were to explain how philosophy can arrive at a unified history that can be known.

This continuity of individual experience is not sufficient for the establishment of historical experience, though. Gadamer explains, “The important step for Dilthey’s epistemological groundwork of the human sciences is the transition from the structure of continuity in the experience of an individual life to historical continuity, which is not experienced by any individual at all.”149 Dilthey achieves this move by talking about “logical subjects” rather than “real subjects.” Though this move may seem to align Dilthey’s thought with that of Hegel, the former thinker thinks that such an approach is allowable and does not lead to speculative philosophy, because “…the similarity between individuals—as in the case of one generation or one nation—represents a spiritual reality that must be recognized as such precisely because it is not possible to get behind it in order to explain it.”150 In other words, though no one can ever have the empirical experience of one generation or one nation, philosophers can justifiably speak of them because of the similarity between these logical subjects and individuals.

Dilthey drew from Husserl’s work on intentionality in the latter’s Logical Investigations in order to support his contention. Gadamer says, “Dilthey’s concept of the structural quality of the life of spirit corresponds to the theory of intentionality of consciousness in that this is not
merely a psychological fact but the phenomenological description of an essential determination of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{151} By following Husserl’s phenomenological lead, Dilthey thought he was able to explain the givenness of experience without reference to a purely empirical phenomenon, like immediate experience or the “‗mechanism’ of the psyche.” With Husserl’s intentionality …one can no longer derive continuity from atoms of experience or explain it in this way. Consciousness, rather, is always involved in continuity and has its own being in the conception of it. [Husserl’s thought gave] such concepts as structure and significance…a foundation, although they were not derivable from elements. They were now to be more fundamental than the elements from and on which they were supposed to be built up.\textsuperscript{152}

Though Dilthey draws from Husserl, the former does not hew slavishly to the latter’s thought. Dilthey sees the concepts of intentionality as more than logical; rather, these concepts are an expression of life. Gadamer explains that for Dilthey, “Life itself, flowing temporality, is ordered towards the formation of permanent units of significance. Life interprets itself. It has itself a hermeneutical structure.”\textsuperscript{153} Units of significance like the individual, nations, institutions, etc., are the “givens” of the human sciences, according to Dilthey. Gadamer explains, “It is characteristic of what is given in the human, as against the natural, sciences ‘that one has to discard all ideas of anything fixed or alien, qualities of the images of the physical world, when considering what is given in this field’. Here everything given is created.”\textsuperscript{154}

The importance of Dilthey’s reassessment of Husserl’s thought is that the coherence of historical experience is now possible. Gadamer says, “Dilthey himself has pointed out that we only understand historically because we are ourselves historical beings.”\textsuperscript{155} The fact that humans understand themselves historically means that a human being, “As an historical
being…experiences historical realities; they support the individual; in them he at once expresses and discovers himself. As such they are…objectifications of life.”\textsuperscript{156} Dilthey’s move to make experience coherent and unified through the appropriation of certain aspects of Husserl’s phenomenology served to explain the possibility of historical knowledge by explaining how the individual can understand history because her actions are always already understood historically. There is no experience apart from a historical understanding of it. Of course, if this is the case, then it would seem that the historian is incapable of achieving an objective stance from which to assess and study history. As Gadamer puts it:

Is not the fact that consciousness is historically conditioned inevitably an insuperable barrier to its reaching perfect fulfillment in historical knowledge?...[I]f life is the inexhaustible, creative reality that Dilthey conceives, then must not the constant development of the meaningful context of history exclude any knowledge attaining to objectivity? Is, then, historical consciousness ultimately a utopian ideal, containing an internal contradiction?\textsuperscript{157}

Gadamer contends that Dilthey was constantly concerned about this problem of “…justify[ing] the knowledge of what was historically conditioned as the achievement of objective science, despite the fact of the knower’s being conditioned himself.”\textsuperscript{158} Dilthey thought that his approach to historical analysis did not do away with the historian’s objectivity because historical analysis can overcome its historical conditionality by reflectively assessing its historical conditionality. Because of the self-structuring that history, i.e., experience, performs/achieves it is possible to understand this structure without reference to other criteria. Says Gadamer, “That a structural context could be understood in terms of its own centre corresponded to the principle of hermeneutics and to the insistence of historical thinking that an
age should be understood in terms of itself and not by the criterion of some alien time.”

But this structural understanding of history is based upon the possibility of the historian to
“…overcome the fact that the historical observer is tied to time and place.”

This overcoming of “the prejudices of one’s own time” is possible if one develops a “historical sense.” Dilthey
argues that it is possible for a finite mind to understand and “know” an infinite history, because

Historical understanding…has its firm foundation in the inner totality and infinity
of mind…. [U]nderstanding [is] possible because of the similarity of human
nature through the ages…. [O]ne’s own world of experience [is] the mere starting-
point for an expansion that…fills out the narrowness and fortuitousness of one’s
own experience by the infinity of what is available in the re-experiencing of the
historical world.

In other words, for Dilthey, the subjective viewpoint that the historian finds herself in can be
overcome by “sympathy” with those agents of action in the past (and, one would assume, in the
future.) As Weinsheimer reiterates:

It is in principle possible for a historian of any time to understand any past
whatsoever, because the limitations imposed on him by his own traditions,
customs, and institutions are of a subjective nature only. That is, it is
fundamentally possible to escape them and attain to a knowledge of the historical
object in itself. The finitude of the historian is not a function of the kind of being
he is but rather an accident of history, and a remediable one.

Gadamer questions the validity of Dilthey’s assessment of the sympathy, or similarity,
among different eras of history. Gadamer thinks that in essence Dilthey uses comparative
methods “…to overcome the chance limits set by one’s own range of experience and ‘to rise to
truths of greater universality’.” Gadamer finds this methodology dubious because, “The essence of comparison presupposes the freedom of the knowing subjectivity, which is in control of both members of the comparison. It makes things contemporary as a matter of course.”

Gadamer argues that the only way to achieve objectivity in historical analysis is through an “absolute, philosophical knowledge above all historical consciousness,” i.e., through an absolute Hegelian consciousness. Gadamer contends that historical consciousness is in direct opposition to an absolute philosophical consciousness:

The claim of the philosophical consciousness, to contain within itself the whole truth of the history of mind, is questioned precisely by the historical world-views. This is, rather, the reason why historical experience is necessary; human consciousness is not an infinite intellect for which everything exists, contemporaneous and copresent. The absolute identity of consciousness and object simply cannot be achieved by finite, historical consciousness.

To be fair, Gadamer does explain that, though, Dilthey never explicitly addressed this problem, the latter did provide an indirect response. Gadamer suggests that Dilthey’s conception of historical consciousness was a kind of self-knowledge. By becoming aware of her prejudices, the historian, through a unique form of “mental life,” is able to reflectively become aware of herself:

However indissoluble the ground of historical life from which [historical consciousness] emerges, it is still able to understand historically its own capacity to take up an historical attitude….It no longer simply applies the criteria of its own understanding of life to the tradition in which it stands that it may, in a naive assimilation of the tradition, simply carry it on. Rather it adopts a reflective
attitude towards both itself and the tradition in which it stands. It understands itself in terms of its own history. Historical consciousness is a mode of self-knowledge.\footnote{166}

Gadamer contends that the identification of self-knowledge and historical consciousness requires a fuller account of self-knowledge. Dilthey, according to Gadamer, was concerned with showing the development of self-knowledge up to the development of the natural sciences, always with an eye to show how it occurs “in terms of life.” Weinsheimer says, “If this reflective distance, the objective distance, is not to be an attitude that the historian imposes on history, Dilthey must show that reflection and historical self-consciousness arise in historical life itself. Like everything else, he argues, the objectivity that makes history a science is itself a product of history.”\footnote{167} Dilthey argues that life does have this reflectivity immanent to it; it is just that experience does not reflect upon itself in everyday endeavors. Acts, institutions, moral norms, i.e., cultural expressions, acquire significance, according to Dilthey “…when we distance ourselves from the context of our own activity.”\footnote{168} He argues that this distance, i.e., self-knowledge, occurred long before the advent of the scientific method. One sees this distance in legends, adages, and most especially in art, thinks Dilthey. But this distance is not exclusive to these fields or expressions. According to Dilthey:

>[T]he forms of expression that dominate human life are all forms of objective mind. In language, customs, and forms of law the individual has always been able to raise himself above his particularity. The great shared moral world in which he lives represents something fixed in which he can understand himself in the face of changing, fortuitous nature of his subjective emotions. It is in his
devotion to common aims, in being taken up in activity for the community, that a man is freed ‘from particularity and transience’.\textsuperscript{169}

With this explanation of the immanence of self-reflection in life, Dilthey thinks that he is able to explain how scientific objectivity is merely “the culmination of the natural tendency of life.”\textsuperscript{170} Dilthey is thereby able to claim a “genuine community” between the natural and human sciences. In the same way that the natural sciences attempt to overcome the subjectivity of actual human experience, so do the human sciences. Gadamer explains, “[T]he human sciences endeavour to rise methodologically above the subjective fortuitousness of their own standpoint in history and above the tradition accessible to them, and thus attain the objectivity of historical knowledge.”\textsuperscript{171}

The significance of the conformity of all cultural expressions with the drive to self-knowledge allows Dilthey to affirm that “…the historical scientist is doing no more than life itself does.”\textsuperscript{172} Dilthey thought that this grounding of the objectivity of the historical sciences in life addressed any possible charges of relativism that could arise from his thoughts on the groundedness of knowledge in experience.

According to Gadamer, Dilthey’s constant concern to address charges of relativism in his theory shows that the latter “…was not really able to hold to the logical consequence of his life philosophy against the reflective philosophy of idealism. Otherwise, he could not but have seen, in the objection of relativism, the ‘intellectualism’ that his own beginning from the immanence of knowledge in life sought to undermine.”\textsuperscript{173} Gadamer ascribes Dilthey’s inability to overcome these objections to the latter’s continued commitment “to an earlier form of idealism, namely that of Descartes. On the one hand…life gives rise to certainty and truth; on the other…life must somehow get over itself to attain certain truth…What certainty means here is what Descartes meant by it. The problem is…that for Dilthey reflection leads everywhere to doubt.”\textsuperscript{174}
Gadamer shows this Cartesian universal doubt is present in Dilthey by quoting the latter: “Everywhere life leads to reflection on what is given in it, and reflection leads to doubt. If life is able to assert itself against the latter, then thought can finally attain valid knowledge.” Gadamer contends that such an admission that “reflection leads to doubt” is Dilthey’s acceptance of the Enlightenment position that only knowledge that has overcome this universal doubt can claim to be real knowledge, i.e., only science can claim certainty.

Gadamer argues that Dilthey did not recognize that there are different forms of certainty: “The kind of certainty afforded by a verification that has passed through doubt is different from the immediate living certainty with which all ends and values appear in human consciousness when they make an absolute claim. But the certainty of science is very different from this kind of certainty that is acquired in life.” In other words, because Dilthey ascribed a universal doubt to the reflection inherent in life, he thought that this doubt could only be overcome by a certainty analogous to that of the natural sciences. Gadamer thinks that Dilthey expected “…the overcoming of the uncertainty and uns sureness of life to come not so much from the stability that the experience of life provides, but from science.”

Gadamer contends that in order to support the claim of the equality of both the natural and human sciences, Dilthey turned to Romantic hermeneutics: “…since…it took no account whatsoever of the historical nature of experience.” The basic assumption of Romantic hermeneutics that Dilthey takes on is that the text “…has to be deciphered and its meaning understood…. Every text is strange enough for it to present a problem, and yet familiar enough for it to be fundamentally soluble even when we know nothing of the text but that it is text, writing, an expression of mind.” Romantic hermeneuticists thought that the possibility of understanding was made possible by the absolute contemporaneity of author and interpreter.
Accordingly, “This is the triumph of the interpretive method, understanding the mind of the past as present, the strange as familiar.”\textsuperscript{180} The constant presence of a text that requires interpretation and yet is in essence intelligible, regardless of its historical or cultural distance, creates an object for the “human scientist” that mimics those objects of the natural scientist. Gadamer says, therefore, “Dilthey thought he was performing his task of justifying the human sciences epistemologically, by conceiving the historical world as a text to be deciphered.”\textsuperscript{181} The consequence of Dilthey’s view of the basis of hermeneutics is:

\begin{quote}
\ldots that history was ultimately reduced to intellectual history…. [Hermeneutics becomes] the universal medium of the historical consciousness, for which there no longer exists any other knowledge of truth than the understanding of expression and, in expression, life…. Thus Dilthey ultimately conceives the investigation of the historical past as a deciphering and not as an historical experience.\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

Gadamer argues that such a conception of historical experience, one that does not concern itself with the truth of that experience, is suspect. He argues that Romantic hermeneutics and its philosophical method are not adequate to understanding history. Gadamer argues that historical experience cannot be understood by a method grounded or based in a philosophy that models itself upon the natural sciences. He says, “It is true that one can derive general rules of experience from [historical experience], but their methodological value is not that of a knowledge of law under which all cases could be clearly subsumed. Rules of experience require, rather, the experience of their use and are, basically, what they are only in this use.”\textsuperscript{183} Weinsheimer eloquently explains Dilthey’s position:
Dilthey looks finally to historical method for the ground of truth—not to historical experience, not to the finite, conditioned experience of men who by reason of that finitude are permanently in need of history in order to understand themselves and the truth. Insofar as one sees human finitude as an obstacle to the truth, one will already have missed it, for the truth is: men are historical, conditioned, finite. Method is the attempt to deny that truth, and also the truth about truth which it implies—namely, that truth arises precisely in finite, historical experience.\textsuperscript{184}

Gadamer adds, “In the face of this situation it must be admitted that the knowledge of the human sciences is not that of the inductive sciences, but has quite a different kind of objectivity and is acquired in a quite different way.”\textsuperscript{185} Gadamer argues that if the pull of the natural sciences was sufficient enough to overcome the tendencies of Dilthey’s philosophy against idealism, then it is all the more important “…to describe adequately the experience of the human sciences and the objectivity they are able to achieve.”\textsuperscript{186} He proposes that the insights of phenomenology can be helpful in this resolve.

Gadamer contends that, though other thinkers, like Nietzsche, Bergson, and Simmel, recognized the historical aspect of the experience that the human sciences study, “…the first man to bring to general awareness the radical challenge to historical being and knowledge presented by the inadequacy of the concept of substance was Heidegger. Only through him was the philosophical intention of Dilthey released. [My italics.]”\textsuperscript{187} Gadamer adds though that Heidegger’s work was greatly influenced by Husserl’s analysis of intentionality. Gadamer contends that the more that one studies Husserl’s work on intentionality the more one realizes just how radical a critique of objectivism his work is. Husserl’s research led Dilthey to assert, “… intentional phenomenology has made the mind, as mind, the field of systematic experience
and science and thus totally transformed the task of knowledge. The universality of absolute mind embraces all beings in an absolute historicity in which nature as a construct of the mind also finds its place.”\(^\text{188}\) Gadamer argues that Husserl was always concerned with “the application of his ideas to the problems of the historical sciences.”\(^\text{189}\) Gadamer argues that this concern shows that Husserl’s ideas are immanently associated to Dilthey’s research into experience. In other words, an analysis of Husserl’s work is justified, if only to show how he overcame the limitations of Dilthey’s thought.

The key insight that Dilthey saw in Husserl’s work on intentionality was the distinction between “…consciousness, ‘as an intentional experience’…[and] the real unity of consciousness in experience and…its inner perception.”\(^\text{190}\) This distinction shows that consciousness is not an object for self-reflection, but rather, “an essential co-ordination”\(^\text{191}\) of subject and object. The significance of this coordination in terms of interpretation of historical texts in a broad sense is that it frees the meaning of words from the “actual psychic content of consciousness…. The intention and fulfillment of meaning belong essentially to the unity of meaning….\)”\(^\text{192}\) Weinsheimer clarifies that authorial intent in accord with such an understanding of intentionality refers to more than what the author had in mind when writing. The author’s intent is truth. Therefore,

…analysis of the author’s mind per se always misses precisely what the author had in mind. Psychological analysis, apart from the truth of what is meant, is necessarily incomplete. That consciousness is intentional means that it intends an object. What consciousness intends, what it is conscious of, is not a psychological entity but an ideal unity of all possible experiences. It is meant as
objective. The author’s intention, therefore, is not to be confined within the parameters of the author’s mind.  

Husserl’s phenomenology recognizes that an object is presented for consciousness in many “modes of givenness.” Interestingly, even subjectivity is given in various modes. He explains, “…the ‘I’ as phenomenon is not the ‘inner perception’ of a real ‘I’, nor is it the mere reconstruction of ‘consciousness’, ie the relation of the contents of consciousness to a transcendental ‘I’ pole, but it is a highly differentiated theme of transcendental reflection.” The point that Husserl makes with this understanding of “subjectivity” is that “…there is such a thing as givenness that is not itself the object of intentional acts. Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally merges with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form one flow of experience.” In other words, there is a temporal horizon to experience that frames intention. The present intention is connected to past and future experience. Gadamer contends that Husserl had to consider the constitution of time-consciousness in order to “…draw subjectivity into the investigation of correlation…. [T]he particularity of an experience…is not an ultimate phenomenological datum.” In other words, present experience always implies past and future experience. The meaning of the present refers back and forward in time.

Gadamer explains that this concept of horizon is essential to Husserl’s phenomenology. The horizon of experience allows for a coordination of one’s individual limited intentionality with the whole to which it refers. Gadamer explains, “A horizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further. Thus horizon intentionality, which constitutes the unity of the flow of experience, is paralleled by an equally comprehensive horizon intentionality on the objective side.” In other words, an understanding of the part
brings along with it some kind of understanding of the whole. Gadamer explains that this understanding of the part, i.e., the givenness of any existent, implies an understanding of the whole world, “…and hence brings the world horizon with it.”

He explains that Husserl, in his initial phenomenological work, did not recognize the significance of the “phenomenon of the world,” but in the latter’s later work Husserl attempted to find the connection between the world horizon and intentionality. Gadamer contends that Husserl’s early achievements in *Ideas* were made extremely more problematic by the recognition of the role of the world horizon in intentionality. Gadamer argues that Husserl’s earlier analysis of the conditions for the “eidetic truths of science,” which was the goal of that earlier research, was no longer radical enough because of this recognition of the role of the world horizon.

The inclusion of this role of the world horizon in the phenomenological project leads to

…an intentionality that is fundamentally anonymous, ie not achieved by anyone by name, through which the all-embracing world-horizon is constituted….

Husserl call this phenomenological concept of the world ‘life-world’, ie the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes for us an object as such, but that constitutes the pre-given basis of all experience.”

The life-world is prior, or more fundamental than the a priori concepts of science. Most importantly, the life-world is essentially connected to subjectivity; therefore it “…exists in a movement of constant relativity of validity. The concept…is the antithesis of all objectivism.”

The impossibility of an objective life-world has to do with the fact that the life-world is historically determined. It is “…the whole in which we live as historical creatures. And…in the face of the historicity of experience implied in it the idea of a universe of the possible historical life-worlds simply cannot be carried through.” Because the life-world is infinitely open to the
past, as well as the future, the former cannot enclose a historical universe. In other words, because the life-world points to the horizon of intentionality that is always relative to the concerns of human beings, it cannot encompass or determine a historical unity that could ground that horizon. Gadamer does accede that “…one can enquire into the structure of what embraces all the surrounding worlds that man has ever experienced, and which simply is the experience of the possibility of world, and in this sense we can indeed speak of an ontology of the world.”

But he also explains that this ontology would not in any way found an ontology like that of the natural sciences.

Weinsheimer argues that the philosophical consequences of the life-world lead Husserl to a position very much in agreement with Hegel. Because the phenomenological reduction is supposed to remove all givenness prior to the constitution of experience, “…this reduction includes the pre-givenness of the life world.” There are two possible consequences to this abstraction from the pre-givenness of the life world: 1) eliminate subjectivity in as much as it is codetermined by the life-world or 2) determine that “…the life world is not in fact the basis of all acts of constitution.” Husserl opted for the second consequence. Weinsheimer claims that this choice made Husserl more Cartesian than Descartes. Thereby, “Not the Cartesian ego but the ur-ego of transcendental subjectivity is the absolute to which all else is relative.” In other words, the life-world and its ground, the ur-ego, lead to transcendental idealism, i.e., Hegel.

As close as Husserl was to Hegel’s philosophical position, the former was unable to “do justice to the concept of life” as Hegel had in his philosophy, says Gadamer. Husserl is incapable of adequately addressing the concept of life, even with the concept of the life-world, because of the difficulty in explaining how the inter-subjective historical life-world is constituted by this ur-ego. As Gadamer explains, “It is clear that the life-world is always at the same time a
communal world and involves the existence of other people as well.” Gadamer adds that Husserl does not have the philosophical tools with which to constitute this inter-subjective life-world, though. The former asks: “How can something originate in the pure ‘I’ that has no validity as an object, but itself seeks to be an ‘I’?” As cognizant as Husserl was that the other, i.e., the ‘Thou’, is not included in the “immanent data in reflectively examined consciousness” and that this ‘Thou,’ though it “…does not possess that kind of immanent transcendence that belongs to the objects of the external world of experience…” the ‘Thou’ is independent of the ego, even though the Thou is “understood in terms of the ego.” In other words, “The other person is first apprehended as an object of perception which then, through empathy, becomes a ‘Thou’.” Gadamer argues that this empathetic constitution of the ‘Thou’ “…is still orientated to the interiority of self-consciousness…” thereby is incapable of adequately constituting the life-world. As Weinsheimer explains, “[I]nsofar as [Husserl], like Descartes, begins with other people as objects of perception which only subsequently become other subjects like oneself, Husserl to that extent assumes the alterity of others—that is, the alterity of the world to life and consciousness.”

Heidegger
Gadamer contends that Heidegger was able to overcome the limitations of Husserl’s phenomenology, i.e., the inability to adequately explain the constitution of the inter-subjective historical life-world, i.e., the transcendental idealism of Husserl’s phenomenology, because the former rejected the grounding of experience upon a transcendental subject. Gadamer says:

Under the name of a ‘hermeneutics of facticity’, Heidegger confronted Husserl’s eidetic phenomenology, together with the distinction between fact and essence upon which it depended, with a paradoxical demand. The facticity of there-being, existence, which cannot be based on or derived from anything else, and not the
pure cogito as the essential constitution of typical universality, should represent the ontological basis of the phenomenological position…

Weinsheimer explains that the “facticity of Dasein,” i.e., there-being, should be understood by the fact that knowledge of the world is intimately connected to being in the world. In other words, human existence is characterized by the manner in which Dasein inhabits the world. Weinsheimer explains that this manner of being-in-the-world is analogous to the manner in which one is in love. In other words, Dasein is not in the world in the same way as an object is in the world. Weinsheimer explains, “The world is not an essence, idea, or object of consciousness but rather a fact; and that Dasein exists as being-in-the-world, that it cannot transcend the world to become a pure consciousness, is called the facticity of Dasein.”

Gadamer remarks that Husserl also recognized the need for a demonstration of “the meaning of facticity.” Gadamer says: “…Husserl was able to acknowledge being-in-the-world as a problem of horizon intentionality of transcendental consciousness and the absolute historicity of transcendental subjectivity had to be able to demonstrate the meaning of facticity.” Gadamer adds, though, that Husserl thought that his ur-ego, Ur-Ich, primal I, allows for a conception of facticity is “…itself an eidos, that it belongs essentially to the eidetic sphere of the universal essences.” Gadamer contends that Husserl’s recognition of the tendency of his phenomenological method to solipsism makes it difficult to “…fix the point from which Heidegger could confront the phenomenological idealism of Husserl.” Husserl could argue, according to Gadamer, that Heidegger’s move to a fundamental ontology founded in Dasein and its analysis merely “…mark[s] a new dimension within transcendental phenomenology.” Husserl could have claimed, thinks Gadamer, that Heidegger’s project to make “…the meaning of being and objectivity…intelligible and demonstra[ble] solely in term of
the temporality and historicality of There-being…” is a project that the former thinker could have taken up “…on the ground of the absolute historicity of the ‘proto-I’.” Gadamer adds that Husserl “…would undoubtedly have said that transcendental subjectivity itself had already overcome and done away with all the implications of substance ontology and hence with the objectivism of tradition.” In other words, Husserl could have argued that his phenomenology anticipated and addressed the limitations that Heidegger ascribes to it precisely in the transcendental subjectivity of the ‘proto-I.’ In other words, for Husserl, Heidegger’s critique of the former’s phenomenology is based upon a misunderstanding of the role of the ur-ego in that phenomenology. In other words, Husserl could argue that he and Heidegger are not that different.

Gadamer argues though that the difference between these two thinkers is belied precisely by Husserl’s own admission of his philosophical predecessors and his characterization of his phenomenological project. Gadamer says, “Husserl’s critique of the objectivism of all earlier philosophies was a methodological continuation of modern tendencies, and he regarded it as such.” Gadamer also relates that Husserl saw his project in the light of the prior philosophies of Descartes, Kant, and the British materialists. Husserl, according to Gadamer, saw his project as following in the philosophical footsteps of the “radical self-reflection…that he regarded as the essence of modern philosophy….”

Heidegger, on the other hand, according to Gadamer, saw his project precisely as a move back to the Greeks and not as following in the footsteps of the modern Enlightenment project. Gadamer contends: “[Heidegger] regarded his own work not so much as the fulfilment of a long prepared development as, rather, a return to the beginnings of Western philosophy and the revival of the long-forgotten Greek argument about ‘being’.”
It is worth noting, as well, that Heidegger’s return to the Greeks, though it did foreground the problem of history in fundamental ontology, was not an attempt to provide a “more original grounding of science” nor “an ultimate radical grounding by philosophy of itself”, rather “…the whole idea of ‘grounding’ itself underwent a total reversal.” The reversal is precisely what differentiates Heidegger from Husserl. By questioning the very project of grounding consciousness, Heidegger moved beyond Husserl’s Ur-Ich. Gadamer argues that though Heidegger was concerned with determining being “from within the horizon of time”, he moved beyond that determination. Though “…the structure of temporality appeared as the ontological determining factor of subjectivity…. [I]t was more than that. Heidegger’s thesis was that being itself is time,” says Gadamer. He contends that Heidegger’s thesis on being totally undermined the foundation of metaphysics and the “subjectivism of modern philosophy.” The major significance of Heidegger’s thesis is that “…there is a ‘there’, a clearing in being, ie a distinction between being and beings.” Gadamer thinks that Heidegger’s project of returning to the Greeks was precisely an attempt to reconsider this difference that had “…remained unconsidered in all previous enquiry into the being of beings, indeed, that was concealed by the metaphysical enquiry into being.” According to Gadamer, Heidegger contended that the “forgetfulness of being,” i.e., the covering over of the difference between being and beings was motivated by “…the embarrassment caused by the problem of nothingness. By showing that the question of being included the question of nothingness, [Heidegger] joined the beginning of the end of metaphysics. That the question of being could represent itself as the question of nothingness postulated a thinking of nothingness repugnant to metaphysics.”
Gadamer adds that Heidegger’s “reversal” was not a complete break with transcendental philosophy. Heidegger did approach the question of being from within phenomenology. Gadamer contends that Heidegger

…recognized the unresolved fundamental problem of metaphysics, concealed, in its ultimate culmination, in the concept of mind or spirit as conceived by speculative idealism. In his grounding of the hermeneutics of ‘facticity’ he went beyond both the concept of spirit developed by classical idealism and the thematic of transcendental consciousness, purified by phenomenological reduction.  

Gadamer is quick to add that the project that Heidegger engaged upon with *Being and Time* was not concerned with “…a theory of the human sciences or a treatment of the impasses of historicism.” Though this was the case, Heidegger’s radical work “…was able to move beyond the complications in which Dilthey’s and Husserl’s investigation into the fundamental concepts of the human sciences had become involved.” Gadamer argues that Heidegger’s project was instructive for these concerns of the human sciences precisely because of the advances of Husserlian phenomenological analysis. Husserl, according to Gadamer,

…had abandoned for good the narrow approach of simply enquiring into the methods of the human sciences. His analysis of the life-world and of the anonymous creation of meaning that forms the ground of all experience gave a completely new background to the question of objectivity in the human sciences, making science’s concept of objectivity appear as a particular case.

The significance of Husserl’s attention upon the life-world relative to the human and natural sciences is that such a foundation obliterates the seemingly insurmountable distinction between spirit and nature that these sciences address. Gadamer argues that because of Husserl, “Both the
human and the natural sciences are to be derived from the achievements of the intentionality of
universal life, ie from absolute historicity." Gadamer argues that the difference, or the
advance that Heidegger makes from Husserl’s lead, has to do with the former’s understanding of
understanding. Husserl’s phenomenology showed that scientific understanding was merely a
mode of knowledge, not the epitome of knowledge. Heidegger connected understanding directly
to the manner of being of consciousness. Gadamer says that for Heidegger,

Understanding…is [not], as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of
philosophy over against the naïveté of unreflecting life; it is, on the contrary, the
original form of the realization of There-being, which is being-in-the-world.
Before any differentiation of understanding into the different directions of
pragmatic or theoretical interest, understanding is There-being’s mode of being, in
that it is potentiality-for-being and ‘possibility’.235

Gadamer contends that this difference in viewpoint and approach to understanding made “…the
problems of the human sciences suddenly look very different.”236

Gadamer argues that Heidegger’s move in his phenomenological analysis provides a
new viewpoint from which to consider the problems of historicism. Gadamer says,

The concept of understanding is no longer a methodological concept…[n]or…is
the process of understanding an inverse operation that simply follows behind
life’s tendency towards ideality. Understanding is the original character of the
being of human life itself…. [Heidegger] revealed the projective character of all
understanding and conceived the act of understanding itself as the movement of
transcendence, of moving beyond being.237
Gadamer also argues that Heidegger’s new viewpoint of understanding pushes the hermeneutical conceptualization of understanding. In effect, Gadamer contends that Heidegger’s position transforms the “object” of understanding as understood by hermeneutics. Gadamer thinks that this new viewpoint shows that understanding is truly self-understanding. He says,

Even the understanding of an expression, means, ultimately, not only the
immediate grasp of what lies in the expression, but the disclosure of what is
enclosed within it, so that one knows this hidden part also. But this means that
one knows one’s way in it. *Thus it is true in all cases that a person who
understands, understands himself, projecting himself according to his
possibilities*. … [A]s a result of the existential futurity of human There-being, the
structure of historical understanding appears with its full ontological background.

[My italics.]²³⁸

Gadamer thinks that the significance of Heidegger’s different viewpoint leads to a
reconceptualization of historical knowledge. This reconceptualization sees historical knowledge as framed by, or adapted to, the object under consideration. Significantly, “[T]his object is not a
*factum brutum*, not something that is merely at hand, something that can be established and measured, but it is itself ultimately of the essence of There-being.”²³⁹

Gadamer does insist, though, that this new “object” of knowledge or understanding
…does not mean that there is a resemblance between the knower and the
known….In fact…the coordination of all knowing activity with what is known is
not based on the fact that they are essentially the same but draws its significance from the particular nature of the mode of being that is common to both of them. It consists in the fact that neither the knower nor the known are present-at-hand in
an ‘ontic’ way, but in a ‘historical’ one, ie they are the mode of being of historicalness.²⁴⁰

It is at this point that Gadamer makes his analysis of Heidegger bear fruit. The latter’s insight into the historicality of understanding is useful for addressing the problems of historicism because such a conception of understanding recognizes

…that we study history only insofar as we are ourselves ‘historical’ means that the historicalness of human There-being in its expectancy and its forgetting is the condition of our being able to represent the past…. [C]orrespondence with traditions is as original and essential part of historical finiteness of There-being as is its projectedness towards future possibilities of itself.²⁴¹

Put differently, for Heidegger the fact that history makes any sense to us, i.e., that history has any meaning for us, has to do with the fact that in the same way that we understand and are ourselves in the present by reference to our future goals and projections, so do we understand and are ourselves by reference to the past. Weinsheimer summarizes this insight:

When Dasein understands the meaning of its own being, it understands itself not as an object, something that is; rather it understands what it means to be what Dasein can be. It understands itself as potentiality for being—that is, as possibility and as history….Dasein interprets itself; and its extended understanding, the coming to be of what it can be, is its history….Understanding is not a faculty of apprehension, nor an activity of the conscious subject, but a mode of being, specifically that of Dasein—which never is but is always to be. That it never is (self-present) means that it is always to be interpreted, is always open to interpretation and to a future.²⁴²,²⁴³
Gadamer argues that this conceptualization of understanding means that “…there is no understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure does not function….” In other words, there is no mode of understanding that is capable of standing outside itself in order to “objectively” understand itself. This applies to the natural sciences as much as to the human ones. Gadamer makes clear the significance of this view of understanding:

The general structure of understanding acquires its concrete form in historical understanding, in that the commitments of custom and tradition and the corresponding potentialities of one’s own future become effective in understanding itself. …The main point of the hermeneutics of facticity and its contrast with the transcendental constitution research of Husserl’s phenomenology was that no freely chosen relation towards one’s own being can go back beyond the facticity of this being. Everything that makes possible and limits the project of There-being precedes it, absolutely. This existential structure of There-being must find its expression in the understanding of historical tradition as well…. [My italics.] 

In other words, Heidegger’s insight as to the existential structure of understanding shows that there is a historical aspect to understanding. In other words, there is no timeless, abstract, objective viewpoint that one can take in order to know or understand understanding.

Gadamer quickly points out that this Heideggerian insight into understanding was useful for Heidegger so that he could “…develop from it, for the purposes of ontology, the fore-structure of understanding.” But Gadamer’s project is different from Heidegger’s. Gadamer says, “[O]ur question is how hermeneutics, once freed from the ontological obstructions of the
scientific concept of objectivity, can do justice to the historicality of understanding." Interestingly, Gadamer argues that doing justice to the historicality of understanding will not necessarily lead to a new methodology by which to perform hermeneutical analysis of historical texts and phenomenon. The lessons learned from Heidegger’s insights about the historicality of understanding do not necessarily lead to “…a theory that is applied to practice and the latter now performed differently, ie in a way that is technically correct.” Instead, Gadamer offers the possibility that Heidegger’s ideas could lead at best to a “correction” of the manner in which we understand understanding—“…a procedure that would benefit the art of understanding at most only indirectly.”

If Gadamer is correct in his assessment about the consequence (actually, the non-consequence) of Heidegger’s ideas to the practice of hermeneutics then he must somehow address Hirsch’s implied critique of such a stance: “If we cannot enunciate a principle for distinguishing between an interpretation that is valid and one that is not, there is little point in writing books about texts or about hermeneutics.” According to Weinsheimer, reiterating Gadamer’s point, “Gadamer intends to correct not the ongoing practice of understanding, which is already in good order, but only the way we understand understanding.” But returning to the import of Hirsch’s critique, if Gadamer is not proposing some kind of change in method or practice of understanding, then what is the point of his endeavor? What’s more, Gadamer’s suggestion is not just saying that there is no need to change how we achieve understanding, he also indicates that there is no way to create a method for achieving understanding. But if Gadamer is right, then there is nothing to do, i.e., hermeneutics does not require some revolutionary re-modification in order for it to more effectively and adequately understand historical phenomenon. But Gadamer thinks that there is a difference between understanding
and how we understand understanding: “It is not interpretation but instead our conception of our interpretation that requires alteration.”

This distinction that Gadamer makes between practice and self-understanding is problematic. If interpretation does not need change but our understanding of it does, then that means that there is a disconnect between the two. Such a stance about the difference between understanding and understanding of it suggests,

If it is possible to alter the interpreter’s self-understanding without altering his practice, that can only be because self-consciousness does not govern interpretive practice. This is one of Gadamer’s central theses: to say that the methodization of understanding is ultimately impossible is another way of saying that self-consciousness does not finally control it.

Such a stance is also controversial, because then what is the point of attempting self-understanding if it will not affect what we do? Gadamer’s response is that though self-understanding does not control the process of understanding, it is still better to understand understanding, because what we understand through self-understanding is ourselves, and that “has an effect on everything else we understand.”

Gadamer contends that the hermeneutic circle, as presented and interpreted by Heidegger, is instructive in showing interpretation is not about what should and should not be appropriate interpretation, but only what interpretation is: self-understanding. Gadamer’s explanation of the connection between interpretation and self-understanding is somewhat convoluted, but it does bear fruit in the end. Gadamer begins, after quoting Heidegger extensively about the latter’s understanding of the circle, by suggesting that “…Heidegger works out here…not primarily a
demand on the practice of understanding, but…a description of the way in which interpretation through understanding is achieved.”

Conclusion

In much the same way that Gadamer contends that the historian and interpreter cannot and ought not attempt to escape their historical situatedness in favor of some objective and timeless viewpoint from which to study their respective subject or text, so too does Gadamer look to the tradition of hermeneutics to ground his hermeneutic approach. Of course, Gadamer would not say that the situatedness of the interpreter within a hermeneutical tradition precludes her from looking at that tradition with a critical view. The importance, of course, is to understand that both interpreter and tradition have in view the subject-matter under question, which will allow the truth of the subject-matter to disclose itself, instead of an interpretation that closes off the possibility of this disclosure. In order to more effectively demonstrate how his hermeneutics might allow the disclosure of the subject-matter, i.e., the proper task of hermeneutics, Gadamer analyzes the ideas of several thinkers to show how their ideas might have moved hermeneutics forward in that task, but at the same time had significant shortcomings. Gadamer draws significantly from the ideas of Kant, Husserl and Heidegger to offer alternatives to the hermeneutics that Schleiermacher, Droysen, and Dilthey, among others, put forward. In the next chapter, we will address Gadamer’s proposal of his hermeneutics.
Chapter 3

An Alternative Hermeneutics

Gadamer’s hermeneutics attempts a re-conceptualization of the manner by which we come to know the truth. He recognizes that the natural sciences have come to monopolize any claims to the discovery of truth—so much so that the human sciences have taken up the methods of the natural sciences. But Gadamer proposes that the prejudice against prejudice that we see in the methods of the natural sciences and the human sciences has a history, i.e., there is a tradition behind it. He proposes that the explanation that the human sciences, following the model of the natural sciences, can achieve is not sufficient to provide understanding of their subject-matter: humanity. He argues that in order to achieve understanding the interpreter must take and have a stance from which to perform that interpretation. He explains that this stance or viewpoint that the interpreter takes to her subject-matter provides her a horizon within which to guide her exploration and interpretation. Gadamer also provides an extensive analysis of legal, theological, and literary hermeneutical principles and examples that provide an alternative to the methodologies of the human sciences for the attainment of understanding. Gadamer turns to both Aristotle and Plato to found and provide alternatives to the methodologies of the human sciences.

We closed the previous chapter with Gadamer’s analysis of Heidegger’s ontological analysis of Dasein. Gadamer explains that Heidegger’s analysis of the hermeneutic circle provides an indication of what motivates interpretation: self-understanding. Gadamer’s analysis also pointed out that Heidegger does not give specific ends or goals that are achieved through interpretation, but merely a description of how interpretation might provide understanding.
Gadamer then supplies us with such a description. To begin with, interpretation “…must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought and direct its gaze ‘on the things themselves’…”1 This defensiveness against prejudice is a “constant task” because of “…all the distractions that the interpreter will constantly experience in the process and which originate in himself.”2 The distractions from the “things themselves” occur precisely because “A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for that text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text.”3 According to Gadamer, this whole meaning that the interpreter applies to the text comes, because “…he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning.”4 Finally, the constant revision of this fore-meaning by the process of trying to interpret the text “…is understanding what is there.”5 Gadamer recognizes that Heidegger’s description of the hermeneutic process is more complex than outlined above, but the key insight is that “…interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection is the movement of understanding and interpretation.”6

At this point Gadamer provides further elucidation of the distractions that misguide the interpreter from the “things themselves”: “A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves.”7 Understanding is always an attempt to find confirmation of, or harmony between, these fore-meanings and the things themselves. Gadamer renames “objectivity” this harmony. This is what Gadamer calls the “working out” of the fore-meanings. Fore-meanings “work out” when they no longer obscure the things themselves. He explains:
The only ‘objectivity’ here is the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. The only thing that characterises the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings is that they come to nothing in the working-out. But understanding achieves its potentiality only when the fore-meanings that it uses are not arbitrary.8

The key point here is that understanding occurs when one realizes that one’s fore-meanings are not arbitrarily placed upon one’s understanding of a text. Understanding occurs when the interpreter “…examine[s] explicitly the legitimacy, ie the origin and validity, of the fore-meanings present within him.”9

Of course, the question that must be addressed is how it is possible to examine one’s fore-meanings. How do we know that our fore-meaning of a text is or is not appropriate? Or as Gadamer puts it, “How do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage [of language] and that of the text?”10 Gadamer suggests that one can begin to examine one’s fore-meanings when one is “pulled up short by the text.” Being pulled up short occurs when we are incapable of finding any meaning in a text, or when the meaning that we do derive is different from the one we anticipated. We typically anticipate being able to understand a text. (Why else would we be attempting to read it?) “[W]e make our projections on the basis of a presumed community of meaning,”11 explains Weinsheimer of Gadamer’s position. When our expectations are not met we can either explain the misunderstanding as a lapse in the text or we can reassess our expectations, i.e., our fore-meanings.

Interestingly, the assumption of intelligibility of the text applies not only to the language of the text, but also to its meaning. And it is at this point that understanding a text becomes even more difficult, thinks Gadamer, because “…the fore-meanings that determine my own
understanding can go entirely unnoticed. If they give rise to misunderstandings, how can misunderstandings of a text be recognised at all if there is nothing else to contradict? How can a text be protected from misunderstanding from the start?“\textsuperscript{12}

Gadamer’s response is that we expect to learn something different from what we already know when considering the meaning of a text. Weinsheimer says of Gadamer’s position:

“[W]e read with an openness to the unexpected. Rather than stubbornly persisting in our preconceptions, we stand ready to revise them…because we merely want to know and learn about [the topic under discussion]…. We hold our own opinions open to disconfirmation and place them at risk not because we are neutral but…because we too are interested. The hermeneutic task is to understand the text in terms of its subject matter because it is something that concerns us too [my italics].”\textsuperscript{13}

Gadamer contends that though there are a large variety of valid interpretations of a text, there are some that we can clearly classify as misinterpretations or misunderstandings. Gadamer thinks that unless we are willing to accept the text as saying something to us, i.e., unless we risk ourselves, “…[we] will not be able to place correctly what [we have] misunderstood within the range of [our] own various expectations of meaning.”\textsuperscript{14}

At this point it would seem that Gadamer’s hermeneutics would actually embrace the scientific approach to knowledge. The scientific method privileges an objective stance that attempts an abstraction from one’s prejudices in order to more accurately assess the object under study. But Gadamer’s position is more nuanced than this. Weinsheimer suggests, following Gadamer, that the openness that we have to disconfirmation of our prior expectations,
…does not mean that we present ourselves as a blank slate…. Because we are concerned and interested, our receptivity implies that we are wiling to integrate the meaning of the text with our previous preconceptions by making them conscious, bringing them into view, and assimilating them to what the text reveals. Only if we are not disinterested can we take—and the text give—offense, so that our prejudices emerge into the open, and we thereby become able to understand the things themselves."¹⁵

Gadamer thinks that neutrality, i.e., doing away completely with our preconceptions, does not allow us to understand the text because it removes us from a genuine interaction with the text. Non-neutrality, on the other hand, allows for the “…conscious assimilation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.”¹⁶ Gadamer concludes, “It is not, then, at all a case of safeguarding ourselves against the tradition that speaks out of the text but, on the contrary, to keep everything away that could hinder us in understanding it in terms of the thing. It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to the language that speaks to us in tradition.”¹⁷

Gadamer contends that the resistance to the notion that prejudices are necessary for understanding, i.e., that we reject an understanding that is achieved through the lens of prejudice, is derived from a prejudice of the Enlightenment—a prejudice against prejudice. Gadamer argues that the purely negative connotation of prejudice did not exist until the Enlightenment. The term originally denoted a “provisional legal verdict before the final verdict is reached.”¹⁸ Obviously, this kind of preliminary judgment could be disadvantageous to a defendant, but this does not mean that the prejudice was unfounded opinion—the connotation that the term achieved
during the Enlightenment. As Gadamer puts it, “It is only its having a basis, a methodological justification…that gives a judgment its dignity. The lack of such a basis does not mean, for the Enlightenment, that there might be other kinds of certainty, but rather that the judgment does not have any foundation in the facts themselves, i.e. that it is ‘unfounded’.”

Gadamer argues that modern science established our present understanding of truth from this assessment of prejudice that derived from “…the rule of Cartesian doubt of accepting nothing as certain which can in any way be doubted, and the idea of the method that adheres to this requirement.”

Gadamer thinks that the main problem with this prejudice is that such a prejudice “…deprives tradition of its power.” If one equates method with truth then history can no longer be a source for truth. One arrives at a situation where

…either the historical study of traditions must be considered as a study of mere opinions or outright falsehoods, or else the historian must suspend his prejudices and thereby break with his own traditions precisely in order to understand them.

In either case, objective historiography denies that history is itself a source of truth [my italics].

Gadamer thinks that by overturning the negative assessments of prejudice by the Enlightenment that it might be possible to “…harmonise the historical knowledge that helps to shape our historical consciousness…” with an understanding of truth that is more adequate than that of modern science.

A History of Prejudice

Gadamer begins his attack upon the Enlightenment understanding of prejudice by placing the origin of such an assessment squarely at the feet of Kant. Though Gadamer thinks that there are two sources for prejudice—over-hastiness and uncritical acceptance of authority—he thinks the latter is most at fault for the prejudice against prejudice of the Enlightenment. The call to
arms that led the Enlightenment—according to Gadamer, Kant’s principle to have the courage to trust one’s own understanding—was the linchpin behind the movement’s negative assessment of authority. According to Gadamer, this guiding principle was directed primarily at the Christian tradition and the unquestioning acceptance of the authority of the Bible. But this guiding principle motivated the Enlightenment project beyond the religious realm. This is so because the Enlightenment saw reason and not tradition as the final source of authority. The Enlightenment’s dream of human perfectibility was premised upon the understanding that human understanding could only progress so long as human society moved further and further from myth, i.e., human progress was based upon “the conquest of mythos by logos.” But Gadamer rejects the Enlightenment assumption that reason and tradition are on a historical course of separation or even that the two must be separated if the Enlightenment project is to be achieved: “In the past, as in the present, tradition and reason are, as they have always been, indissolubly joined.”

Gadamer points out that the Romantic rebellion against the Enlightenment, though the former celebrated a return to the past, did not achieve the doing away with such thinking. In fact, according to Gadamer, Romanticism “…actually perpetuates the abstract contrast between myth and reason.”

Gadamer asserts that Romanticism was the impetus behind “…the attitude of the historical science of the nineteenth century.” He says,

The historical science of the nineteenth century is [the Enlightenment’s] proudest fruit and sees itself precisely as the fulfilment of the enlightenment, as the last step in the liberation of the mind from the trammels of dogma, the step to the objective knowledge of the historical world, which stands as an equal besides the knowledge of nature achieved by modern science.
The drive in Romanticism to retrieve and revive the past led to historicism’s view of tradition. According to Gadamer, “[I]t is an established fact for the enlightenment that all tradition that reason shows to be impossible, ie nonsense, can only be understood historically, ie by going back to the past’s way of looking at things….“28 The radicalization of the Enlightenment project by the historical sciences is understandable considering the tendency of cultural phenomenon to move beyond their original realms of application. But Gadamer questions this expansion of the Enlightenment project beyond the natural sciences. He doubts that the eradication of prejudice in the human sciences as in the natural sciences is even possible. He suggests, in fact, that reason itself has limits that make it impossible to stand outside these prejudices. He even proposes that the Enlightenment’s privileging of objective reason as the sole route to the expansion of human freedom is mistaken. He says:

Does the fact that one is set within various traditions mean really and primarily that one is subject to prejudices and limited in one’s freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, then the idea of an absolute reason is impossible for historical humanity.

*Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, ie it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates* [My italics].29

Gadamer argues that such a view of human understanding and the role that reason plays in its attainment drastically changes the capacity of the historical sciences to adequately explain human history. Historical science, with its Enlightenment influence, sees history as motivated and explained by reference to the individual human and “his own creations.” In other words, Enlightenment-influenced historical research explains the progress of humanity by reference to
the “genius” of individuals. Put pithily: history belongs to us; we make history. Gadamer argues that such an understanding of history fails to adequately explain the influence of historical realities upon individuals. He opines:

In fact history does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.  

Gadamer thinks that this is where hermeneutics might be useful in understanding and providing a reassessment of tradition and its accompanying prejudices. The fundamental question that he thinks needs to be asked is: “Where is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of the critical reason to overcome?” He proposes that the answer to these questions is possible once “…a fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices…” is achieved. Such a rehabilitation is also necessary “…if we want to do justice to man’s finite, historical mode of being.”

Gadamer begins this rehabilitation by performing a genealogy of the Enlightenment understanding of prejudice. He finds the source of this understanding in Descartes and Schleiermacher. For Descartes, the sources of prejudice, considered negatively, are over-hastiness and authority. He considered the main source of error to be the former, because authority “…is responsible for one’s not using one’s own reason at all,” whereas, over-
hastiness could be overcome by “a methodologically disciplined use of reason.” Gadamer contends that the Enlightenment derives its source from Luther’s attempt at reformation of the Catholic Church and the questioning of Aristotelian philosophy. Gadamer says, “The reformation, then, gives rise to a flourishing hermeneutics which is to teach the right use of reason in the understanding of transmitted texts.” So, hermeneutics derives its modern instantiation from the resistance against unreasonable interpretations forced upon believers by tradition and authority.

Gadamer is quick to point out that the questioning of tradition and authority does not automatically imply its rejection. He explains that there were some thinkers of the Enlightenment who held out the possibility of “…reconciliation between reason and biblical authority.”

Obviously, though, the Enlightenment moved beyond such a stance to “the subjection of all authority to reason.” This position of the Enlightenment, according to Gadamer, served to shift the central concern of hermeneutics from over-hastiness to authority in its assessment of the cause of error. Gadamer contends that Schleiermacher “…places the lasting prejudices due to narrowness of view beside the momentary ones due to overhastiness, but only the former are of interest to someone concerned with scientific method.” In essence, according to Gadamer, Schleiermacher altered “the traditional division of prejudices” by focusing on those that are motivated by authority. By Schleiermacher’s time, the Enlightenment had achieved the complete discounting of authority by interpreting any recourse to authority as “an individual limitation of understanding.”

But Gadamer thinks that this assessment of authority by the later Enlightenment is not justifiable. He says,
That the prejudices that determine what I think are due to my own narrowness of vision is a judgment that is made from the standpoint of their dissolution and illumination and holds only of unjustified prejudices. If, contrariwise, there are justified prejudices productive of knowledge, then we are back with the problem of authority. Hence the radical consequences of the enlightenment, which are still contained in Schleiermacher’s faith in method, are not tenable. [My italics.] \(^3^8\)

Gadamer continues his argument against the denigration of authority by the Enlightenment by pointing out that, though the difference that the movement made between authority and reason is tenable, the Enlightenment’s exclusion of authority as a source of truth is a serious oversight. He points out that Descartes himself “…excluded morality from the total reconstruction of all truths by reason.” \(^3^9\) Gadamer contends that the extremism of the Enlightenment led to a deformation of the understanding of the concept of authority. He argues that because of the connection that the Enlightenment made between freedom and the use of reason, it came to see “…the concept of authority …as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience.” \(^4^0\)

Gadamer holds, though, that authority is not at all about blind obedience. Rather, he suggests that the essence of authority is the recognition and knowledge of the superiority of judgment and insight of those whom we ascribe with authority. He says,

“This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed, but is acquired and must be acquired…. It rests on recognition and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, accepts that others have better understanding…. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge.” \(^4^1\)
The consequence of such an understanding of authority is to see that submission to it rests upon recognition of the truth of authority, rather than its irrationality or arbitrariness. Gadamer suggests that the authority that one ascribes to a teacher, expert, or superior is based wholly on the recognition of the truth of their knowledge. Gadamer thinks that the prejudices that these superiors instill are legitimated by the person who receives them. He says of these prejudices, “Their validity demands that one should be biased in favour of the person who presents them. But this makes them then…objective prejudices, for they bring about the same bias in favour of something that can come about through other means, eg through solid grounds offered by reason.”

In essence, according to Gadamer, one can look to authority and tradition as sources of truth and not as limits to one’s freedom and use of reason, because one uses rational judgment to accept and legitimate the truths of authority—truths that one would have arrived at in any case. Submitting to authority is merely a shortcut to the same point. Put another way, Gadamer sees the submission to authority of tradition as a “rational recognition of the finitude of one’s own reason.” Gadamer contends that this attitude can overcome the prejudice of the Enlightenment against tradition and authority and thereby return them to their appropriate status as sources of truth.

This stance that Gadamer has toward tradition and authority is precisely the source of the critiques lodged against him by critical theorists. Gadamer seems unwilling to accept the possibility that tradition and authority may have ulterior motives behind the maintenance of certain prejudices, i.e., that authority and tradition may actually cover over certain truths. An attitude toward these institutions such as Gadamer’s would be incapable of discovering those truths, precisely because such an attitude is bias in favor of the prejudices of authority and tradition. In other words, critical theorists maintain that Gadamer’s hermeneutics does not allow
for the critique of ideology. Considering that philosophy has been at the forefront of uncovering truths that have been covered over by the inertia of popular opinion, the coercion of powerful elites, and the errors of both, it would seem irresponsible to hold out a hermeneutical philosophy that seems aligned with the maintenance of those delusions and dissimulations. In fact it would seem that such a hermeneutics turns its back on the very history and tradition that motivated the development of Western philosophy: the heroic life and death of Socrates. This oversight is precisely what Ricoeur’s hermeneutics overcomes and addresses. But before getting to that, we must give Gadamer his due credit.

Authority and Tradition

Before moving on, it is important to understand why it is that Gadamer so easily identifies authority and tradition. He easily interchanges between one and the other based upon the Romantic assessment that “…tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted—and not only what is clearly ground—has power over our attitudes and behaviour.” He explains that, for example, the validity of the morals of a society is not self-referentially grounded nor is it based upon the insight of each individual who rationally recognizes their validity. Their validity is based on a tradition that “…has a justification outside the arguments of reason and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes.”

It is worth noting that, though Gadamer accepts this Romantic assessment of tradition—in fact, he will use this assessment to move his discussion to the issue of tradition—he explains that this assessment also is problematic. Gadamer takes issue with the Romantic assessment of tradition, because “Romanticism conceives tradition as the antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature.” The Romanticists saw tradition, regardless of one’s stance towards it—critical or conservative—as the opposite of reason,
precisely because it “…does not require any reasons, but conditions us without our questioning it.” Gadamer rejects this antithetical understanding of tradition and reason.

Gadamer’s basic position about the lack of an antithesis between tradition and reason is that tradition is not imposed upon us, but rather, it is freely chosen, i.e., reason allows us to freely accept and maintain tradition. He says,

The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what has existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one.”

The point that Gadamer tries to make here is that though we tend to see change, i.e., revolution, as an action that is rationally determined and chosen and see the maintenance of what has come before as determined more by emotion or nostalgia, he argues that preservation is equally determined and chosen rationally. He says, “[P]reservation is as much a freely-chosen action as revolution and renewal.”

This view of tradition and its basis in reason is significant for the understanding of historical research because it might be possible to see that it is not necessary to overcome prejudice for the sake of achieving truth in history. Historical research with prejudices intact can hand down history and tradition. In fact such a view of tradition might allow for a revaluation of tradition within the human sciences as a whole. Gadamer says,

Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the attitude we take as historical beings to the past. In our continually manifested attitude to the past, the main feature is not…a distancing and freeing of ourselves
from what has been transmitted. Rather, we stand always within tradition, and this in no objectifying process, ie we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar….”

Gadamer goes so far as to suggest that this understanding of tradition and the attendant reassessment of the methodology of the human sciences might actually have something to say to the natural sciences as well. He asks, “[D]oes ‘unprejudiced science’ have more in common than it realizes with that naïve openness and reflection in which traditions live and the past is present?”

Gadamer suggests that historical research is connected to tradition, because “…it lets itself be addressed by tradition.” This address has to do with the fact that historical research is influenced by tradition in the very determination of its object. Gadamer argues that the determination of a historical phenomenon for study is different from that process in the sciences. He explains that for the natural sciences there is no point to learning what prior scientists thought about disproved theories to explain phenomena. That a scientist might study this history will not in any way affect the truth or significance of the theories that are presently ascendant. Gadamer does accede that science is affected by tradition in that “…particular lines of research are preferred at particular places. But scientific research as such derives the law of its development not from these circumstances, but from the law of the object that it is investigating.” The situation for the human sciences is quite different. In historical research there is much worth in revisiting the ideas and work of prior thinkers, writers, historians, etc. The reason for this is that whatever historical phenomenon we are studying
…appears truly significant only in the light of him who is able to describe it to us properly. Thus it is certainly the subject that we are interested in, but the subject acquires its life only from the light in which it is presented to us. *We accept the fact that the subject presents itself historically under different aspects at different times or from a different standpoint.* [My italics.]*"\(^{55}\)

This aspect of the object of study in the human sciences, the historical sciences in particular, explains why it is that one would prefer to study a major text of a historian whose histories have been superceded by new historical information. This is so because the manner in which the ancient histories account of the past is part of the past that we wish to study and understand.

Gadamer explains that the interest in the histories of the past and the determination of appropriate objects for historical study derives from the different “object” of the human sciences. He argues that we must recognize that the object of historical research definitely does exist, but it is not one from which we can separate ourselves: “It does exist in relation and mediation, and only there. The past exists always and only in relation to its future. For this reason, there is no object in itself to which historical research is directed or in terms of which it could be evaluated.”*^{56}\) Gadamer proposes that an objective history is impossible because without some prejudice the motivation behind the research—the attainment of understanding—would not have existed. Objectivity would not have made Gibbon a better historian; it would merely have made him not a historian. The object of history and the human sciences is different from that of the natural, because “…the interest in tradition is motivated in a special way by the present and its interests. The theme and area of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the enquiry. Hence historical research is based on the historical movement in which life itself stands and cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which it is enquiring.”*^{57}\)
Gadamer provides an example of historical understanding that is not based in a concept of objectivity, yet still provides knowledge—the classical. Gadamer suggests that an appropriate understanding of ‘the classical’ in history can help us see how historical research is guided by prejudice, yet still produces knowledge. He will argue that it is possible for “…the human sciences to detach [themselves]…from the model of the natural sciences and to regard the historical movement of whatever [they are] concerned with not simply as an impairment of [their] objectivity, but as something of positive value.”

Gadamer provides a history of the notion of “the classical” to show how this concept might be helpful in a reassessment of the methodologies of the human sciences. The point that he makes at the end of this history is that though historical research has moved away from an understanding of “the classical” as some kind of normative concept by which to study changes in thought, art, politics, etc. to an understanding of the concept that denotes a particular time period of history without any notion of a “suprahistorical value” that is signified by the concept, there still exists a normative component to ‘the classical.’ Gadamer contends:

[T]he classical is a truly historical category, precisely in that it is more than a concept of a period or an historical stylistic one and that yet it does not seek to be a suprahistorical concept of value. It does not refer to a quality that we assign to particular historical phenomenon, but to a notable mode of ‘being historical’, the historical process of preservation that, through the constant proving of itself, sets before us something that is true…. The classical is what resists historical criticism because its historical dominion, the binding power of its validity that is preserved and handed down, precedes all historical reflection and continues through it.
The normative component that Gadamer ascribes to the classical is not the same as a timeless eternal form that sets a criterion by which to measure all other ages and historical phenomena. Rather, the normative aspect of the classical has to do with the enduringness of those expressions of the classical. He says,

The classical is fundamentally something quite different from a descriptive concept used by an objectivising historical consciousness. It is a historical reality to which historical consciousness belongs and is subordinate…. [I]t is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and is independent of all the circumstances of time…a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other age.60

The enduringness of the classical gives it a normative aspect. But the normativity is not achieved by an objectifying move of consciousness. Rather, Gadamer argues that the enduringness of the classical, its normative quality, is achieved precisely because it informs the stance of the historian, i.e., the classical speaks to the present. Gadamer argues:

[U]ltimately…the classical is what is preserved precisely because it signifies and interprets itself; ie that which speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past, a mere testimony to something that still needs to be interpreted, but says something to the present as if it were said specially to it. What we call ‘classical’ does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its own constant communication it does overcome it. The classical, then, is certainly ‘timeless’, but this timelessness is a mode of historical being.61

The point that Gadamer makes here is that the manner by which the historian is to understand the classical is not by trying to recreate the past in order to somehow recapture it, rather she must
merely accept the possibility that the classical may make a claim to truth that speaks directly to
the historian. He says, “[Ou]r understanding will always be more than the mere historical
construction of the past ‘world’ to which the world belongs. Our understanding will always
include consciousness of our belonging to that world. And correlative to this is the fact that the
world belongs to our world.”62 The timelessness of the classical, its capacity to serve as a
normative model by which to understand historical and present phenomena derives from the
classical’s capacity to say something to those time periods, i.e., to be part of those eras. The
truth of the classical derives not from its position as an eternal objective stance from which to
assess history but from its capacity for interplay and dialogue with history.

The significance of Gadamer’s understanding of the classical as an example of
knowledge achieved through prejudice is to see that “[u]nderstanding is not to be thought of so
much as an action of one’s subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of
tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in
hermeneutical theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of process, a method.”63

Weinsheimer also draws out a consequence of Gadamer’s understanding of historical
interpretation. Weinsheimer points out that the fusion of the past and present cannot be limited
to just the classical and the present. He says that if this is true, then

…we will not be able to conceive of historical movement as the movement of
events alone while the understanding of them remains fixed and static. Rather,
understanding, the valid knowledge gained from and in history, changes too; and
such change is not the result of remediable accidents due to the subjectivity of the
historian. It results rather from his mode of being—from his own being historical
and belonging to tradition.64
The payoff for all this discussion of the belongingness of the interpreter to tradition is
that Gadamer is able to offer an alternative hermeneutics to that of Romanticism and he is able to
describe understanding in a manner that is opposed to that of objective science. Most
importantly, Gadamer’s ideas about the truth of tradition and its necessary presence in
interpretation offer an alternative for how an interpreter is to overcome prejudices that do not
produce genuine understanding.

An Alternative Hermeneutics

As for the alternative hermeneutics, Gadamer proposes that the hermeneutics that had
arisen from Schleiermacher needs reassessment. Specifically, Gadamer thinks that the
understanding of the hermeneutic circle and its attendant theories about the proper method of
interpretation must be overturned. The hermeneutic circle derives from the basic hermeneutical
principle that “…we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of
the whole.” 65 This principle creates a circular relationship between the terms that conceivably
could lead to difficulties in interpretation of texts. This difficulty derives from the fact that in
order to hope to understand the whole of a text we must understand the details of the text that can
only be understood in reference to the whole text that has yet to be understood. The difficulty of
interpretation is addressed though, if we understand that hermeneutic interpretation is possible if
there is a constant to and fro between the whole and the part under question. Gadamer says,
“Our task is to extend in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. The harmony of
all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this
harmony means that understanding has failed.” 66

Gadamer contends that Schleiermacher’s understanding of the hermeneutic circle and the
latter’s approach for overcoming the difficulties of the hermeneutic circle and the demands of a
scientific method are inadequate. Gadamer reports that Schleiermacher established a distinction
between the subjective and objective approach to the hermeneutic circle. Gadamer quickly dismisses the subjective analysis by pointing out, “When we try to understand a text, we do not try to recapture the author’s attitude of mind but…we try to recapture the perspective within which he has formed his views. *But this means simply that we try to accept the objective validity of what he is saying.* [My italics.]”67 The move to the objective account of understanding in Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics is no advance, though, according to Gadamer. The reason is that “…the goal of all communication and understanding is agreement concerning the object. Hence the task of hermeneutics has always been to establish agreement where it had failed to come about or been disturbed in some way.”68 Gadamer argues that Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics fails to achieve this agreement. Rather, it applies historical interpretation in order to get a complete, i.e., objective, understanding of a text. Gadamer thinks, “It is something qualitatively new when romanticism and Schleiermacher ground a universal historical consciousness by no longer seeing the binding form of tradition, from which they come and in which they stand, as the firm foundation of all hermeneutical endeavour.”69 Because Schleiermacher and those after him saw the goal of hermeneutics to be the attainment of an objective understanding of historical phenomenon and of texts, they had to discount the claims of tradition to truth. Gadamer contends that the aforementioned thinkers “…conceive the task of hermeneutics in a way that is formally universal. They were able to harmonise it with the natural sciences’ ideal of objectivity, but only by ignoring the concretion of historical consciousness in hermeneutical theory.”70 As Weinsheimer puts it,

[Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics assumes] that the circular method finds its perfection in the elimination of prejudices no less than the Cartesian method that suspends them from the outset. Thus the method supposed to be typical of
hermeneutics ultimately denies the historicity of the interpreter no less than the method supposedly typical of the natural sciences. Both assume that there are no true prejudices, that prejudices are subjective accidents, that they are finally or at least remediable, that objectivity is therefore possible, and this it is certainly desirable.\(^71\)

Gadamer at this point takes up Heidegger’s insights about the hermeneutic circle in order to offer an alternative account of it. Rather than accept the possibility of interpretation overcoming the hermeneutic circle and thereby achieving full understanding of the text as Schleiermacher contends, Heidegger proposes that “…the understanding of the text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding. The circle of the whole and the part is not dissolved in perfect understanding but, on the contrary, is most fully realised.”\(^72\) In other words, interpretation of a text always assumes that the interpreter approaches the text with prejudice(s). Also, the understanding of a text is never complete because the interplay between the whole and the part is never fully closed.

Another aspect of Heidegger’s hermeneutic is the realization that the application of the “subjective” prejudices by which one interprets a text are not subjectively nor objectively applied, rather it is the case that prejudices are the condition for the possibility of any understanding at all. Gadamer says, “The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the communality that binds us to the tradition.”\(^73\) The application of seemingly subjective prejudices is not subjectively chosen; rather their application is the result of contingent qualities of our existence in the world. Gadamer adds that, though they are not chosen, the application of these prejudices is also not objective. He explains that our connection to tradition is not a relationship of blind
acceptance and rote application, rather “Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves.”74 The fact that tradition, i.e., prejudice, is applied neither subjectively nor objectively in interpretation shows that “…the circle of understanding is not a ‘methodological’ circle, but describes an ontological structural element in understanding.”75

Gadamer contends that a consequence of this understanding of the process by which interpretation proceeds shows that interpretation always occurs with anticipation that the matter in question is wholly intelligible. He calls this the “fore-conception of completion.” The consequence of this anticipation is that “…when we read a text we always follow this complete presupposition of completion, and only when it proves inadequate, ie the text is not intelligible, do we start to doubt the transmitted text and seek to discover in what way it can be remedied.”76 Gadamer explains this concept of fore-conception of completion basically to be an expectation of the truth of the text under consideration. He explains that only when the assumption of truth is undermined by something in the text do we then attempt to “explain” the text historically or psychologically. He says, therefore, “The anticipation of completion, then, contains not only this formal element that a text should fully express its meaning, but also that what it says should be the whole truth.”77

Gadamer thinks that the import of this anticipation of completion and truth for hermeneutics is that it “…must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a relation to the object that comes into language in the transmitted text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition out of which the text speaks.”78 Interestingly, and very notably (considering most interpreters understanding of Gadamer’s thought) Gadamer contends
that there is some tension involved in the hermeneutical taking up of tradition. He thinks hermeneutics must maintain a certain tension between familiarity with and alienation from the text under interpretation. He says, “The place between strangeness and familiarity that a transmitted text has for us is that intermediate place between being an historically intended separate object and being part of a tradition. The true home of hermeneutics is in this intermediate area.”

At this point, Gadamer’s discussion bears fruit in terms of explaining how the interpreter is to go about her task. Gadamer stresses that the significance of his discussion about the anticipation of completion and the space of hermeneutics shows that hermeneutics cannot prescribe a particular method by which interpretation must occur to achieve truth. The goal of hermeneutics is “merely” “…to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place…. The prejudices and fore-meanings in the mind of the interpreter are not at his free disposal. He is not able to separate in advance the productive prejudices that make understanding possible from the prejudices that hinder understanding and lead to misunderstanding.”

Gadamer does not expect any interpreter, historian, or other human scientist to be content with such a situation. If it were impossible to separate productive from unproductive and misleading prejudices then there would certainly be very little motivation for attempting interpretation of a text. One would have to be satisfied with tradition alone. The central consideration here is that the separation of the two cannot occur prior to interaction with the work or issue at hand. Gadamer contends that this separation is possible because of temporal distance between the time of the creation of the work and that of the interpreter. Such an understanding of the process by which interpretation occurs is in direct opposition to romantic hermeneutics. Romantic hermeneuticists considered understanding of a text to be achievable
through a reproduction of the original work, i.e., through a reconstruction of the historical conditions and environment under which the author created the text. Only then could one be able to achieve understanding of the genius of the author. Through this reconstruction and because of the distance in time between that of the author and the interpreter’s, the interpreter could reasonably achieve an understanding of the text that is actually better than that of the author.

Gadamer enters the fray here maintaining that the better understanding of a text occurs not because the interpreter understands the author and the accumulated understanding of the text achieved through tradition, but because there is “…an inevitable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by the historical distance between them. Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text is part of the whole of the tradition in which the age takes an objective interest and which it seeks to understand itself. [My italics.]”

The consequence of this way of viewing the process of interpretation is that the author loses her authority over the text. Gadamer says, “The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and whom he originally wrote for. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always partly determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history.”

The significance of this point is what places Gadamer’s hermeneutics beyond that of the romantics. Gadamer contends that this movement of understanding beyond the author’s intended meaning is not a phenomenon that occurs only when a particularly insightful and brilliant interpreter interacts with a particular text. This new understanding is always the case. Gadamer argues that this constancy of different meanings of an interpreted text should lead us to see that “…understanding is not merely a reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well.”
Gadamer also qualifies the status of this new understanding of the meaning of a text. He thinks that it is better to see this new understanding as merely different from that of the author’s and those of ages prior to the interpreter’s. New understanding that is achieved because of temporal distance is not better than that of the author, it is merely different.

Temporal Distance

At this point Gadamer gives the significance of this new way of understanding understanding. He says, “Because what we are now concerned with is not individuality and what it thinks [in the manner of the romantic hermeneuticists], but the objective truth of what is said, a text is not understood as a mere expression of life, but taken seriously in its claim to truth.” By recognizing that the meaning of a text is not merely what the author intended, but is also derived through the interaction between the text and the interpreter we come to recognize that the text must be approached as if speaking to the interpreter. The interpreter cannot hold back in the hopes of maintaining some kind of objectivity to more effectively determine the meaning of the text.

Furthermore, according to Gadamer, the temporal distance that exists between the author’s intended meaning and that of the interpreter does not need to be and should not be overcome. Gadamer thinks that Heidegger’s insights about temporal distance being the result of the ontological condition of Dasein shows precisely that understanding a text does not require attempting to suppress the accretions of tradition. Gadamer says, “In fact the important thing is to recognize the distance in time as a positive and productive possibility of understanding. It is not a yawning abyss, but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.”

Gadamer does stress that this restriction against overcoming temporal distance does not place him in agreement with some historians who hold that interpretation can only occur under
this same constraint. These historians safeguard historical distance because they think that it can allow the objective meaning of the text to appear by separating the text from the “fleeting circumstances of its actuality.” Time, for these thinkers, is necessary to overcome the prejudices of the contemporary circumstances of the creation of the text. According to Gadamer,

> The implicit prerequisite of the historic al method, then, is that the permanent significance of something can first be known objectively only when it belongs within a self-contained context. In other words, when it is dead enough to have only historical interest. Only then does it seem possible to exclude the subjective involvement of the observer.”

The insistence upon objectivity in the historical method then makes it impossible for the interpreter to see the text as having anything to say to her actually. It also places the text in a position where the meaning of it is beyond doubt and alteration. The need for a “self-contained” text or phenomenon requires that the text be uprooted from any tradition, any questioning, and any claims to truth.

Gadamer argues that such a view of the achievements of temporal distance is misguided. He thinks, “Temporal distance has obviously another meaning than that of the quenching of our interest in the object. It lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process.” He maintains that temporal distance constantly overcomes erroneous prejudices that cover over the true meaning of a text, but temporal distance also constantly brings to light unexpected meaning. He says, “The temporal distance which performs the filtering process is not a closed dimension, but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension….It not only lets those prejudices that are of particular and limited nature die away, but causes those that bring about genuine
understanding to emerge clearly as such."\textsuperscript{88} Weinsheimer adds, that Gadamer’s position also shows that the prejudices that the interpreter takes on are not controlled by her. They are the result of temporal distance. In other words, these prejudices of tradition are not subjectively determined. This characteristic of the hermeneutic process that Gadamer espouses is essential if he is to address any critique from those who might say that the “truth” that Gadamer uncovers in this way is purely relative because of the presence of prejudice in its determination. This characteristic also classifies Gadamer’s hermeneutics beyond or outside of method, i.e., because the interpreter does not choose the prejudices she brings to analysis of the text or phenomenon under study, one cannot see her analysis as the application of a method—scientific, psychological, etc.—to the understanding of the text. This move beyond method is important for Gadamer because it justifies his claim that truth can be achieved through approaches apart from the scientific or Cartesian method.

To sum up, Gadamer thinks that temporal distance is an essential aspect of understanding because it filters out false prejudices and filters through true ones, i.e. those that are appropriate to the work. But this filtering process does not achieve its final goal apart from the interpreter. For how can the interpreter know prior to hermeneutical interpretation which of her prejudices aid in understanding and which hinder it? As Gadamer says, “[S]o long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not know and consider it as a judgment.”\textsuperscript{89} He adds that the only way to make the prejudice stand out for consciousness is to “stimulate” it. He maintains that our prejudices are stimulated when they are challenged by other claims to truth or as Weinsheimer puts it when the interpreter engages interestedly with the work. This engagement with the work takes place when the interpreter takes seriously the claims of the text and allows her prior understanding of it to be in question. This putting into question of our prejudices does
not make them false nor is it similar to the withholding of judgment in the scientific method. Gadamer’s hermeneuticist does not abstract herself out of the interpretation of the text in order to achieve an objective stance from which to understand the work. Rather, she puts at risk her prior understandings by allowing the text to address her, i.e., by recognizing the truth claim of the text. As Weinsheimer explains, “[I]f we trust method and maintain a disinterested aloofness, we have not at all eliminated our prejudices but rather universally affirmed them, for we have rendered them immune to provocation and placed them out of jeopardy. Thus we keep safe even our false prejudices.”

Gadamer argues, “[O]ur own prejudice is properly brought into play through its being at risk. Only through its being given full play is it able to experience the other’s claim to truth and make it possible for he himself to have full play.”

Put differently, Gadamer thinks that one must realize that understanding only occurs through the putting into question of our prejudices not by abstracting them out of consideration. He calls this a recognition of our own historicality. He claims that historicism and scientific positivism forget this. He says,

True historical thinking must take account of its own historicality. Only then will it not chase the phantom of an historical object which is the object of progressive research, but learn to see in the object the counterpart of itself and hence understand both…. A proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as ‘effective-history’. Understanding is, essentially, an effective-historical relation.

Weinsheimer explains that Gadamer’s analysis shows,

The truth about the past, how it truly was, cannot be divorced from the truth of the past, what it says truly to us; and both are neither more nor less than what is truly understood through the medium of a true prejudice. Thus all understanding, the
true as well as the false, is prejudiced. The subject of history (the historian) is not a subject itself, not a pure consciousness, because he is prejudiced by history; but neither is the object of history an object in itself because it is what is known by a true prejudice. History is the union of the one and the other, for history exists in the history of it and exists only in true history…. [T]he reality of history…is the unity of history with the understanding of it, which Gadamer calls *Wirkungsgeschichte*.³

Effective-historical Consciousness

Gadamer claims that this concept is not new to hermeneutics. Prior historians had considered the effect of historical events in their historical research. But they saw such research as secondary to the primary goal of historical research of analysis of the historical event or phenomenon. Gadamer argues that this concept must be given greater importance because of the new understanding of historical consciousness that he has uncovered. Interestingly, he explains that this new demand upon hermeneutics to consider the effects of history is more theoretical than practical. He says that historical analysis must recognize that *Wirkungsgeschichte*

“…determines in advance both what seems to us worth enquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there—in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.”⁴ Gadamer thinks that historicism overlooks the role of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in history and its understanding. He says,

Historical objectivism, in appealing to its critical method, conceals the involvement of the historical consciousness itself in effective-history….In this historical objectivism resembles statistics, which are such an excellent means of
propaganda because they let facts speak and hence simulate an objectivity that in reality depends on the legitimacy of the questions asked.  

So the hermeneutical process that Gadamer proposes as an alternative to historicism will not necessarily devote itself to the analysis of effective-history, but the process will recognize the latter’s role in understanding. He adds,

But looking at the whole situation, we see that the power of effective-history does not depend on its being recognized. This, precisely, is the power of history over finite human consciousness, namely that it prevails even where faith in method leads one to deny one’s own historicality. The demand that we should become conscious of this effective-history is pressing because it is necessary for scientific consciousness. But this does not mean that it can be fulfilled in an absolute way….Rather, effective historical consciousness is an element in the act of understanding itself and…is already operative in the choice of the right question to ask.

Gadamer’s insistence that the recognition of the role of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in understanding can never be obtained absolutely is not an external limit that is placed upon the hermeneuticist. Rather, this limit derives from Dasein’s historicality. He says,

We are always within the situation, and to throw light on it is never entirely completed….The illumination of this situation—effective-historical reflection—can never be completely achieved, but this is not due to a lack in the reflection, but lies in the essence of the historical being which is ours. To exist historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete.
Horizon

At this point Gadamer introduces a new concept in order to better explain the limits that one’s historicality places upon understanding, i.e., the fact that knowledge can never be complete. (Of course, without these limits, according to Gadamer, there would be no understanding.) This concept is horizon. He explains that a horizon of thought is determined by those phenomena that the individual can understand or know from her particular prejudiced vantage point. He adds that horizons can be narrow, open, expanded or closed. They can even be almost non-existent in the case of the individual who overvalues what is closest to her such that she cannot understand anything beyond. He says, “A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, as near or far, great or small. Similarly, the working out of the hermeneutical situation means the achievement of the right horizon of enquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.”

Gadamer adds that the concept of horizon is important in historical research because in order to appropriately understand the past, i.e., in order to interpret it fairly, one must look at it through its historical horizon not our own “contemporary criteria and prejudices.” He says, “If we fail to place ourselves in this way within the historical horizon out of which tradition speaks, we shall misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us. To this extent it sees a legitimate hermeneutical requirement to place ourselves in the other [sic.] situation in order to understand it.”

Gadamer adds, though, that this understanding of the past does not guarantee understandings. He says,

Just as in conversation when we have discovered the standpoint and horizon of the other person, his ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with him, the person who thinks historically [i.e., the historicist] comes to
understand the meaning of what has been handed down, without necessarily agreeing with it, or seeing himself in it.\textsuperscript{99}

The point that Gadamer makes here is that even with an understanding of the past’s historical horizon, the historian will not achieve an adequate historical understanding if she abstracts the past from the present, i.e., if she sees the past as not making any claims to truth. He says,

The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim that it is uttering something true. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint, i.e., place ourselves in the historical situation and seek to reconstruct the historical horizon. In fact, however, we have given up the claim to find, in the past, any truth valid and intelligible for ourselves. Thus this acknowledgment of the otherness of the other, which makes him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of this claim to truth.\textsuperscript{100}

Gadamer ascribes the problem of the rejection of the truth of the past to a misapprehension of the “hermeneutical phenomenon” in historical research. He argues that the characterization of past and present historical horizons as utterly distinct is a conceptual abstraction. He disagrees with the notion that historical horizons are closed off from each other. He says,

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

In this quote, Gadamer establishes at least two principles. First, he makes it clear that the notion that historical horizons are closed off from each other is a mischaracterization of their actual interaction. Second, he intimates that the notion of a static tradition that is impervious to change is also a mischaracterization. Tradition changes. But Gadamer also shows us that historians are not the only ones who, for purposes of historical research, enter into the horizon of the past. One is always and already entering into that horizon. What is and ought to be different from the historian and the everyday person is that the former performs this action self-consciously. Gadamer supports his contention of the interaction and permeability of historical horizons by characterizing all horizons as making up “…one great horizon that moves from within and, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. It is, in fact, a single horizon that embraces everything contained in historical consciousness.”

Gadamer supports his stance of the interpenetrability of historical horizons by pointing out that in order for the historian to “place” herself within a past historical horizon, she must always already have one herself. He says, “[I]t is not the case that we acquire this horizon [of the past] by placing ourselves within a historical situation. Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within in a situation…[I]nto this other situation we must also bring ourselves. Only this fulfils the meaning of ‘placing ourselves.’” Gadamer, here, makes a distinction between a historical horizon and a historical situation. The distinction seems to derive from the fact that one already has a historical horizon, but for the sake of historical research, i.e., in order to understand the past self-consciously, one
situates oneself within the horizon of the past. We place ourselves in the place of those of the past.

“Bringing ourselves” into the horizon of the other is more complex than at first glance it might seem. According to Gadamer, it is neither by empathy nor by “…application to another person of our own criteria…” that we place ourselves in another’s shoes. Rather, he says, this placement

…always involves the attainment of a higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other. The concept of ‘horizon’ suggests itself because it expresses the wide, superior vision that the person who is seeking to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it, but to see it better within a larger whole and in truer proportion.\textsuperscript{104}

This acquisition of a horizon, then, involves the overcoming of past and present prejudices. Gadamer says that in order to achieve a truly historical consciousness, “…it is constantly necessary to inhibit the overhasty assimilation of the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then will we be able to listen to the past in away that enables it to make its own meaning heard.”\textsuperscript{105}

Gadamer thinks that it is possible to overcome “the overhasty assimilation of the past” by recognizing the interpenetrability of each historical horizon with the other, i.e., by recognizing that our present historical horizon is not “…a fixed set of opinions and evaluations that determine and limit the horizon of the present, and that the otherness of the past can be distinguished from it as from a fixed ground.”\textsuperscript{106} Instead, Gadamer thinks we must recognize that our present horizon is always changing because of a constant testing of our prejudices. He
adds, “An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons.” Gadamer, therefore, recommends that a truly historical consciousness is achievable not by an abstraction that sees each historical period as utterly foreign from each other and most importantly from the present, but through a recognition of the influence of the past upon the present and, in a sense, of the present upon the past.

Fusion of Horizons

Gadamer calls this mutual influence a “fusion of horizons.” He says,

Understanding…is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves. We know the power of this kind of fusion chiefly from earlier times and their naïve attitude to themselves and their origin. In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other.

An obvious critique of this position of the interpenetrability of horizons might be that if it is the case then why insist upon a distinction between them in order only to fuse them back together. As Gadamer characterizes the critique, “[W]hy do we speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply of the formation of the one horizon, whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition?”

Gadamer’s response is that the distinction of the horizons is necessary for understanding. He argues that the critique of the distinction of horizons is motivated by an objectivist historicist view of history. When historical consciousness is seen as a scientific task then this question is possible, but if it is seen hermeneutically then the need for this distinction is clear. He says,
Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation but consciously bringing it out. That is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project an historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence distinguishes the horizon of tradition from its own.\textsuperscript{110}

Weinsheimer explains that we must recognize that the goal of historical understanding is not the identity of the past and present, but the maintenance of a tension between the two.

If there is to be assimilation and a shared understanding, the historian must apply his own standards; and yet if he is not naively to conceal the tension and difference of the past and present, the standards so applied cannot be simply those given in advance. The historian can presume neither that the criteria already familiar to him are correct and univocally applicable to the past, nor that those of the past are correct and univocally applicable to the present.\textsuperscript{111}

Gadamer elaborates his point about the maintenance of the distinction between the past and present historical horizons by explaining that this distinction is not solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of understanding. In the process of understanding there takes place a real fusing of horizons, which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously removed. We described the conscious act of this fusion as the task of the effective-historical consciousness.\textsuperscript{112}
In other words, hermeneutical historical understanding is aware of its own prejudices and is aware that those prejudices are necessary to understand the world, past, etc. But this approach to historical understanding also recognizes the prejudices of the present are mutable and greatly influenced by those of the past. In addition to this recognition of the role of the past upon the present there is an awareness that this influence of the past upon the present does not thereby imply that the present can simply be explained away by reference to the prejudices of the past. The distinction between the past and the present must be maintained, and yet, this distinction cannot be seen to be absolute. Understanding requires a fusion of these historical horizons.

The Hermeneutic Problem of Application

Gadamer enters into an analysis of the role of application in hermeneutical understanding. The purpose of this analysis is to show concretely how the fusion of horizons occurs and demonstrates the relevance of this approach to understanding. Gadamer begins the analysis by pointing out that early hermeneuticists divided understanding into three elements: understanding, interpretation and application. The first two were taken up by the discipline as most relevant for the study of understanding, while the third was seen as a supplement to understanding. Gadamer relates that the romantics concentrated on the first two elements because they realized, “Interpretation is not an occasional additional act subsequent to understanding, but rather understanding is always an interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding.” Because of this connection between interpretation and understanding, romantic hermeneutics disregarded the role of application in understanding. Gadamer contends that application is an integral part of understanding. He suggests this is the case because “…understanding always involves something like the application of the text to be understood to the present situation of the interpreter.”
Gadamer proposes that the unity of these three elements in understanding are best explained if one recognizes that hermeneutics is comprised of more than just literary hermeneutics. He contends that theological and legal hermeneutics, as well as literary, “…make up the full concept of hermeneutics. It is only since the emergence of historical consciousness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that literary hermeneutics and historical studies became detached from the other hermeneutical disciplines…”¹¹⁶ A consideration of these other two branches of hermeneutics allows us to see that application is an essential aspect of understanding. Gadamer remarks,

> In both legal and theological hermeneutics there is the essential tension between the text set down—of the law or of the proclamation—on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by its application in the particular moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching.….[T]he text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly, ie according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application. [My italics.]¹¹⁷

Gadamer recognizes that this view of understanding, i.e., that it is an event, is quite foreign to that held by modern science, but he thinks that the unity of these three elements can be demonstrated.¹¹⁸ He argues that when one tries to construct a general theory of interpretation the strict distinctions among these three elements breaks down. If one tries to follow Betti’s categorization of interpretive approaches in an effort to establish a general theory, Gadamer contends that the strict categories create “…difficulties in the ordering of phenomena according to [them].”¹¹⁹ He thinks that the assignation of different interpretations into cognitive, normative
and reproductive functions breaks down precisely because understanding, interpretation, and application are one process.

Gadamer provides the example of the reproductive function of interpretation in the putting on of a play or the performance of music to show this unity. Though he does accede that there is a conceptual distinction between, on the one hand, the normative and cognitive functions of interpretation and, on the other hand, the reproductive function in the performance of plays and music, Gadamer thinks, “[N]o one will be able to carry out this reproductive interpretation without taking into account, in the translation of the text into appearance, of that other normative element that limits the demand for a stylistically correct reproduction through the stylistic values of one’s own day.”

It is also the case that the normative and cognitive functions fuse with the reproductive if one considers how an understanding of the original meaning of the text of the performance will directly influence its performance. This example, according to Gadamer, shows that “…we cannot avoid the conclusion that the suggested distinction between cognitive, normative, and reproductive interpretation has no fundamental validity, but all three constitute one phenomenon.”

The unity of these three elements, for Gadamer, suggests a necessary reevaluation of the human sciences. He thinks that we must recognize the insights that legal and theological hermeneutics can provide for those sciences. He thinks that the inclusion of the hermeneutical insights of these interpretive approaches derives from the fact that “[t]he meaning of a law that emerges in its normative application is fundamentally no different from the meaning reached in textual interpretation.” In other words, if we can understand how it is that legal (and theological) hermeneutics achieve understanding (and demonstrate it), then this knowledge can be applied to the human sciences. Gadamer recognizes that such a view of the methodology of
the human sciences runs counter to that of the strict natural sciences and of romantic hermeneutics, but he argues that such is the case because of the separation that these two methodologies establish between, on the one hand, the subject and the object, and, on the other hand, normative and cognitive functions of interpretation. Gadamer rejects the romantic notion that “connaturality” between the author and the interpreter is necessary for true understanding to occur. Rather, he thinks,

The miracle of understanding…consists in the fact that no connaturality is necessary to recognize what is really significant and fundamentally meaningful in tradition. We are able to open ourselves to the superior claim the text makes and respond to what it has to tell us. Hermeneutics in the sphere of literary criticism and the historical sciences is…a subordination to the text’s claim to dominate our minds.\(^\text{123}\)

In other words, legal and theological hermeneutics can provide a model of understanding that offers an approach to understanding that is not modeled upon domination or appropriation of knowledge by the knowing subject. He thinks this is the case because these two hermeneutics “…are interpretations—which includes application—in the service of what is considered valid. [My italics.]\(^\text{124}\) Gadamer explains later how these interpretive approaches serve the truth of their respective traditions. Once he demonstrates this though, he will be able to show the connection between these two and the human sciences. In fact the service of these two hermeneutics to their traditions is what will allow Gadamer to argue that the human sciences must approach their traditions similarly. He says, “Our thesis is that historical hermeneutics also has a task of application to perform, because it too serves the validity of meaning, in that it explicitly and
consciously bridges the gap in time that separates the interpreter from the text and overcomes the alienation of meaning that the text has undergone.”¹²⁵

The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle
Prior to exploring the connection of legal and theological hermeneutics to a broader understanding of hermeneutics that includes application, Gadamer explores Aristotle’s ethical theory for insights that it might add to his argument about understanding requiring application. Gadamer commences this exploration by pointing out that his proposal of a hermeneutics that espouses an approach to understanding that is mutable and provisional that is still understanding brings us to a problem. He says, “If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that the same tradition must always be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, is that of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Understanding is, then, a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation.”¹²⁶ It is this problem of the relationship between the particular and the universal and Aristotle’s insights into this problem that leads Gadamer to this analysis.

Gadamer thinks that because Aristotle’s response to the issue of how knowledge and reason inform and direct moral action was formulated with a concern for the application of knowledge by a being that is becoming and how that application by that being determines that being and the knowledge moved Aristotle to develop an ethical theory that was “independent of metaphysics.” Gadamer argues that Aristotle rejected Plato’s “equation of virtue and knowledge” because the former ancient philosopher based his ethics upon practice, i.e., application, rather than on knowledge. Gadamer explains that this difference is easily explained if one recognizes, as Aristotle did, that the development of human powers and capacities differs from the development of the capacities of the natural realm. That is, “[M]an becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves, ie he behaves in a certain way because of what he has
become. Thus Aristotle sees *ethos* as differing from *physis* in that it is a sphere in which the laws of nature do not operate….”¹²⁷ The ethical realm for Aristotle, according to Gadamer, is made up of institutions and attitudes that are mutable and can be seen as rules or laws, but not like those of the natural realm. Because Aristotle sees ethical knowledge to be directly tied to its application, i.e., to their understanding *in* history, ethical knowledge will not be knowledge of objective principles. Rather, ethical knowledge will be a changing knowledge because of its need for application.

Gadamer’s analysis of Aristotle’s ethical theory will show that history can produce real knowledge precisely because it is constantly different and the difference comes from the application of this knowledge. Gadamer says,

> [T]he person acting must see the concrete situation in the light of what is asked of him in general. But…this means that knowledge which cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring the demands that the situation makes….It is among the characteristics of the moral phenomenon that the person acting must himself know and decide and cannot let anything take this responsibility from him. Thus it is essential that philosophical ethics have the right approach, so that it does not usurp the place of moral consciousness and yet does not seek either a purely theoretical and ‘historical’ knowledge but, by outlining phenomena, helps moral consciousness to attain clarity concerning itself."¹²⁸

In this dense excerpt Gadamer explains why it is that objective knowledge cannot be seen as the sole paradigm for knowledge, in fact, in the ethical realm such an understanding of knowledge could be opposed to proper action. The demand for the *application* of knowledge is what creates
this opposition to objective knowledge. Gadamer explains here, also, that the reason for the limitation of objective knowledge in the ethical realm derives from the fact that moral action must be responsive to the demands of the concrete situation, something that objective knowledge cannot achieve, and moral action must derive from the human individual understandingly applying her knowledge to the demands of the concrete situation, i.e., moral action cannot be seen as a blind subsumption of a particular situation to a universal standard without consideration of the uniqueness of the situation. Moral action requires the individual to make decisions and to accept responsibility for those decisions, not to robotically apply predetermined criteria to the concrete situation and thereby relinquish responsibility for the outcome of that application to the criteria. Gadamer says, “[M]oral being, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge, ie the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes, but he is directly affected by what he sees. It is something that he has to do.”

Gadamer also reasserts the connection of this analysis to the question of the status of the human sciences. He says,

[T]he human sciences stand close to moral knowledge. They are ‘moral sciences’. Their object is man and what he knows of himself. But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge that he has of himself does not seek to establish what exists. An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same as it is, but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his action.
The connection between these two kinds of knowledge—moral and that of the human sciences—is important if Gadamer is to offer an alternative to the natural sciences as a model for the human sciences.

Gadamer contends that Aristotle’s analysis of the ethical realm is preoccupied with the problem of applying knowledge to the particular. Aristotle recognizes that technical knowledge is an exemplar of a kind of knowledge that is applied to a particular situation to produce something. The question, of course, is whether ethical knowledge is technical. Gadamer asks, “Should man learn to make himself what he is to be, in the same way that the craftsman learns to make what is to be according to his plan and will? Does man develop himself in relation to an eidos of himself in the same way that the craftsman carries within himself an eidos of what he seeks to make and is able to embody in his material?”

On the one hand, it would seem that ethical knowledge is like technical knowledge precisely because both are concerned with the application of knowledge to a particular, i.e., both are concerned with action.

But it is also clear that these two kinds of knowledge are not at all the same, because, as Gadamer makes clear, “It is obvious that man does not dispose of himself in the same way that the craftsman disposes of the material with which he works. Clearly he cannot make himself in the same way that he can make something else.” But, if one considers the objects of ethical and technical knowledge the difference between them is not as clear as it may seem. Gadamer accepts that the objects of both knowledges are mutable; the objects are not fixed like the objects of sophia. He adds that both kinds of knowledge take the knowledge of the “object” and applies it to the production of that “object.” This application involves the determination of appropriate materials and means for the object’s production. It would seem, therefore, that there is no difference between technical and ethical knowing.
Gadamer points out, though, that Aristotle’s analysis of phronesis shows that they are radically different for at least three reasons. The first reason is that the knowledge of the “object” of phronesis cannot be known prior to its application. Though it is the case that prior to ethical action we “know” what is right and wrong, that does not mean that this ethical knowledge is the same as technical knowledge. Gadamer argues,

[W]e can only apply [knowledge] that we already possess; but we do not possess moral knowledge in such a way that we already have it and then apply it to specific situations…. What is right, for example, cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action from me, whereas the eidos of what a craftsman desires to make is fully determined by the use for which it is intended.133

Gadamer contends that the application of legal justice is very analogous. The situation of the craftsman is quite different from that of the judge. The craftsperson often needs to react or adjust her practice because of the limitations or the materials or exigencies of the situation, but this adjustment in no way adjusts or changes the knowledge that she uses to shape and fashion her products. The situation of the judge is different, because the application of the law (sometimes even its non-application) shapes one’s understanding of the law. Given the situation of a judge who determines the non-application of a law to be more just than its application, Gadamer remarks, “In holding back on the law, [the judge] is not diminishing it but, on the contrary, finding the better law.”134 Gadamer remarks that Aristotle called this the correction of the law according to equity, epieikeia. Gadamer concludes, “The law is always imperfect, not because it is imperfect in itself, but because, in comparison with the ordered world of law, human reality is necessarily imperfect and hence does not allow of any simple application of the
Gadamer thinks that such an understanding of law prevents the possibility of conceiving a law that is universally and objectively true for every situation. There is no unchanging natural law to which we can refer to understand and know what the correct thing to do is without reference to the details of the situation. Gadamer contends that for Aristotle the ethical principles that guide moral action

\[\text{…have only the validity of schemata. They always have to be made concrete in the situation of the person acting. Thus they are not norms that are to be found in the stars or have their unchanging place in a natural moral universe, so that all that would be necessary would be to perceive them. Nor are the mere conventions, but really do correspond to the nature of the thing—only the latter is always itself determined in each case by the use that the moral consciousness makes of them. [My italics.]}\]

The second reason for the difference between ethical and technical knowledge is that unlike the latter, the former does not have predetermined “knowledge” of the appropriate means to the achievement of a moral end. Gadamer says,

\[\text{Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance in the manner of knowledge that can be taught. The relation between the means and ends here is not such that the knowledge of the right means can be made available in advance, and that because the knowledge of the right end is not the mere object of knowledge either. There can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed towards as a whole.}\]

The significance of this aspect of ethical knowledge makes it that much more dependent and receptive to the contingencies of the particular situation. Because the end of ethical knowledge
is not definitely known, neither can the means by which to attain it. Says Gadamer, “[T]he
consideration of the means is itself a moral consideration and makes specific the moral rightness
of the dominant end….Thus it is a knowledge of the particular situation that completes moral
knowledge, a knowledge that is nevertheless not a perceiving by the senses.”\textsuperscript{139} In order to “see”
what might be the correct means to ethical action one cannot depend upon sense perception,
rather, one must depend on \textit{nous} to inform one of the appropriate action to take in a specific
situation. There is nothing prior to the situation that can guide our determination about the
correctness of the action that we might take. Gadamer says, “Moral knowledge is really
knowledge of a special kind. It embraces in a curious way both means and end and hence differs
from technical knowledge.”\textsuperscript{140} He argues that ethical knowledge and “seeing” require
experience, whereas technical knowledge, though supported by experience does not require
experience for its application.

The third reason for the difference between these two ways of productive knowing is that
ethical knowledge knows itself in a peculiar way. Gadamer contends that moral reflection
involves concern for others, not just for oneself. In other words, ethical knowing involves the
contemplation of the specific individual and situation to which it is being applied. Gadamer
suggests that Aristotle’s discussion of the role of \textit{sunesis} in ethical reflection shows that ethical
knowledge it derives from the specificity of the situation. When one is giving advice to another
about how to act in a given situation one must consider the person to whom the advice is given.
Also, most importantly according to Gadamer, ethical advice can only be given if one is united
with the other person in finding the right way to act. He says,

Only friends can advise each other or, to put it another way, only a piece of advice
that is meant in a friendly way has meaning for the person advised. Once again
we discover that the person with understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected; but rather, as one united by a specific bond with the other, he thinks with the other and undergoes the situation with him.\textsuperscript{141}

Gadamer also thinks that Aristotle’s compelling description of the \textit{deinos}—an individual with the experience, intelligence, and capacity to get the best out of any situation—shows just how different ethical and technical knowledge are. This difference has to do with the fact that the possession of ethical knowledge involves the person who has it in a way that technical knowledge cannot. The \textit{deinos} uses her capacities without any consideration of ethical action, something that a phronetic individual could not do. The end of action intimately involves and concerns the person applying or using ethical knowledge.

Gadamer closes his discussion of Aristotle’s analysis of ethical versus technical knowledge by pointing out that “…Aristotle’s analysis is in fact a kind of model of the problems of hermeneutics.”\textsuperscript{142} The connection between the two has to do with the fact that the interpreter of an ancient text cannot understand it by trying to apply objectively predetermined criteria to the text. He says, “[A]pplication [is] not the relating of some pre-given universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditional text seeks to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he understands it as such and only afterwards uses it for particular applications.”\textsuperscript{143} Gadamer argues that understanding of a text and its application has to do with a search for the meaning and significance of the text to interpreter. In order achieve this kind of understanding, the interpreter “…must not seek to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation, if he wants to understand it at all.”\textsuperscript{144}
The Exemplary Significance of Legal Hermeneutics

Given the case that a proper and adequate interpretation of a text requires a recognition of the relevance of the text to the interpreter, i.e., the text has meaning so long as the interpreter sees it speaking to her, Gadamer argues that the distinction between the hermeneutics of the human sciences and legal hermeneutics is not tenable. The difference between these two branches of hermeneutics was established by hermeneuticists because they saw that the human sciences could achieve objective knowledge through “a general theory of the understanding and the interpretation of texts.” On the other hand, legal hermeneutics, because of its concern for application of law to specific situations was limited to “fill[ing] a kind of gap in the system of legal dogmatics.” In other words, the two were different because the former was concerned with understanding while the latter with application. Weinsheimer explains,

> The bilateral relation involved in application is what Gadamer understands by the term *dogmatics*. Because the relation is reciprocal, dogmatics is not forced interpretation, sheer imposition of meaning on an empty form waiting to be given content by the meaning-endowing interpreter. Rather, the force is bilateral because dogmatics is the interpretation of that which is itself in force, whether law or Scripture. This implies too that, since the force is bilateral, dogmatics cannot be conceived as the construction of pure doctrine per se and apart from its application.¹⁴⁵

Since the hermeneutic field had made a clear distinction between these two processes, it was only reasonable that there be a distinction made between legal hermeneutics and the hermeneutics of the human sciences.

Gadamer remarks that the distinction among interpretation in the human sciences, law, and theology was only possible so long as the interpretation is not concerned with dogmatics.
He says, “It seems that we move into a modern methodology of the human sciences when it becomes detached from any dogmatic tie. Legal hermeneutics became separated from the theory of understanding as a whole because it has a dogmatic purpose, just as, by giving up its dogmatic commitment, theological hermeneutics become united with literary and historical method.”

But Gadamer contends that such a distinction and separation among these branches of hermeneutics is not tenable.

Gadamer argues that a consideration of “…those cases in which legal and historical hermeneutics are concerned with the same object, ie those cases in which legal texts are interpreted in a legal way and also understood historically” might clarify his position. He intends, in other words, to challenge the hermeneutical proposition that there is a difference between dogmatic and historical, i.e., objective and theoretical, concerns.

Initially, it would seem that there is a distinction between these two concerns. In legal hermeneutics the jurist looks at and understands the law based upon the original meaning of the law under consideration. On the other hand, the legal historian, in order to provide an adequate interpretation of the meaning of a law, must consider the whole historical scope of the application of that law. As Gadamer says, “He will have to understand the development from the original application to the present application of the law.” In effect, the historian looks at, or achieves, an objective viewpoint from which to assess the meaning of a law, whereas the jurist, because of her concern with application, cannot afford such a stance. Any historical understanding that the jurist might apply to her interpretation is achieved as a means to the end of the application of the law. The historian, meanwhile, achieves a distance from the law in order to more appropriately assess its meaning.
But Gadamer rejects this strict separation. He argues that the jurist is concerned with the history of the law for more than practical reasons. In fact, he rejects the notion that the meaning of a law can be assessed, for the purposes of the jurist, merely by appeal to its original intent or adoption. He reminds us, “It is true that the jurist is always concerned with the law itself, but its normative content is to be determined in regard to the given case in which it is to be applied.”\textsuperscript{149} And this is why the jurist concerns herself with the history of the law, but she cannot limit herself to that history, if she hopes to offer an adequate and just determination of how the law ought to be applied to a specific case. Gadamer thinks, rather that she, “…has to take account of the change in circumstances and hence define afresh the normative function of the law.”\textsuperscript{150} Gadamer thinks that the situation of the historian is similar as well. The historian, in order to provide an adequate interpretation of the meaning of a law, must understand the change and development of the law through history. In other words, the historian, like the jurist, must recognize the difference between the original meaning of the law and its present meaning. Gadamer says,

The hermeneutical situation of both the historian and the jurist seems to me to be the same in that when faced with any text, we have an immediate expectation of meaning. There can be no such thing as a direct approach to the historical object that would objectively reveal its historical value. The historian has to undertake the same task of reflection as the jurist….Historical knowledge can be gained only by seeing the past in its continuity with the present—which is exactly what the jurist does in his practical, normative work of ‘ensuring the unbroken continuance of law and preserving the tradition of the legal idea’."^{151}
Gadamer, not content with his assessment of the unity of both hermeneutical concerns, addresses a possible rebuttal to his analysis. The rebuttal claims that the ‘ideal’ situation that Gadamer considered in order to achieve his analysis does not actually match up with the activities of the legal historian. The rebuttal claims that the historian is generally concerned with historical case law that no longer applies or has validity to the present. So, Gadamer’s suggestion that the historian is concerned with the connection of the past to the present is actually a misrepresentation of the activities of the historian.

Gadamer’s argument against the rebuttal is to explain that the “ideal” case of historical interpretation of a continuing valid law is not an exception to the activities of the legal historian, but rather, the case that undergirds the field of legal history. He argues that this is the case because the task of the jurist and historian are quite similar. The jurist applies a still valid law to a particular situation by interpreting that law, but that interpretation is not an arbitrary one. Gadamer says, “[T]o understand and to interpret means to discover and recognise a valid meaning.”\textsuperscript{152} What the jurist does is to link the present interpretation to the meaning and significance of the law. In other words, the jurist is concerned with how the law has meaning, or can meaningfully be applied, to the present. Gadamer thinks that the activity of the historian is the same, even though she may not be concerned with any concrete application of the law. He argues that the historian, in order to adequately interpret the historical meaning of a law, must recognize that a law is “…a legal creation that needs to be understood in a legal way.”\textsuperscript{153} Gadamer contends that the special case of historical interpretation of still valid law shows the connection between interpretation and tradition. He says, “The historian, trying to understand the law in terms of the situation its historical origin, cannot disregard the continuance of its legal validity: it presents him with the questions that he has to ask of historical tradition.”\textsuperscript{154}
words, the historian must determine the significance of the law to the present, i.e., must ask what the law, through tradition, is trying to say. Gadamer thinks that in order to provide an answer to that question the historian, and all interpreters for that matter, must restate the text, and that restatement must occur through a consideration of the relation of that text, law, etc. to the present. He says,

> Inasmuch as the actual object of the historical understanding is not events, but their ‘significance’, it is clearly not a correct description of this understanding to speak of an object existing in itself, and the approach of the subject to it. The truth is that there is always contained in historical understanding the idea that the tradition reaching us speaks into the present and must be understood in this mediation—indeed, as this mediation.\(^{155}\)

Gadamer opines that such a view of the connection of tradition to interpretation can help to unify the separate fields of hermeneutics.

Having addressed this rebuttal, Gadamer tasks himself with the goal of demonstrating that his description of understanding necessarily belonging to tradition is demonstrated in legal and theological interpretation. For our purposes we will concentrate upon his analysis of legal hermeneutics.

Gadamer argues that legal interpretation is necessary and possible only when the law is seen to be binding and applicable to us. In other words, an interpreter must already have a position relative to the law, or text, prior to her interpretation. This position is not chosen by the interpreter; rather, legal tradition places her in it. He argues that interpretation is not necessary if the bindingness of a law is not recognized, for example, when a monarch places herself outside the law. In such a situation, interpretation cannot provide any explanation for the connection
between the particular situation and the generally accepted meaning of the law. He says, “There is a need to understand and interpret only when something is enacted in such a way that it is, as enacted, irremovable and binding.” Gadamer explains, then, that the interpretation, i.e., the application, of the law cannot occur outside of its bounds. That means, then, that even the interpreter, i.e., the jurist and legal historian, is bound by the tradition of the meaning of the law. He says, “The application of the law is not simply a matter of knowing the law. If one has to give a legal judgment on a particular case, of course it is necessary to know the law and all the elements that have determined it. But the only connection with the law that is called for here is that the legal order is recognised as valid for everyone and that no one is exempt from it.” In essence, Gadamer’s position is that the understanding of tradition, i.e., application of tradition, i.e., a knowing alteration of tradition, is a central aspect of tradition. Weinsheimer explains, “[W]ithout application there is no understanding. Application varies and so does understanding, but…the law is the understanding of it by those who are themselves under the law. It is precisely because understanding belongs to the law that the law changes.”

The Limits of Interpretation

At this point, it would seem that Gadamer argues for a manner of interpretation that allows for almost limitless possibilities for interpretation of the meaning of a law. A quick detour through his analysis of theological interpretation will show that Gadamer’s hermeneutics is much more constrained. He relates theological and legal interpretation by pointing out that meaning in both is achieved through application. In theological interpretation, application takes the form of sermonizing. But there is a difference between the two. The difference has to do with the understanding of what is achieved in the act of application in both realms. Gadamer thinks that one cannot claim that a sermon supplements theological knowledge in the same way that a judge’s verdict supplements legal understanding. He argues that, at least in Protestant
theology, the claims to truth that a priest might make in her sermon are not as absolute as those of a judge. The ideas that a presented in the sermon may be the priest’s, but the truth and its fulfillment in the minds and souls of parishioners are found in another source. Gadamer says, “The proclamation cannot be detached from its fulfillment. The dogmatic establishment of pure doctrine is a secondary thing. Scripture is the word of God, and that means that it has an absolute priority over the teaching of those who interpret it.”⁴⁵⁹ Gadamer adds that this recognition of the superiority of divine proclamation over theological interpretation shows that any interpretation must concern itself with more than a “scientific or scholarly exploration of [a text’s] meaning.” In other words, adequate interpretation requires and assumes that “…all understanding [requires] a living relationship between the interpreter and the text, his previous connection with the material that it deals with.”⁴⁶⁰ Bultmann, according to Gadamer, called this connection “…‗fore-understanding’, because it is clearly not something attained through the process of understanding, but is already presupposed.”⁴⁶¹

The characteristics and status of this presupposition are initially problematic for Gadamer. Is it possible that the presupposition necessary for an adequate interpretation of Scripture derives from faith or is it a presupposition that is inherent to human being? Or is an adequate interpretation of Scripture limited by the creed of the interpreter’s faith? In other words, must the presupposition for an adequate interpretation of Scripture be a Christian one? If one were to propose that particular creeds are not necessary for adequate interpretations of Scripture, but merely a recognition that such “texts answer the question of God,” it is quite clear that a Marxist would resist such a proposal. The result, then, is that “…the hermeneutical significance of fore-understanding in theology seems itself theological.”⁴⁶² In other words, an adequate interpretation is only possible by those who accept the truth of the text that they are
interpreting, furthermore, that interpretation would find in the text what that presupposition already expects to find in the text. In other words, interpretation would be arbitrary at best. As a pointed example, Gadamer reminds us that the history of modern hermeneutics derives from the Protestant presuppositions that were contrary to those of the Catholic creed. But he says,

This does not mean that this kind of theological hermeneutics is dogmatically predisposed, so that it reads out of the text what it has put into it. Rather, it really risks itself. But it assumes that the word of scripture addresses us and that only the person who allows himself to be addressed—whether he believes or whether he doubts—understands.163

The point that Gadamer hopes to make here is that interpretation is not an imposition by the interpreter of her presuppositions upon the text, but merely that appropriate interpretation requires a commitment “…to the meaning of the text. Neither jurist nor theologian regards the work of application as making free with the text.”164

Gadamer argues that such an understanding of interpretation applies to philology and literary criticism. He says,

“[I]n the case of a philosophical text or a work a literature we can see that these texts require a special activity from the reader and interpreter and that we do not have the freedom to adopt an historical distance towards them. It will be seen that here understanding always involves the application of the meaning understood.”165

Gadamer recognizes, though, that this view of interpretation is not wholeheartedly accepted within the fields of philology and literary criticism. The tension derives from the fact that on the one hand, there are scholars who hold up the uniqueness and singularity of particular
works, while other scholars insist upon a homogenization of all historical literature. In the former point of view the literary critic ascribes to the text a status of a work of art. This gives the text a position separate from other historically contemporaneous texts. The work of art is a world unto its own. According to Gadamer, the literary critic is concerned with interpretation because she “…seeks to understand a text for the sake of its beauty and its truth.” Gadamer thinks that literary critics ascribe these qualities to these exemplary texts not merely because of their formal stylistics but primarily because of “the great truth that speaks in them.” Literary critics, according to Gadamer, hold up particular texts as exemplars, “…not automatically, as if they were given and patent standards…” but from a choice and a commitment to the truth presented in them. Gadamer says,

That is why this relating of oneself to an exemplar always has the character of following in someone’s footsteps. And just as this is more than mere imitation, so this understanding is a continually new form of encounter and has itself the character of an event, precisely because it does not simply take for granted, but involves application. The literary critic goes on, as it were, weaving the great tapestry of tradition which supports us.”

Gadamer offers the example of an order and its obedience to demonstrate the need for application and self-application in hermeneutical understanding. He points out, “An order exists only where there is someone to obey it. Here, then, understanding is part of a relationship between persons, one of whom has to give the order.” But obedience of an order is more than just recognition that the order is given to one. In addition, the addressee of the order must apply it in a specific relevant case. Gadamer insists that even when orders are repeated by the addressee to her commander, in order to demonstrate understanding of the order, an order “…is
given real meaning when it is carried out in accordance with its meaning….The criterion of understanding is clearly not the actual words of the order, nor in the mind of the person giving the order, but solely in the understanding of the situation and the responsibleness of the person who obeys.”

The obvious misunderstanding demonstrated by the literal obedience of an order provides support to the view that “…the recipient of an order must perform a definite creative act of understanding its meaning.”

Gadamer thinks that it is possible to make a parallel between this example and historical interpretation. He thinks that it is possible to see that tradition makes a claim upon the historian, i.e., that history gives an order to the historian, and that this claim must be understood, if the historian is to follow through upon the claim. Though the orders of tradition are not directed specifically to the historian, “…if he really wants to understand the order, then he must, idealiter, perform the same act performed by the intended recipient of the order.” The same act will be difficult for the historian to perform, but s/he must attempt to reconstruct the situation surrounding the giving of that order in order to make the order concrete. Gadamer concludes: “This, then, is the clear hermeneutical demand: to understand a text in terms of the specific situation in which it was written.”

Unfortunately, in the eyes of Gadamer, the influence of the natural sciences upon the historical sciences has made it possible for the latter to take too great a distance from the claims of tradition upon its interpreters. Historical scientists, under the sway of the natural sciences, think that, because the orders of tradition cannot realistically be thought to address them, the way to appropriately understand a text in a manner that is adequate to the text is to “…not accept the content of what it says as true, but [to leave] it open. Understanding is certainly a work of concretisation, but one that involves keeping a hermeneutical distance. Understanding is
possible only if one forgets oneself.”

Put differently, according to Gadamer, the historian and the literary critic, in the eyes of a historical science swayed by the natural sciences, recognize that every text has an addressee, but that they are not s/he. Because of this disconnect between the text and its intended addressee, neither the historian nor the literary critic need apply the text to herself. The task of the interpreter, whether historian or critic, is merely to attempt to understand what the author is saying, and to achieve this task the interpreter does not need to concern herself with the truth of the text, “…not even if the text itself claims to teach truth.”

Gadamer thinks that such a view of the text derives from the purpose to which the historical sciences put historical texts. Historians are not concerned with the texts in themselves; rather the interpreters hope to learn something of the past through the texts. Gadamer says, “[The historian] examines the text to find something that it is not, of itself, seeking to provide…. Thus the historian goes beyond hermeneutics….“

Gadamer contends that this movement beyond the text is motivated by viewing the text as an expression not as an artifact with a clearly intended meaning. Such a view of the text sees the text as intending more than just what it means to say. That is to say, the historian is concerned with “…what is also expressed by the words without its being intended, ie what the expression, as it were, ‘betrays’…. Interpretation here, then, does not refer to the sense intended, but to the sense that is hidden and has to be revealed. Thus every text not only presents an intelligible meaning but, in many respects, needs to be revealed.”

Gadamer recognizes that such an attitude toward historical texts is advisable and reasonable. By looking at the text as a phenomenon of expression one can consider historical testimonies and determine their credibility. But Gadamer adds that a historical text, even after it is determined credible, can only have its true meaning discovered, i.e. the meaning beyond its literal one, “…through comparison with other data which allow us to estimate the
historical value of a text from the past.”

Accordingly, Gadamer thinks that the historian approaches texts suspiciously, always “…go[ing] back behind them and the meaning they express to enquire into the reality of which they are the involuntary expression. Texts are set beside all the other historical material available…. They, like everything else, need explication, i.e. to be understood not only in terms of what they say, but of what they bear witness to.”

Gadamer concludes that such an approach to a text brings the idea of interpretation to its zenith and termination. He says, “[I]nterpretation is necessary wherever one is not prepared to trust what a phenomenon immediately presents to us…. The historian interprets the data of the past…in order to discover the true meaning that is expressed and, at the same time, hidden in them.”

Gadamer argues that such an understanding of the ultimate achievement of hermeneutical interpretation is actually a distorted one. He offers the thesis that both the critic and the historian “…should be orientated not so much to the methodological ideal of the natural sciences as to the model offered us by legal and theological hermeneutics.” Gadamer supports this proposal by pointing out that the historian and jurist must both question the reliability of the testimonies put before them. But, Gadamer contends, establishing the facts of a case, whether legal or historical, is not the main object of either individual. In particular, he says, “[T]he facts are not the real objects of enquiry; they are simply material for the real tasks of the judge, to reach a just decision, and of the historian, to establish the historical significance of an event within the totality of historical self-consciousness.” Accordingly, Gadamer asserts that the important issue for historical interpretation is to enquire about the motives and prejudices that might guide the historian in the application of historical methods. He says, “An historical hermeneutics that does not make the essence of the historical question the central thing, and does not enquire into
the motives from which a historian is examining historical method, lacks its most important element.”

The result of such an understanding of the true project of the historical sciences is to bring the problem of application even more to the forefront of problems in historical interpretation. Gadamer explains that this concern for application in interpretation is relevant in the historical sciences even though the historian is justified in assessing the historical text as not addressing her directly and even though the historian rightfully needs to analyze suspiciously the testimony of the historical text. Application is relevant to historical interpretation, even with the above allowances, says Gadamer, because,

For the historian…the individual test makes up, together with other sources and testimonies, the unity of the total tradition. This unity of the total tradition is his true hermeneutical object. It is this that he must understand in the same sense in which the literary critic understands his text in the unity of its meaning. Thus he too must undertake a task of application. This is the important point: historical understanding proves to be a kind literary criticism writ large.

Weinsheimer explains that though the historian may trust the testimonies of historical non-texts more than those of texts, “…the historian has no choice but to read everything as if it were something like a text. The historian’s text is the totality of sub-texts, and historical understanding proves to be a philology—not of great books, to be sure, but of the great book of history.”

Gadamer is quick to separate this notion of interpreting or reading from history writ large from any connection to a kind of history of spirit. He rejects Dilthey’s view that the unfolding of history “…has as perfect a meaningful form as has a text.” Gadamer’s point, rather, is that
history is and must be applied in order to be interpreted. There is no reader for whom the great book of history is open and readily legible. “Rather,” Gadamer says, all reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends. He belongs to the text that he is reading. It will always happen that the line of meaning that is revealed to him as he reads it necessarily breaks off in an open indefiniteness. He can, indeed he must, accept the fact that future generations will understand differently what he has read in the text. And what is true for every reader is also true for the historian. The historian is concerned with the whole historical tradition, which he has to combine with his own present existence if he wants to understand it and which in this way he keeps open for the future. [My italics.]189

In this statement, Gadamer shows a parallel between the historian and the literary critic. Though their tasks are different in scope, they both must apply their respective texts to themselves. In the same way that the critic understands himself through a text, so to does the historian understand “…the great text he has himself discovered of the history of the world itself, in which every text handed down to us is but a fragment of meaning, one letter, as it were, and he understands himself in this great text.”190 Weinsheimer explains that history is not a whole that the historian can set herself against and achieve complete understanding of: “[I]t always remains a projected whole, and that projection involves the prejudices of the historian. It involves applying himself to history.”191 Also, even if the historian could achieve a true understanding of history through her true prejudices, that history would still just be part of the history of the understanding of history. Weinsheimer explains, “It becomes one more event in history itself.
Thus not only does the historian apply himself and his prejudices to history; history also applies to him…. The understanding of history is history itself.”

Gadamer argues that the self-forgetting, or the self-abstraction, that the modern natural sciences have modeled for the human scientist is overcome by this reappraisal of method. He argues that the true basis of the human sciences must be, and is, found in effective historical consciousness. What is more, thinks Gadamer, “The old unity of the hermeneutical disciplines comes into its own again if we recognise that effective historical consciousness is at work in all the hermeneutical activity of both critic and historian.” The above insight about the basis and unity of hermeneutics is based upon Gadamer’s analysis that offers an alternative conception of understanding as application. He says, “It is not the subsequent applying to a concrete case of a given universal that we understand first by itself, but it is the actual understanding of the universal itself that the given text constitutes for us. Understanding proves to be a kind of effect and knows itself as such.” Weinsheimer explains that Gadamer sees understanding as belonging to history. That is, the event that understanding is makes history. Understanding of history, because it is a constant endeavor that builds on itself makes it something to always be understood. The application of hermeneutic understanding integrates the past and the present or present events to present understanding, but application also integrates the future. This integration occurs because the interpreter cannot fully know how her interpretation will affect the future. Weinsheimer says, “The [hermeneutic] circle does not close because the aspect of the text that he does not fully understand is precisely that which he has contributed to it.”

Weinsheimer proposes that it is that the present understanding that the interpreter offers that also gives a possibility for understanding to the future. But this possibility for understanding that the present provides is a possibility that the present does not understand.
Analysis of Effective-Historical Consciousness

The limitations of reflective philosophy

Gadamer points out that effective-historical consciousness is more than a reflective awareness of the effect of a work. Effective-historical consciousness is more than a knowledge of “…the trace a work leaves behind.”\(^{196}\) The consciousness he hopes to elucidate is an awareness of the work itself, and Gadamer insists that this awareness has an effect. But Gadamer thinks that such a characterization of effective-historical consciousness is somewhat vague and unclear. He says, “However much we say that [effective-historical consciousness] is itself within the effect, as consciousness it is of its essence to be able to rise above that of which it is consciousness. The structure of reflectivity is fundamentally given with all consciousness. Thus it must be valid also for effective-historical consciousness.”\(^{197}\) Gadamer suggests that if this result maintains then Hegel’s assessment that the foundation of hermeneutics is a fusion of history and truth is correct. Such a result is significant for historical hermeneutics because if we look at the development of this field from Schleiermacher through Dilthey, we see that it can achieve its goal of historical understanding “…only in the infinity of knowledge, in the thoughtful fusion of the whole of the past with the present. We see it based on the ideal of perfect enlightenment, on the total opening up our historical horizon, on the abolition of our finiteness in the infinity of knowledge, in short, on the omnipresence of the historically knowing spirit.”\(^{198}\) Gadamer contends that the historians of the nineteenth century, though they looked to Schleiermacher and von Humboldt to support their “enthusiasm for experience,” actually held Hegel’s position about understanding. Gadamer thinks this is the case because both Schleiermacher and von Humboldt did not overcome Hegel’s idealism. Gadamer says, “The critique of reflective philosophy that applies to Hegel applies to them also.”\(^{199}\) Gadamer wonders if this critique might also be applied to his hermeneutics as well.
The problem as Gadamer sees it, if his hermeneutics is to overcome the critique is as follows: “We are concerned with understanding effective-historical consciousness in such a way that the immediacy and superiority of the work does not disintegrate into a mere reflective reality in the consciousness of the effect, i.e. we are concerned to conceive a reality which is beyond the omnipotence of reflection.” The problem with this position is that Hegel showed, in his critique of Kant’s assertion of the unknowability of the thing-in-itself and its distinction from appearance, that these determinations were made by reason itself, i.e., reason knows the thing-in-itself. In making a distinction between appearances and the thing-in-itself

…reason was by no means establishing its own limit, for it meant that reason had already gone beyond that limit. What makes a limit a limit always also includes knowledge of what is on both sides of it. It is the dialectic of the limit to exist only by being removed. Thus the quality of being-in-itself that characterises the thing-in-itself over against its appearance is in-itself only for us.

Gadamer contends, then, that Hegel’s critique of Kant shows that reflective consciousness has no limit and that consciousness can achieve its goal of understanding in an absolute self-consciousness.

Gadamer argues that the problem of intersubjectivity—the problem of the Thou—does not offer an adequate critique of Hegel’s idealism. Gadamer thinks that Hegel’s phenomenology can solve the problem of the Thou by recourse to forms of mind that maintain the absoluteness of mind. Gadamer says, “[C]onscience represents the mental element of being recognised, and mutual self-recognition, in which the mind is absolute, can be attained only via confession and forgiveness.” He thinks that these forms of mind can overcome objections to Hegel’s idealism.
Gadamer also points out that any arguments against an absolute thinker cannot get started, i.e., they have no basis from which to begin their critique. He says,

This is precisely the formal quality of reflective philosophy, that there cannot be a position that is not drawn into the reflective movement of consciousness coming to itself. The appeal to immediacy—whether of bodily nature, or of the ‘Thou’ making claims on us, or of the impenetrable factualness of historical change, or of the reality of the relations of production—has always been self-refuting, in that it is not itself an immediate attitude, but a reflective activity.\textsuperscript{203}

Gadamer thinks, though, that there is a way to overcome the absoluteness of reflective philosophy, i.e., idealism. He says, “[T]he arguments of reflective philosophy cannot ultimately conceal the fact that there is some truth in the critique of speculative thought based on the standpoint of finite human consciousness.”\textsuperscript{204} Gadamer thinks that this is the case in particular in those arguments against relativism. Gadamer thinks that no matter how well one demonstrates the contradictions of the relativist, the arguments seem to miss the point. He says, “The reflective argument that proves successful here falls back on the arguer, in that it renders the truthfulness of reflection suspect…. [T]he truth of all formal argument is…affected. Thus the formalism of this kind of reflective argument is of specious philosophical legitimacy. In fact it tells us nothing.”\textsuperscript{205} Gadamer reminds us that even Plato recognized the futility of such an approach to the refutation of relativism. Gadamer explains that Plato’s ‘solution’ to Meno’s paradox is not solved

…through superior argument, but by appealing to the myth of the pre-existence of the soul….\textsuperscript{[I]}t is characteristic of the weakness that Plato recognises in the logos that he gives his critique of the argument of the sophists not a logical, but a
mythical basis. Just as true opinion is a divine favour and gift, so the search for and recognition of the true logos is not the free self-possession of the human mind.\textsuperscript{206}

Gadamer recognizes that a mythical refutation of relativism is not particularly satisfying to us of the modern world. This is one reason that Hegel’s idealism is so compelling; by establishing reason as its own foundation, Hegel is able to overcome the refutation, without recourse to myth, or as he classifies it, pedagogy. This is why Gadamer says that his proposal for an alternative hermeneutics must “come to grips with Hegel.”

Weinsheimer elucidates Gadamer’s concern with Hegel’s idealism. Weinsheimer explains that an adequate conceptualization of effective-historical consciousness must address the problem of the experience of history. The understanding of history must be more than the application of some formal structure by which to understand history. More importantly, understanding of history must allow for history itself, not the historian’s self-awareness of the structures of history, to affect her understanding of it. Gadamer’s hermeneutics must be wary of placing the historian outside history. Weinsheimer explains that Gadamer’s solution—effective-historical consciousness—solves this problem by stressing that history is more than understanding, though it gives rise to truth. This implies that “…truth exceeds every understanding of it…. [T]he excess of truth over understanding, reflection, and self-consciousness is precisely what precludes the equation of truth with method.”\textsuperscript{207} Weinsheimer explains the difficulty of Gadamer’s position: So long as Gadamer wants to say that there is a limit to understanding, he has to know that whole to which he ascribes that limitation. But Gadamer has already demonstrated that understanding is never whole. In essence, he refutes himself. According to Weinsheimer, Gadamer argues that self-refuting statements are not
necessarily false. If that is true, then there are limits to the capacity of reflection to determine truth. Weinsheimer concludes, “And if not all truths can be understood by reflection, this means that some truths exceed reflective understanding….”

This means that experience is indispensable for the acquisition of understanding.

The concept of experience and the essence of the hermeneutical experience

Gadamer recommends that a thorough analysis of effective-historical consciousness requires recognition that it has the structure of experience. Therefore, in order to adequately analyze this consciousness we must reconsider the concept of experience. Gadamer asserts that this concept is not particularly clear. In fact, he thinks that the natural sciences, because of their cultural and philosophical influence, and because of the central place of experience in the inductive method of the natural sciences, have altered the understanding of the concept “experience” for the worse. He says, “[T]he main lack in the theory of experience hitherto… [is] that it has been entirely orientated towards science and hence takes no account of the inner historicality of experience. It is the aim of science to so objectify experience that it no longer contains any historical element…. Hence no place can be left for the historicality of experience in science.”

The problem with the scientific understanding of experience is that the scientific concern for repeatability as a basis for confirmation that gives experience its truth does away with the history of experience. Gadamer thinks, “This is true even of everyday experience, and how much more for any scientific version of it.”

Husserl addressed this problem of the “one-sidedness of the scientific idealisation of experience” in his phenomenology. Gadamer argues that Husserl was unable to effectively solve this problem because the latter “…still seems dominated by the one-sidedness that he criticizes, for he projects the idealised world of exact scientific experience into the original experience of
the world, in that he makes perception, as something external and directed toward mere physical appearances, the basis of all further experience.”\textsuperscript{211} Gadamer thinks that Husserl’s attempt to overcome scientific idealism must address the problem of the pure transcendental subjectivity of the ego. This subjectivity is not given as such, but is found in “…the idealisation of language, which is already present in any acquisition of experience and in which the individual I’s membership of a particular linguistic community is worked out.”\textsuperscript{212}

Gadamer turns to the thought of one of the founders of the scientific method, Francis Bacon, in order to reconsider the present-day scientific understanding of experience. Bacon rejected the scholastic understanding of experience that was based on enumerative induction. Gadamer says, “His method of induction seeks to rise above the unruly and accidental way in which daily experience takes place and certainly above its dialectical use…. The [scholastic] concept of induction makes use of the idea that we generalise on the basis of chance observation and, if we encounter no contrary instance, we pronounce it valid.”\textsuperscript{213} The point of Bacon’s method is to keep the mind from progressing, too quickly, from particulars to universals: “[I]t has to climb gradatim (step by step) from the particular to the universal, in order to acquire an ordered experience that avoids all hasty conclusions.”\textsuperscript{214}

The way to achieve this gradual movement of the mind is through the experimental method. Gadamer is quick to point out that “experimental” for Bacon is very different from science’s contemporary understanding of the term. Gadamer says,

…Bacon does not always just mean the scientist’s technical procedure of artificially inducing processes in isolating conditions and making them capable of being measured. An experiment is also, \textit{and primarily}, the careful directing of our mind, preventing it from indulging in overhasty generalisations, consciously
confronting it with the most remote and apparently most diverse instances, so that it may learn, in a gradual and continuous way, to work, *via the process of exclusion*, towards the axioms. [My italics.]\(^{215}\)

Gadamer does accede that Bacon’s method, as the latter formulated and utilized it, was not particularly fruitful, because it was too general and vague, and because Bacon “…remained profoundly involved in the metaphysical tradition and in the dialectical forms of argument that he attacked.”\(^{216}\)

Gadamer recommends that Bacon’s philosophical achievement was to provide for a “…methodical self-purification of the mind that is more a discipline than a method. Bacon’s famous doctrine of the ‘prejudices’ first and foremost makes a methodical use of reason possible.”\(^{217}\) Gadamer thinks that Bacon allowed us to see that experience does *not* have to be teleologically oriented. That is to say, experience does not have to be characterized solely by the confirmatory aspect of intuition, i.e., “…the tendency of the human mind always to remember what is positive and forget all negative instances.”\(^{218}\) In other words, Gadamer thinks that Bacon opened up the possibility of seeing experience from a negative aspect. According to Gadamer, Bacon’s analysis of the prejudices, what he calls *idola*, “…indicate[s] that the teleological aspect [of experience]…is not the only one possible…. [W]e must regard as one-sided the principle of accepting teleology as the sole criterion of the achievement of knowledge.”\(^{219}\) Gadamer argues that this recognition of the negative aspect of experience can also inform our view of language, which he thinks is “…a positive condition of, and guide to, experience itself.”\(^{220}\)

Though Gadamer does wish to explore the negative aspect of experience, he does not outright reject and dismiss the teleological aspect of experience. He does accept that the non-contradiction of prior experience by new experience “is clearly characteristic of the general
nature of experience” be it scientific or everyday. But, he does think that the rejection of the primacy and exclusivity of the teleological model of experience puts him in accord with Aristotle’s approach to the analysis of experience in the Posterior Analytics.

Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics

In the Posterior Analytics, Aristotle explains how the unity of experience is achieved through the retention of many individuals. This unity is the unity achieved by a universal. Interestingly, according to Gadamer, the universality of experience so achieved is not the universality of science. He says, “Rather…it occupies a remarkably indeterminate intermediate position between the many individual perceptions and the true universality of the concept.”

The analysis that Gadamer performs, here, of Aristotle’s phenomenology of experience shows that the movement from the unity of experience to the unity of science is not performed in one fell swoop. Rather, science depends on the prior unity of experience for the former’s universality. Gadamer says, “Experience is not science itself, but it is a necessary condition of it. There must already be certainty, ie the individual observations must show the same regular pattern. Only when that universality which is found in experience is attained can we enquire into the reason and hence move forward into science.”

The mediated movement from intuition to scientific universality by way of a unity achieved by experience does show a possibility of an alternative to the teleological model of experience.

Gadamer, however, considers Aristotle’s explanation of the mediation accomplished by this prior step to scientific universality to be quite vague and unclear. Gadamer explains that Aristotle bases his statements upon an already dominant theory of experience. The significant characteristic of this theory is: “[t]he persistence of important perceptions…through which the knowledge of the universal can emerge from the experience of the individual…. Experience is always actually present only in the individual observation. It is not known already in a previous
This insistence upon the primacy of the individual experience marks out an alternative to scientific knowledge and experience, according to Gadamer. Also, this is the basis for the negative aspect of experience. Gadamer points out, “Here lies the fundamental openness of experience to new experience, not only in the general sense that errors are corrected, but that it is, *in its essence* [my italics], dependent on constant confirmation and necessarily becomes a different kind of experience where there is no confirmation.” The possibility of experience that derives from an individual experience without the need for confirmation from prior experience offers an alternative to enumerative induction as the basis for knowledge.

The image that Aristotle gives to explain how this accretion of observations is the basis for science is that of the fleeing army that is brought to an eventual stand by an individual. The individual, in the metaphor, is an observation that is repeated often enough that it is able to provide a bulwark against the ever-changing, ever-constant flow of intuitions that provide no firm ground for universal knowledge. Interestingly, Gadamer remarks that Aristotle’s image leads to an oversight a very important aspect of scientific experience. Gadamer remarks of this imperfection of the image: “[T]he imperfection of a symbol is not a shortcoming, but the other side of the work of abstraction that it performs.” The oversight that even Aristotle makes because of the image is to assume that the army of observations was previously standing firm. If the point of the image is to show how knowledge, i.e., scientific universal knowledge, comes to be, then it is clear that the army could not have been standing firm previously. So what lesson could the image provide? According to Gadamer,

*[T]he image is intended to illustrate [that] the birth of experience [is] an event over which no one has control and which is not even determined by the particular weight of this or that observation, but…everything is co-ordinated in a way that is*
ultimately incomprehensible. The image captures the curious openness in which experience is acquired, suddenly…unpredictably, and yet not without preparation, and valid from then on until there is a new experience….226

This is, according to Aristotle, how scientific experience and universality come to be—the gradual, but constant accretion of individuals into an *arche* of scientific knowledge.

Gadamer points out that Aristotle’s phenomenology of experience, in addition to being quite simplistic, assumes the ontological priority of the universal concept that is the ground for scientific knowledge. The purpose of the image, and Aristotle’s phenomenology of experience, “…is merely its contribution to the formation of concepts.”227 The problem with this view of experience, both everyday and scientific, is that “…its real character as a process is overlooked.”228

Gadamer explains that Aristotle’s view of experience (and by extension that of contemporary science) forgets the negative aspect of experience. Experience is achieved not purely by the accretion of uncontradicted observations, argues Gadamer, “This development takes place, rather, by continually false generalisations being refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical being shown not to be so.”229 Gadamer contends that this dual aspect of experience is shown by the fact that the everyday meaning of the word “experience” is taken in at least two different ways: 1) experience that confirms our expectations and 2) experience that we acquire when our expectations are contradicted. Gadamer argues that this second one is “‘experience’ in the real sense.”230 The phenomenology of this second sense of “experience” is quite remarkable; it might even explain why Gadamer considers it genuine experience. The negative aspect of experience produces not only knowledge of the object intuited, but also adjusts the knowledge that we previously had. He says,
The negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply a deception that we see through and hence make a correction, but a comprehensive knowledge that we acquire. It cannot, therefore, be an object chosen at random in regard to which we have an experience, but it must be of such a nature that we gain through it better knowledge, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before, i.e., of a universal.... We call this kind of experience dialectical.  

Hegel and Experience

The introduction of a dialectical aspect in experience moves Gadamer’s discussion to a treatment of Hegel’s thought on experience. This treatment elucidates how it is that experience changes our knowledge and the object known. To begin with, Hegel clarifies that one cannot have the same experience twice. The reason for this incapacity is more insightful than the clichéd Heraclitean saw about a river; the same experience cannot occur twice precisely because the second “experience” provides us with the confirmation of a prior experience, a characteristic that is not necessarily the case with the first experience. The newness of the first experience cannot be repeated by the second. The second “experience” merely repeats and thereby confirms the prior experience. Weinsheimer points out, “[T]here is a real sense in which we can say that when something is repeated and just happens to us again, it is not an experience at all. When something simply accords with our expectations and provides a pure, uninspiring confirmation, it no longer provides an experience.” The significance of this clarification of genuine experience shows us that our knowledge is changed by experience. Experience, the first, unexpected kind, moves the mind back on itself: “The experiencer has become aware of his experience, he is ‘experienced’. He has acquired a new horizon within which something can become an experience for him.”
explanation, because the unexpected object “…contains the truth concerning the old [disconfirmed] one.”

The turning round of consciousness that occurs in ‘true’ experience is what Hegel calls “the experience that consciousness has of itself.” For Hegel, according to Gadamer, this self-awareness of consciousness in experience becomes the new criterion of experience. Gadamer says, “Experience itself can never be science. It is in absolute antithesis to knowledge and to that kind of instruction that follows from general or technical knowledge. The truth of experience always contains an orientation towards new experience [my italics].”

Such an understanding of experience moves us to a reconsideration of the goal of consciousness, according to Gadamer, in opposition to, even, Hegel. No longer is consciousness aimed at attaining definitive unchanging knowledge, rather Gadamer proposes that the end of experience is not knowledge but the openness to new experience: “The dialectic of experience has its own fulfillment not in definitive knowledge, but in that openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself.”

Weinsheimer adds, “Being experienced does not mean knowing this or that but rather knowing how to deal with the unexpected—indeed expecting it.”

Gadamer thinks that this realization of an alternative goal for consciousness provides a “qualitatively new element” to our understanding of experience. Experience is now not just information, it is also “…that experience which must constantly be acquired and from which none can be exempt. Experience here is something that is part of the historical nature of man.”

Weinsheimer explains Gadamer’s point quite lucidly: Openness to experience is not about an unflappable cosmopolitan attitude toward new ideas, cultures, and “experiences.” Rather, experience teaches us nothing in particular, “…but the knowledge of the limitations of humanity…. Thus experience is experience of human finitude.”

The alternative understanding
of experience that recognizes a goal for consciousness that is not merely the acquisition of useful information brings along with it a recognition that any attempt to achieve definitive knowledge will always be overcome and overwhelmed by new “real” experience. Experience is knowing that our knowledge will never be complete, that experience will always outrun our knowledge, our understanding. Gadamer concludes, “Thus true experience is that of one’s own historicality. This leads the discussion of the concept of experience to a conclusion that is of some importance to our enquiry into the nature of effective-historical consciousness.”

Gadamer thinks this understanding of experience in a general sense can add to hermeneutical experience and knowledge. Weinsheimer explains how Gadamer makes the connection between this new understanding of experience in general and hermeneutic experience:

[C]onscious openness to experience is what Gadamer means by hermeneutic consciousness, wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein. It too is a form of self-knowledge, but not merely narcissistic knowledge of the self by the self, for there is always something that eludes pure reflection. Since self-contemplation does not suffice, knowledge always requires experience, and self-knowledge requires experience of an other. Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein requires, in particular, hermeneutical experience—that is, understanding of historical tradition.241

Weinsheimer shows that Gadamer performs two significant adjustments with this alternative understanding of experience: 1) recognition of the need for an other in order to have experience, 2) recognition that tradition can serve as this other.
Gadamer has shown the first point throughout his discussion of the alternative understanding of experience. The fact that experience always goes beyond and outstrips its own understanding shows how and why the structure of experience requires an other. There are limits to the capacities of self-understanding. Self-understanding must be performed through a detour; it cannot be achieved directly. This claim of the need for a detour to understanding suggests a much closer stance between Gadamer and Ricoeur than the critical literature suggests.

The “Thou” and Hermeneutic Experience

Gadamer’s argument for the second point is just as involved as the first. He begins by pointing out that “…tradition is a genuine partner in communication, with which we have fellowship as does the ‘I’ with a ‘Thou’”. Now, Gadamer does not offer direct arguments for why this view of tradition is valid, but he does explain in an elliptical way why such a view is justified. He suggests that tradition does not give us information to master; rather, “…it is expression that one comes to understand” very much like one comes to understand an other. He does remark, though, that “…the understanding of tradition does not take the text as an expression of life of a ‘Thou’, but as a meaningful content detached from all bonds of the meaning individual, of an ‘I’ or a ‘Thou’.” This odd status of tradition—having aspects that make it both a “Thou” and not a “Thou”—leads Gadamer to consider how these characteristics might alter the understanding of experience in a general sense that he had earlier delimited. One characteristic that he is most interested in is the moral aspect of the relationship that one enters into with a ‘Thou,’ and how this relationship might present itself in hermeneutical experience. He anticipates that the analysis will show that the interpreter’s relationship to tradition will show that “…here the object of experience has itself the character of a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon, as is the knowledge acquired through experience, the understanding of the other person.”
Gadamer performs this analysis by presenting three different kinds of experience that present a relationship with a ‘Thou.’ After discussing each of these and presenting the manner in which each demonstrates a moral relationship with a ‘Thou,’ Gadamer considers how these kinds of relationships might translate in a hermeneutical experience.

The first kind of Thou-relationship Gadamer considers is one where we attempt to “…discover things that are typical in the behaviour of one’s fellow men and is able to make predictions concerning another person on the basis of experience.” Gadamer considers such a relationship to less than moral, because such a relation is ultimately self-centered and is concerned with how to use these predictions as means to one’s ends. Such a relation makes the ‘Thou’ predictable and treats her as “…any other typical event in our experiential field….”

The second kind of Thou-relationship that Gadamer presents is one where the ‘Thou’ is experienced and treated as a person, but still the relation is permeated by self-centeredness. Such a relation is characterized by a constant one-upmanship in which “One claims to express the other’s claim and even to understand the other better than the other understands himself.” Such a relation also is less than moral because “…the ‘Thou’ loses the immediacy with which it makes its claim. It is understood, but this means that it is anticipated and intercepted reflectively form the standpoint of the other person.” Gadamer does accede that this relation is an improvement from the first, because the second has a dialectical structure wherein each individual attempts to achieve recognition by the other. Unfortunately, in this second relation there is still a drive away from this recognition. In the extreme case of the master-slave relation, the slave withdraws himself from the reciprocity of recognition so that he is unreachable by his master. The slave may perform his master’s orders with great effectiveness, but the slave performs these always in order to demonstrate his mastery over her. Gadamer concludes, “By
understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one takes from him all justification of his own claims….The claim to understand the other person in advance performs the function of keeping the claims of the other person at a distance.”

Gadamer describes the third Thou-relationship as having a true moral character. He says,

In human relations the important thing is…to experience the ‘Thou’ truly as a ‘Thou’, ie, not to overlook his claim and to listen to what he has to say to us. To this end openness is necessary. But this openness exists ultimately not only for the person to whom one listens, but rather anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without this kind of openness to one another there is no genuine human relationship [my italics]….Openness to the other…includes the acknowledgement that I must accept some things that are against myself, even though there is no one else who asks this of me.

In other words, the third and, finally, the moral, Thou-relationship is characterized by an openness to the claims of the other upon my understanding. My recognition of the claim of truth that the other makes is not forced upon me, but is made freely. Most importantly, this recognition of the claims of the other is a recognition that those claims make demands upon me and my understanding, so much so that those claims will alter my view of myself and my experience.

Gadamer considers how the structures of these three relationships might exhibit themselves in hermeneutic experience. The first relation is found hermeneutically in “…the naïve faith in method and the objectivity that can be attained through it. Someone who understands tradition in this way makes it an object, ie he confronts it in a free and uninvolved way, and by methodically excluding all subjective elements in regard to it, he discovers what it
contains." Gadamer contends that this method is that of the eighteenth century social sciences that followed Hume’s notions of a method that could lead to objectivity. The problem with such a methodology is that it “…flattens out the nature of hermeneutical experience…” in exactly the same way as shown earlier with enumerative induction.

The second relation is found hermeneutically in the nineteenth and twentieth century notion of historical consciousness. Gadamer thinks that this hermeneutic understanding of history parallels the second Thou-relationship, because historical consciousness claims to concern itself with the uniqueness of past events and individuals; such an understanding of history is not concerned with determining historical laws. But Gadamer contends, “By claiming to transcend its own conditionedness completely in its knowing of the other, it is involved in a false dialectical appearance, since it is actually seeking to master, as it were, the past.” He continues,

A person who imagines that he is free of prejudices, basing his knowledge on the objectivity of his procedures and denying the he is himself influenced by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him, as a vis a tergo. A person who does not accept that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what is shown by their light…. A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship with tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition….

This assessment of historical consciousness is merely a continuation of the critique that Gadamer has made of the adoption of the methods of the natural sciences by the human sciences. The resolution of this destruction of meaning of history by the methods of the Enlightenment and the
natural sciences is possible if historical consciousness “…take[s] account of its own historicality.
To stand within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible.”

The third Thou-relationship is paralleled in hermeneutic experience when the historian allows the truth claims of the past to speak to her. The historian who is open in this manner sees that “…historical consciousness is not really open at all, but rather, if it reads its texts ‘historically’ has always smoothed them out beforehand, so that the criteria of our own knowledge can never be put in question by tradition.” Such a hermeneutical understanding of history would recognize that any assessment of a historical text or event cannot be performed adequately with preformed conceptual structures or methods that do not allow a genuine interaction with those texts or events. He says,

[E]ffective-historical consciousness…let[s] itself experience tradition and…keep[s] itself open to the claim to truth encountered in it. The hermeneutical consciousness has its fulfilment, not in its methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man by comparison with the man captivated by dogma. This is what distinguishes effective-historical consciousness…in terms of the concept of experience. Gadamer maintains that his analysis offers a different perspective upon the concept of experience and such a perspective provides an alternative for understanding history. We can arrive at a truth in history that is not achieved through method, but is still just as rigorous as such a truth so achieved, and the truth achieved through effective-historical consciousness provides an interaction with history that creates a moral relationship with it. But such a relation is not achieved through objective distanciation from the object of historical inquiry, but from an
engagement of the historian’s own prejudices with those of history. The historian must risk herself.

The Hermeneutical Priority of the Question
The Model of the Platonic Dialectic

Gadamer’s next step in his analysis of effective-historical consciousness considers the attitude and a model for just how the interpreter is to risk herself. His entry into this discussion turns on his reappraisal of the goal of experience itself. Gadamer, unlike Hegel and the major part of the philosophical tradition,

…does not conceive of knowledge as the end of experience, he considers the perfection of experience not as perfect knowledge but as being perfectly experienced….Being experienced means knowing one’s limits, but having this knowledge does not imply that one knows some determinate thing. Quite the contrary, being experienced, being open to experience, being conscious of finitude, means knowing that one does not know.259

Gadamer thinks that this knowledge of one’s ignorance is the foundation of a question. A question and its structure are the basis of all experience. He says, “We cannot have experience without asking questions.”260 Gadamer’s prior analysis of experience shows this assessment to be true. If experience is structured in the manner Gadamer proposes—based not on enumerative induction but on the disappointment of our expectations by experience itself—then it is clear that “[t]he recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought, obviously involves the question of whether it was this or that.”261 Knowing that one does not know what an object is—or more to the point, knowing that one’s knowledge is not the final determination of an object—is the basis of the question that allows for experience, i.e., for genuine provisional knowledge to
occur. This knowledge of her ignorance is also the basis for the openness of the interpreter to hermeneutical experience.

Gadamer asserts that all questions have a sense; this is part of their essence. What this means, according to Gadamer, is that all questions have a particular perspective that determines the meaningfulness of all answers given in response to a question. He says, “A question places that which is questioned within a particular perspective. The emergence of the question opens up…the being of the object. Hence the logos that sets out this opened-up being is already an answer. Its sense lies in the sense of the question.”

At this point, having determined the attitude that allows the interpreter to risk herself: openness, Gadamer offers his proposal for the model that allows for such openness: the Socratic dialogue. Gadamer contends that the Socratic dialogue achieves this openness for many reasons, among them that Socratic dialectic allows us to “…understand experience temporally, in terms of process rather than result…. [T]he dialogue of Socrates and his interlocutors embodies the process of question and answer.” Weinsheimer adds that the dialogue maintains openness, in Gadamer’s view, because the assertion of definitive knowledge, though it does provide an answer to a question, “…conceals the priority of the question and so also its past, the process of conversation by which it arose. Moreover… [a statement of definitive knowledge] closes off the future, for a definitive answer is one that obviates further questioning.” The Socratic dialogue is the exemplar for perfect experience because it “…affirms the primacy of process over state and of question over statement.”

Gadamer also argues that the Socratic dialogue clearly demonstrates the difference between genuine and false discourse. In the Socratic dialogue those individuals who use the dialogue in an attempt to prove their positions to be correct and not in order to learn something
about the topic under discussion in the dialogue, soon realize “…that he who thinks that he knows better cannot even ask the right questions. In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know.”

Gadamer thinks the Socratic dialogue shows that “[d]iscourse that is intended to reveal something requires that the thing be opened up by the question.” The question opens up the thing in question because the question shows that there is not a definitive answer to the question. This means that the determination of whether a thing is this or that has not been settled. But this means that we have not determined that it is neither this nor that. In other words, the question shows us that the answer has not been provided either positively or negatively. Gadamer says, “The sense of every question is realised in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question achieves this openness. If it lacks this it is no more than an apparent question.”

Interestingly, Gadamer argues that the openness of a question is not unlimited: “It is limited by the horizon of the question.” What he means by this, is that a question, in order to be a question must be asked, i.e., it must settle upon a specific direction. The asking of a question “…implies openness, but also limitation. It implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which it can be seen what remains open.”

Weinsheimer explains, [Questions] are bounded by a horizon. Within this horizon, openness consists in the possibility of the thing’s being this way or that; but each of these possibilities must have been determined beforehand, and their determinacy marks the limits of a question’s horizon. The openness of a question is not infinite because it involves no more than the indeterminacy or hesitation between alternative determinations [My italics].
Gadamer thinks that a question, if it is to be asked, must distinguish between what is undecided and what is not, i.e., “…those predispositions that are effectively held….” Without this distinction, thinks Gadamer, nothing can be decided because nothing has been brought out into the open, i.e., determined to be undecided. It would seem here that the limitation of the possible answers to a question, i.e., the asking of a question as Gadamer puts it, would actually close off the question from true openness. But Gadamer contends that there is a difference between an open question that leaves open possibilities for responses to it and those questions that inherently close off possibilities. Such closed questions are rhetorical, pedagogical and, most importantly, distorted questions. Distorted questions show us, again, how every question has a sense. The sense of a distorted question closes off the possibility of “correct” answers to it, as do all questions. But the closing off achieved by distorted questions is achieved through a semblance of openness. Gadamer says,

There can be no answer to a distorted question because it leads us only apparently, and not really, through the open state of indeterminacy in which a decision is made…. [T]here is a question behind [the distorted question], i.e there is an openness intended, but it does not lie in the direction in which the distorted question is pointing…. The distortedness of a question consists in the fact that it does not have any real direction, and hence any answer to it is impossible.

Weinsheimer explains that the openness of a question depends upon its leading discussion in a particular direction, but not thereby closing off any possibility of response. He says, “That an open question is not infinitely open means that it too is a leading question and gives a direction [like rhetorical and pedagogical questions], but its openness consists in its leading in several possible directions to several possible answers [unlike distorted questions].”
From the above discussion, Gadamer asserts that the question is prior to knowledge. The question opens up the possibility of both positive and negative responses to the question about the thing at hand. He says, “Knowledge always means, precisely, looking at opposites. Its superiority over preconceived opinion consists in the fact that it is able to conceive of possibilities as possibilities. Knowledge is dialectical from the ground up.”

The interplay between positive and negative judgments that is achieved by the openness achieved by the question shows that the question is prior to the judgment. Gadamer explains, “The priority that the question holds in knowledge shows in the most basic way the limitedness of the idea of method for knowledge from which our argument as a whole has proceeded. There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what needs to be questioned.”

The Socratic dialogue, according to Gadamer, is a model for the questioning of one’s supposed knowledge. The central event in the dialogue is the admission of ignorance by the interlocutor. The admission of ignorance, says Gadamer, establishes the presuppositions of the question and moves the question or discussion in a particular direction. But this admission of ignorance is blocked by opinion. Gadamer says, “It is the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain an admission of ignorance. It is opinion that suppresses questions. Opinion has a curious tendency to propagate itself…. How, then, can the admission of ignorance and questioning emerge?”

*Source of the Question*

Gadamer’s response to this question of the source and possibility of questioning is to compare the admission of ignorance to the occurrence of a sudden idea. He recognizes that the concept of a sudden idea is usually associated with an answer to a question and not to the question itself, but he thinks that the relationship between a question and a sudden idea is
appropriate. The connection has to do with the fact that a sudden idea has a direction or sense, just like a question. The direction of a sudden idea comes from the “…area of openness from which the idea can come, ie [sudden ideas] presuppose questions. The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less the sudden realisation of the solution to a problem than the sudden realisation of the question that advances into openness and thus makes an answer possible.”278 With this connection between the sudden idea and questioning, Gadamer is able to explain why and how it is that the source of the questioning of dogma and common opinion does not arise from the questioner. He says, “A question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion.”279

This passion of the question suffered by the questioner makes the art of questioning unique from all other arts. The art of questioning, like the other arts, presupposes that there is a questioner who has questions, i.e., the art is limited to particular practitioners, questioners who have questions. But the art of questioning is not concerned with overcoming prejudices and common opinion in order to ask questions; the art already presupposes the questioners’ freedom from such influence.

Nor is the art a techne by which one learns to master truth. In addition it is not concerned with winning arguments; rather, it is concerned with keeping questions open. Gadamer says, Dialectic, as the art of raising questions, proves itself only because the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness. The art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions, i.e. the art of thinking. It is called ‘dialectic’, for it is the art of conducting a real conversation [My italics].280
The Art of Questioning

Gadamer provides several factors that the questioner must fulfill if she is to effectively perform the art of questioning, i.e., keep questions open. In order for a conversation to be real both parties to it must be moving in the same vein of the conversation. Gadamer says, “To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion.” To keep a conversation real, i.e., open, both parties must concern themselves with the object or concern of the conversation, not with trying to dominate the conversation with their respective points of view. Real conversation keeps open the question of the topic of conversation. Real conversation allows for open possibilities about the topic of conversation. Gadamer says, “A person who possesses the ‘art’ of questioning is a person who is able to prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion.” The practitioner of real conversation keeps questions open by trying to strengthen all sides of the conversation. Gadamer insists that this is not the sophistic art of making the weaker argument the stronger, “…but the art of thinking that is able to strengthen what is said by referring to the object.”

Gadamer argues that the Socratic dialogue is still relevant philosophically and, most relevantly, hermeneutically because of its capacity to strengthen an argument under consideration to the utmost degree. Interestingly, this strengthening occurs precisely because the question of the conversation attempts resolution: “[I]t is not simply a matter of leaving the subject undecided.” Weinsheimer explains that the resolution of the question of the conversation occurs if, and so long as, both parties are concerned with reaching mutual understanding about the question. But the resolution of the question in a Platonic dialogue, i.e.,
in a real conversation, is guided by the subject at hand, not by the opinions of the interlocutors, though these very opinions start the conversation. Gadamer says, “What emerges in [the dialogue’s] truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the subjective opinions of the partners to the dialogue that even the person leading the conversation is always ignorant.”

Weinsheimer explains, “The object of the conversation is what both want to understand, and it is by reference to this object that they reach a mutual understanding. This joint object, not the partners conducts the conversation.”

Gadamer explains that this drive for mutual understanding is part and parcel of the art of conversation that he considers also to be “…the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect…i.e., it is the art of the formation of concepts as the working out of the common meaning.”

Exactly how Gadamer thinks a concept is worked out through common meaning is a question that Weinsheimer elucidates. Weinsheimer asks, “[H]ow can [the interlocutors] be led by a mutual understanding that is yet to be reached or by a common object that does not yet exist?” It is clear that if this understanding or the common object already existed, then the conversation would never have been engaged in. So the concept that at the end of the conversation unifies the views of the interlocutors is not prior to the conversation; it is worked out through the conversation. And this possibility of arriving at a mutually determined concept must be possible, “…for that possibility motivates the partners to engage in conversation….”

He suggests that the best way to characterize the motivation behind a conversation is “…to be impelled from behind by lack and difference but also to be drawn from before by possibility and community.” Gadamer thinks that meaning is communicated, not exclusively by the exchange of information, but also by “…the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point….”
Gadamer recommends that the communication of meaning occurs in a similar manner between a text and its interpreter. Hermeneutics must see its task as a “conversation with the text.” Now some would argue that this kind of interpretation of a text changes or alters the original fixed meaning of text so that such a conversation can take place. Gadamer thinks, rather, that such an interpretive approach actually “…represents the restoration of the original communication of meaning. Thus that which is handed down in literary form is brought back out of the alienation in which it finds itself and into the living presence of conversation, whose fundamental procedure is always question and answer.” Weinsheimer contends that the task that Gadamer recommends for hermeneutics “…means that [the text] no longer consists of statements but instead of answers and questions. The task of hermeneutics is to transform fixed assertion into conversation and to bring the bygone and static past back into the process of history.”

Weinsheimer adds that the manner in which this conversation with the text occurs cannot be mechanized or methodized. He argues that the interpreter can be drawn into conversation with the text only if “…it says something interesting, something that concerns him too. The interpreter who is thus drawn in no longer stands at a distance or merely makes assertions about the text, but rather engages in a conversation with it. He asks questions of it and so draws the text into conversation as well, draws it out and interprets it.” A hermeneutical engagement with a historical text requires the overcoming of distance and objectivity by the interpreter. Such an engagement makes assertions about a text unlikely. Gadamer thinks that Plato’s dialogues are a clear example of how dialogue, i.e., conversation, with a text makes assertorial statements about the text less likely. He says,
We can see in Plato’s dialogues the way in which the ‘interpretation’ of texts, cultivated by the sophists, and especially that of poetry for didactic ends, called forth Plato’s opposition. We can see, further, the way in which Plato seeks to overcome the weakness of the logoi and especially that of the written ones, through his own dialogues. The literary form of the dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of the conversation. *This protects words from all dogmatic abuse.* [My italics]²⁹⁶

Again, the origin of language and its meaning according to Gadamer is the conversation. The reappropriation of the conversational roots of a text is therefore not “a translation into a foreign medium”,²⁹⁷ but a return to its proper foundation. This foundation inhibits the establishment of dogmatic pronouncements and assertions of meaning about a text.

*The Logic of Question and Answer*

Gadamer contends that Plato’s dialogues offer the model for the maintenance of openness in a conversation. Gadamer also thinks that the structure that underlies the openness attainable by Plato’s dialogues is present in hermeneutic phenomena. He says, “For an historical text to be made the object of interpretation means that it asks a question of the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question.”²⁹⁸ He adds,

Thus a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question….We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is
relative to the question to which it is a reply, ie it necessarily goes beyond what is said in it.299

In other words, the interpreter of a historical text must recognize that in order to understand a text, she must enter into a conversation with the text. She must see that the text is a response to a question, and the text cannot be understood from a distant objective viewpoint. Also strict adherence to the literal text will not provide sufficient grounds for the understanding of a text.

Gadamer elucidates this point—the recognition of the text as a response to a question in order to adequately interpret the text—using Collingwood’s insights about historical events. Collingwood recognized, “The historical method requires that the logic of question and answer be applied to historical tradition. We shall understand historical events only if we reconstruct the question to which the historical actions of the persons concerned were the answer.”300 Gadamer clarifies that historical understanding actually involves two different questions with different answers: “[T]he question of meaning in the course of a great event and the question of whether this event went according to plan.”301 Gadamer reminds us that these two questions are actually separate and that there is a tendency in hermeneutic understanding to join them though they only coincide “…when the plan coincides with the course of events.”302 He adds, “[T]he interpreter of history always runs the risk of hypostasizing the sequence of events when he sees their significance as that intended by actors and planners.”303 Gadamer disagrees with Hegel that there is a consistent coordination between these two elements throughout history. Gadamer accedes that this can be the case on occasion, but generally, there is a “…disproportion that exists between the subjective thoughts of an individual and the meaning of the whole course of history. As a rule we experience the course of events as something that continually changes our plans and expectations. Someone who tries to stick to his plans discovers precisely how
powerless his reason is.” Gadamer finds the application of the occasional experience of seeing events go according to plan to the whole of world history to be an extrapolation that goes beyond experience.

Gadamer thinks that Collingwood’s insight about the understanding of history is applicable to hermeneutics as well. Gadamer says, “Our understanding of written tradition as such is not a kind that we can simply presuppose that the meaning that we discover in it agrees with what the author intended… [T]he sense of a text in general reaches far beyond what its author originally intended.” It is for this reason that Gadamer thinks the main concern of hermeneutics is the text not the author’s intention.

If we concern ourselves with the text, then we may get to the author’s intended meaning, but we need not be limited to it in our interpretation. It is possible “…to differentiate between the question to which the text is imagined to be an answer and the question to which it really is an answer.” Gadamer contends that the reconstruction of an author’s intent is precisely the former. He also thinks that such an approach to interpretation is ultimately fruitless. He says, “The hermeneutical reduction to the author’s meaning is just as inappropriate as the reduction of historical events to the intentions of their protagonists.” Gadamer argues that in that same way that history can only be understood through the progressive determinations that new events allow, so too do new events and situations create new interpretations of a text. He says, “In both cases it is the progress of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. Through being re-actualised in understanding, the texts are drawn into a genuine process in exactly the same way as are the events themselves through their continuance. *This is what we describe as the effective-historical element within the hermeneutical experience.* [My italics.]”
Gadamer argues that we recognize that those who come after us will understand the same historical event or text differently, but that does not change the work or the event.

The retrieval of the question posed by the text is essential for Gadamer’s hermeneutics. As stated above, this retrieval will not be a mere reconstruction of the author’s intended response, but neither is the retrieval achievable through some kind of objective historical method. Gadamer says,

[T]he question that the text presents us with, our response to the word handed down to us…must already include the work of historical self-mediation of present and tradition…. The voice that speaks to us from the past—be it text, work, trace—itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness. In order to answer this question, we, of whom the question is asked, must ourselves begin to ask questions. We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the transmitted text is the answer.\(^{309}\)

In Gadamer’s proposed hermeneutics, the scientifically removed objective stance is not possible. A retrieval of the question of the text must and will involve the interpreter. This involvement occurs because, “The reconstruction of the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer takes place itself within a process of questioning through which we seek the answer to the question that the text asks us.”\(^{310}\) In other words, the retrieval of the question asked by the text cannot occur through a mere assessment of the historical conditions and environment surrounding the creation of the text. Such an assessment would allow for a removal of the interpreter from the question posed by the text. Gadamer also argues, “A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that is outlined in the
reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have responded to the word that has been handed down.”

Weinsheimer, returning to the theme of open conversation, explains that a text opens conversation by asking questions that are responsive to the interpreter’s responses. This does not mean that the interpreter will have answers to the question posed by the text, but the text does concern the interpreter. Gadamer calls this inter-relation of the horizon of the text and that of the interpreter a fusion of horizons. He explains,

The understanding of the word of the tradition always requires that the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness, ie that it merge with the question that the tradition is for us…. It is part of real understanding…that we regain the concepts of an historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them…. [W]e understand only when we understand the question to which something is an answer, and it is true that what is understood in this way does not remain detached in its meaning from our own meaning. Rather, the reconstruction of the question, from which the meaning of a text is to be understood as an answer, passes into our own understanding.

For Gadamer, there is a connection between understanding and questioning, i.e., maintaining a question open. True questioning keeps questions open; says Gadamer, “Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing.” If one questions a thing, then one, in essence, understands that thing. One has realized that the thing in question is open to other ways of understanding it. We may not have definitive responses for the openness created by the question, but that is not the point of questioning. Questioning, i.e., understanding, is about
testing new possibilities, not affirming them. Gadamer asserts, therefore, “[A]ll understanding is always more than the mere recreation of someone else’s meaning. Asking it opens up possibilities of meaning and thus what is meaningful passes into one’s own thinking on the subject.” Gadamer concludes, “To understand a question means to ask it.”

A Different Understanding of Understanding

Gadamer argues that such an understanding of understanding—an opening up of the questionableness of the subject that necessarily must involve the questioner—makes the possibility of “understanding” philosophical problems from a purely abstract and objective viewpoint impossible. He says, “There is no such thing…as a point outside history from which the identity of a problem can be conceived within the vicissitudes of the various attempts to solve it.” Although, we have to be outside of the philosophical schools and texts in order to know what those texts say, Gadamer says, “…this does not mean that we in any way step outside the historical conditions in which we find ourselves and in which we understand…. The standpoint that is beyond any standpoint, a standpoint from which we could conceive [a philosophical problem’s] true identity, is a pure illusion.” Gadamer argues that this illusion is the case because such an abstractive approach to a question—making it into a problem—detaches the question from “the motivated context of questioning,” so that the question becomes senseless, i.e., senseless in the manner that Gadamer explains that all true questions have a sense, i.e., a context that gives them meaning. Gadamer contends that a hermeneutic interpretation that is aware of the necessary involvement of the interpreter “…transforms problems back to questions that arise and derive their sense from their motivation.”

Gadamer connects his discussion of the dialectic of question and answer as seen in Plato’s dialogues to the elaboration of effective-historical consciousness. He explains that the analysis of question and answer “…makes understanding appear as a reciprocal relationship of
He does recognize that a text cannot speak to us in the same way that a person can, and because of this difference, the interpreter must perform the task of making the text speak. This task, though, is not achieved arbitrarily—this is how Gadamer might be able to overcome and address criticism that his hermeneutical approach to interpretation does not provide rigorous understanding of a text—but rather, “...as a question, it is related to the answer that is expected in the text.” In other words, there is a guide behind the direction that interpretation may take; interpretation is not achieved willy-nilly through the whim and fancy of the interpreter. That guide is tradition. Gadamer says,

The anticipation of an answer itself presumes that the person asking is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it. This is the truth of the effective-historical consciousness. It is the historically experienced consciousness that, by renouncing the chimera of perfect enlightenment, is open to the experience of history.

Gadamer concludes his comparison of effective-historical consciousness and Platonic conversation by explaining that the fusion of horizons that happens when understanding occurs is an event that occurs in and through language. He reminds us that both interpretation of a text and understanding in conversation “...are concerned with an object that is placed before them.” But agreement about that object must be achieved in linguistic form. A language is necessary—and in particular a common language is—because without it the interlocutors cannot exchange ideas about the object under consideration. But this linguistic presentation of the thing under consideration, i.e., that language that is used to disclose the object under consideration, “...is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors.” In other words, the adequacy of a particular language that is used to allow for the disclosure of the object under
consideration by the interlocutors cannot be determined prior to the conversation itself. Neither party can come to the conversation thinking that she already has the best method for understanding the object under consideration. Gadamer also thinks, though, that the common language will not be worked out by the two parties “…adapt[ing] themselves to one another….‖324 Such adaptation might be a situation wherein both parties translate the terms and language of the other party into her own. Such translation, though, would in no way affect the application of a predetermined language to the object under consideration. It would merely guarantee that both parties were not communicating at cross-purposes. Such a translation would not necessarily effect a disclosure of the object under consideration. Gadamer contends,

[I]n the successful conversation…both [parties] come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding with one’s partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one’s own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were.325

Conclusion

Gadamer’s hermeneutics arises from a particular wariness of the methodologies of the natural and human sciences and the inclusion of those methodologies within philosophical hermeneutics. He explains that the prejudice against prejudice that marks the sciences since the Enlightenment has a history behind it. That history has covered over the existence of alternative understandings of truth and knowledge. In fact, by turning to Aristotle and Plato, Gadamer is able to show that one must have a stance from which to engage in interpretation. He explains how this stance from within a prior viewpoint does not necessarily lead to a misapprehension of the subject-matter. He turns to the legal realm to demonstrate how a prejudice can offer a better outcome of justice than one that has none.
Gadamer turns to the legal realm also to demonstrate how a different understanding of understanding can offer an alternative to the methodologies of the natural sciences for the attainment of truth. The legal realm, according to Gadamer, develops its measures and understanding of justice from within a legal tradition. That legal tradition influences the kinds of decisions that a judge might make, but not to the extreme that the judge merely robotically applies that tradition to each particular case she might face. Rather, explains Gadamer, that judge must apply the tradition to the particular case in question in order to effect a just outcome. Sometimes, in fact, the judge might choose to not apply a particular law or statute in order to have a just outcome. Just as important for Gadamer as the achievement of justice from within a tradition that the situation of legal hermeneutics demonstrates, the fact that each successive case and judgment serves to expand and elaborate the tradition and clarify the tradition’s understanding of justice demonstrates an alternative understanding of how to understand and achieve truth.

Gadamer’s analysis of legal hermeneutics serves to elucidate how philosophical hermeneutics might achieve its project. Part of Gadamer’s insight about the achievement of legal justice from within a tradition points to the fact that the judge must come to her determination with an openness to the particular situation at hand to shape the judgment she may render. This openness is applicable to interpretation generally, for Gadamer. He refers to it as keeping a question open. That is, when entering into a discussion with another, thinks Gadamer, the awareness that the subject-matter at hand is not what one thought it was, i.e., that one allows for the possibility that one’s experience of the thing did not meet one’s expectation, permits the thing itself to disclose itself to both parties. Gadamer points to the Platonic dialogue as an exemplar of just such an openness. He proposes that Plato shows how both parties, particularly
Socrates, leave room for the issue that is discussed to guide the direction of the dialogue.

Granted, this freedom of the open question is only achieved after the interlocutor comes to an awareness of his ignorance of the matter in question. Socrates, professing his ignorance from the beginning, leaves the question to lead the discussion.

This openness to the question does not mean that interpretation can arbitrarily arrive at a particular understanding. Gadamer points out that the question itself has a horizon that limits the scope of interpretation. The scope of interpretation is given meaning also by the tradition within which the very question is asked. This horizon is filled in and fleshed out by the parties to the question at hand, but only so long as both parties are open to the question. Gadamer points out that part of that openness is found in the language or terminology that both parties use to explore the question. He notes that the determination of that language is not achieved by one party or the other or even by both parties coming to an agreed translation for terms and words. This last strategy does not maintain an openness to the question at hand; it merely assures that both parties are not misunderstanding each other, i.e., speaking at cross-purposes. The determination of the proper language and terminology is achieved through the subject-matter itself. The terms of discussion cannot be arrived at prior to the discussion, if the subject-matter is to be given the room or openness for disclosure.
Chapter 4

Ricoeur’s Hermeneutics

We had closed out chapter one with an intriguing problem raised by Lawlor’s seemingly innocent question “What happens however when the word distorts, deviates, errs, wanders from its path? Doesn’t this open the hermeneutical horizon beyond any dialectic, no matter how naïve?” Earlier we had pointed out that both Ricoeur and Gadamer had to address the problem and that Gadamer would have difficulty doing so within the constraints of his hermeneutics. And yet, Lawlor maintains that there is a foundational unity between Gadamer and Ricoeur. If this is the case how might one fairly arrive at the determination that one thinker might more effectively address Lawlor’s question than the other. If we are to address this question, an assessment of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is called for.

Richard Kearney informs us that Ricoeur elucidated many of his ideas on hermeneutics in two significant texts: The Conflict of Interpretations (1965) and Time and Narrative (1983). Of course there were others, but these two are texts in which Ricoeur explicitly addresses the connection of hermeneutics to understanding. Kearney tells us

The primary aim of these hermeneutic studies is to show how the classical ideal of absolute knowledge is always deferred or displaced by an endless series of expropriations and reappropriations of meaning (via the notion of the ‘unconscious’ in psychoanalysis, or anonymous linguistic ‘codes’ in structuralism or of the impersonal ‘facticity’ of time and circumstance in the political philosophies of history).¹

Kearney adds that, for Ricoeur, philosophy of consciousness has to address the human sciences:
“Only by recognizing the various obstacles and opacities which the project of self-understanding encounters, and by thus resisting the facile solution of some ‘absolute synthesis’ of knowledge which would contrive to resolve prematurely the conflict of interpretations, can we achieve an authentic grasp of the role of human creativity and imagination in spite of all the odds.”

Following Ricoeur’s thinking, Kearney proposes that we have to earnestly address the concerns of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that “seeks to expose the idealist fallacy of self-transparent consciousness” so that we can move to a ‘hermeneutics of affirmation’ that offers “the recovery of lost meanings and the creation of new ones — the opening up of ‘possible worlds’.”

Time and Narrative (Temps et recit), according to Kearney is Ricoeur’s extension of the hermeneutical project to language. It deals with how language transforms and mutates time, and thereby meaning, creatively.

[T]he analysis of narrative operations in a literary text…can teach us how we formulate a new structure of ‘time’ by creating new modes of plot and characterization…. [T]his analysis…discover[s] how the act of raconter, of telling a story, can transmute natural time into a specifically human time, irreducible to mathematical, chronological ‘clock time’. How is narrativity, as the construction or deconstruction of paradigms of story-telling, a perpetual search for new way of expressing human time, a production or creation of meaning?

Finally, an exegesis of Ricoeur’s comparatively short essay, Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue, will provide us with Ricoeur’s view of his own thought relative to that of Habermas and Gadamer.

I. The Conflict of Interpretations

Ricoeur’s The Conflict of Interpretations addresses two significant challenges to philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics: structuralism and psychoanalysis. In this work,
Ricoeur demonstrates how the insights of these fields must be incorporated into philosophical hermeneutics. He explains, extensively, in several essays how the insights of these fields provide an important critique to the philosophical insistence upon the certainty and obviousness of consciousness and self-consciousness. He also demonstrates how the conflicting claims of each of these fields can only be mediated by a philosophical hermeneutics. Ricoeur also explains how hermeneutics properly delimited can expose the limitations of structuralism and psychoanalysis (and by extension other human sciences). Ricoeur centers his analysis of the promise and weakness of these fields upon the symbol and their use, application, and understanding of it.

He shows that the basic presuppositions of structuralism prevent it from adequately explaining the manner by which the symbol is able to create meaning. He demonstrates that these presuppositions prevent structuralism from adequately explaining how the symbol is able to create new combinations of words to create meaning. He clarifies that meaning occurs in discourse when someone attempts to say something about something to someone else. Discourse functions, explains Ricoeur, within a dialectic between the ideal and real referent of language. He provides an extensive explanation of the dynamic between words and context to create polysemy, i.e., to create the possibility for words to mean more than one thing. The inclusion of context within this dynamic requires the consideration of a more complex foundation for the communication of meaning: the text. Ricoeur explores the capacity of the text to communicate in *Time and Narrative*.

Ricoeur’s exploration of psychoanalysis argues that Freud’s theory questions the whole of the philosophic project. Freud, according to Ricoeur, brings into doubt the capacity of consciousness itself to achieve certainty. Ricoeur adds that as powerful as the psychoanalytic
critique may be, it does have its limitations. Freud himself recognized that the unconscious was not a ding ang sich. Its existence depends upon the application of hermeneutic procedures. The consequence of this recognition, according to Ricoeur, is to see that consciousness, as well as the unconscious, is not a given but a task. The meaning of consciousness as a task, for Ricoeur, shows that consciousness is a movement through moments that serve to break up the origin of consciousness. The origin gives and gets meaning to each of these moments by reference to the final moment. In other words, consciousness looks back to get meaning while simultaneously looking forward to a future that also gives each of its moments meaning. Ricoeur argues that Freud’s questioning of self-conscious is analogous to that achieved by Nietzsche and Marx. These thinkers changed the question of the certainty of consciousness to the demonstration that hermeneutics was necessary to achieve understanding and comprehension. The insights of each of these thinkers, according to Ricoeur, though relative to each aspect of human Being that each of these thinkers addressed, demonstrate that the reconceptualization of the past and future of human self-understanding is legitimate.

Ricoeur’s treatment of phenomenology and its value to hermeneutics and vice versa goes through a discussion of Nabert and Heidegger. Ricoeur’s analysis of these thinkers’ ideas shows that the tendency to explain human action deterministically rests on the separation between human action and the motives behind it. Ricoeur shows that the explanation of human action, i.e., providing the value behind actions, is an alternative to deterministic descriptions. He argues that the determination of value is just as important as the uncovering of motives for human self-understanding. Unfortunately, according to Ricoeur, the determination of values that drive human action is covered over in the expression of those values, i.e., human action. For Ricoeur, this means that self-understanding must be achieved hermeneutically. Ricoeur demonstrates that
much of his thought is very much in line with that of Heidegger, but Ricoeur disagrees with Heidegger about the role and effectiveness of hermeneutics to retrieve the meaning of Being of Dasein.

Part I – Hermeneutics and Structuralism

“Structure and Hermeneutics”

Interpretation itself has a tradition. Ricoeur says, “Interpretation does not spring from nowhere; rather, one interprets in order to make explicit, to extend, and so to keep alive the tradition itself, inside which one always remains.”5 Tradition will die if there is not an interpretation of it. “[O]ur ‘heritage’ is not a sealed package we pass from hand to hand, without ever opening, but rather a treasure from which we draw by the handful and which by this very act is replenished. Every tradition lives by grace of interpretation, and it is at this price that it continues, that is, remains living. [My italics.]”6 Ricoeur thinks that the relation between tradition and interpretation needs to be made explicit.

He proposes that it is possible to address the relationship between tradition and interpretation in terms of temporality. He offers that a temporality of meaning could explain how tradition is created and how interpretation clarifies it. Ricoeur also thinks that the symbol is a means to explain the relationship between these two realms. He thinks that the symbol presses us to interpret it, because we recognize that it means more than itself, but we cannot perform the achievement of meaning without the symbol. He says, “The symbol invites us to think, calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us.”7 Ricoeur’s project in this essay is to explain how the surplus of meaning of the symbol and the temporal aspect of this surplus are necessarily related.

Ricoeur begins his analysis by distinguishing myth from symbol. He explains that this is necessary because myth particularizes the capacities of symbol. It places symbol within a
narrative time that is unrelated to the question at hand. Also, myth is intimately related to the social institutions that give it meaning. He argues, “[T]he determined social function of the myth does not, to my mind, exhaust the fullness of meaning of the symbolic base….”\(^8\) He adds that myth introduces us to the way of thinking that explains or rationalizes. This limits the capacities of the symbol. These three aspects of myth show a clear distinction and they show why Ricoeur does not approach this question through myth. Ricoeur argues that his earlier analysis of the symbolism of evil showed “…that the store of meaning of primary symbols was richer than that of mythical symbols and even more so than that of rationalizing mythologies.”\(^9\) He argues that this move to dogmatic myth exhausts the symbol. When symbol moves within in ambit of explanation, i.e., rationalization, then it moves itself outside of the tendency of symbol to call for interpretation. He says, “A tradition exhausts itself by mythologizing the symbol; a tradition is renewed by means of interpretation, which reascends the slope from exhausted time to hidden time, that is, by soliciting from mythology the symbol and its store of meaning.”\(^10\) In effect, interpretation is necessary for tradition, if the latter is to remain alive. This is the case, because interpretation moves myth back into the realm of symbol, i.e., the myth calls for interpretation, not for translation.

At this point Ricoeur returns to an appraisal of the role of temporality in interpretation. Ricoeur thinks that the fundamental time of the symbol can be reached, but not directly. The structuralism of Levi-Strauss is useful here. The notions of synchrony and diachrony are illustrative. Ricoeur explains that this move to structuralism is necessary because hermeneutics, i.e., the interpretation of symbols, requires the distanciation that structuralism as a science allows. He argues that hermeneutics “…is a phase of the appropriation of meaning…is thought recovering meaning suspended within a system of symbols…”\(^11\) The basic principle that
motivates Ricoeur’s detour through structuralism is “One appropriates only what has first been held at a distance and examined.”¹² In other words, by considering something objectively one can arrive at a fuller comprehension of it.

Ricoeur proposes that a fair consideration of structuralism must necessarily consider its limits. But we must also consider structuralism before it oversteps those limits, i.e., when it begins to over-reach its validity. He proposes, “[S]tructuralism must be treated as an explanation which is at first limited and then extended by degrees, following the guideline of the problems themselves.”¹³

I. The Linguistic Model
Ricoeur begins his discussion of structuralism by looking at its foundational principles, rather than considering its later insights, which some might consider the point at which structuralism forgets or disregards its philosophical limits. Ricoeur identifies the foundations of structuralism with Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics. The work of later structuralists created “a reversal of the relations between system and history.”¹⁴ The point Ricoeur makes here is to contrast the basic approach of historicism and structuralism. The former attempts to understand cultural phenomena through consideration of the foundations and evolution of those phenomena, while for the latter “…what is first given as intelligible are the arrangements, the systematic organizations of a given state.”¹⁵ The reversal is possible because of the distinction that Saussure makes between language and speech. The latter is the actual action of individuals communicating, while the former is “…the set of conventions adopted by a social body to allow individuals to exercise language.”¹⁶ This distinction allows Saussure to make determinations about the primacy of a linguistic system relative to its actual practice. Other thinkers will extend these determinations beyond the linguistic realm.
The first insight that Saussure’s distinction provokes is the recognition that language is merely a system of signs. The important thing to keep in mind, according to Saussure, is that the distinct terms, or elements, of the system are not as important as the differences and the relations among the terms of the language system; “[I]t is the differences of sound and meaning and the relations of the one to the other which constitute the system of signs of a language.”\textsuperscript{17} This insight makes the individual terms of the system irrelevant for understanding the language; they are merely arbitrary conventions.

Ricoeur argues that this recognition has direct relation to the temporal aspect of language. Saussure’s insight into the relation among terms of a system and the primacy of this relation can be mapped on to the synchrony and diachrony of these terms. That is to say, the terms of a linguistic system are only intelligible when each term can be compared against the other terms of that system. A consideration of the terms in a succession does not allow for understanding of the language, i.e., diachrony does not allow for intelligibility. Ricoeur argues based on this view, “History is responsible for disorders rather than for meaningful changes.”\textsuperscript{18} This connection of a language system to its temporal aspect allows Saussure to place synchrony prior to diachrony for intelligibility and most importantly, to assert “[E]vents are apprehended only when they have been realized in a system, that is by receiving from the system an aspect of regularity; the diachronic datum is the innovation which arises from speech…but which has become ‘a fact of language.’”\textsuperscript{19} Ricoeur explains that his investigation of the structuralism and its limits will bear fruit when it is possible to find “…a series of interpreting recoveries which can no longer be considered the intervention of disorder in a system state.”\textsuperscript{20} Ricoeur adds that his research is primarily concerned with the subordination of diachrony to synchrony in the structuralist viewpoint. Hermeneutics takes the opposite view of this relation.
Ricoeur also explains that Saussure’s distinction between system and linguistic terms and the primacy of the system “…designate[s] an unconscious level and, in this sense, a nonreflective, nonhistorical level of the mind.”21 This unconscious order is not Freudian, explains Ricoeur; rather, the order is “…a Kantian unconscious, but only as regards its organization, since we are here concerned with a categorial system without reference to a thinking subject.”22(33) The significance of this unconscious is that it establishes between the observer and the system a relationship which is itself nonhistorical. Understanding is not seen here as the recovery of meaning…. [T]here is no historicity to the relation of understanding. The relation is objective, independent of the observer.23

II. The Transposition of the Linguistic Model in Structural Anthropology

Ricoeur moves to consider how Saussure’s structuralism is transposed to other fields. Ricoeur argues that this transposition was made possible by Trubetskoy’s reduction of the structural method to its basic operations. These operations were identified by Levi-Strauss: 1) the movement from conscious to unconscious infrastructure of linguistic systems; 2) the primacy of relations between terms of a system; 3) the introduction of a system in understanding; 4) the aim to discover general laws that have an absolute character. Levi-Strauss applied these basic operations to kinship systems. Ricoeur explains that the application of these operations to the understanding of kinship systems shows that “…these systems are most readily intelligible from a synchronic perspective: the systems are constructed without regard to history, although they do include a diachronic dimension, since the kinship structures connect a series of generations.”24

Ricoeur explains that the transposition of the linguistic model to kinship systems is justified, in the end, because kinship is a kind of communication. Levi-Strauss readily
recognizes that language is the exemplar of signification, but it is possible to see kinship as a subordinate or analogous system because the connections that are made in the system are just as arbitrary as those seen in language. He argues that the rules of kinship are set up to insure the circulation of women among and between clans and this medium of circulation is analogous to language itself.

Levi-Strauss recognizes that the validity of this transposition depends on the ability of a general language to adequately explain several social and cultural phenomena in terms of a symbolic function. The symbolic function must be recognized apart from the analyst or observer of the phenomena. Ricoeur explains, though, that it is necessary, if his contention that structuralism can add to hermeneutic insights, that he must be able to show “…how an objective comprehension which decodes can work with a hermeneutic comprehension which deciphers, that is, which assumes the meaning as its own as the same time that it grows from the sense it deciphers.”

Ricoeur argues that Levi-Strauss recognized a basic impulse in all social interaction that, according to the former, might suggest how structuralism can connect with hermeneutics. This basic impulse has to do with the “split representation that pertains to the symbolic function.”

This split has to do with the fact that some terms can be seen to have similar value for the listener and speaker of a language act, but this can only be explained through the assumption that these values are complementary. Ricoeur argues that this complementariness shows that structuralism assumes an “…already existing background…” against which this split occurs. He argues, “Does this not call for another kind of understanding, which aims at the split itself and is the basis for any exchange? Wouldn’t the objective science of exchange be an abstract segment in the full understanding of the symbolic function…?”

Ricoeur explains that if we accept this ‘already existing background’ to structuralism, then it is
clear that the aim of structuralism would be to arrive at an understanding of this background through the application of its methodology. He says, “Thus mediated by the structural form, the semantic base would become accessible to understanding which, although more indirect, would be more certain.”

Ricoeur leaves the analysis of this proposal to later.

He continues his discussion of Levi-Strauss, though. Ricoeur argues that Levi-Strauss’ application of his insights about kinship systems do not easily apply to other cultural phenomena like art or religion. The former explains that this is the case because whereas kinship systems are a kind of language, religion and art actually are languages that are built on the foundation of language. He explains, “The analogy is shifted inside language and from this moment on refers to the structure of this or that particular discourse in relation to the general structure of a language.” This difference is significant because it makes the application of structuralist insights to these fields much less valid. Levi-Strauss does attempt to justify the application of structuralism to these fields by pointing out that the foundation of language—the relations, oppositions, and correlations among semantic elements—is the same as that of culture taken as a whole. This similarity moves Levi-Strauss to assert that language is the foundation for these cultural structures. Ricoeur points out, though, that Levi-Strauss, himself, accedes that the connection between culture and language is not necessarily as he asserted. Levi-Strauss accepts that a consideration of the human mind intrudes in the direct correlation between language and cultural phenomena. Ricoeur explains that this intrusion is due to the problem of self-understanding by the mind. He says, “[T]he mind comprehends the mind, not only by the analogy of structure, but by recovering and continuing individual discourses. Now, nothing guarantees that this understanding arises from the same principles as those of structural linguistics.” The point that Ricoeur makes with this introduction of the mind is that
structuralism, so long as it recognizes its philosophical limits, can maintain its legitimacy and validity. Ricoeur, quoting Levi-Strauss, argues that structuralism must not make a correlation between language and human actions, but merely between different ways of categorizing cultural phenomena. This will allow anthropology to study societies based on the different manners by which they make distinctions among cultural phenomena.

Ricoeur’s analysis and critique comes to a head here. He wonders, if one accepts the limits of structuralist investigation, then what insight exactly does it offer about the phenomena it studies. He asks, “In questions of art and religion, what does one understand when one understands the structure? And how does structural comprehension instruct hermeneutic comprehension, directed toward a recovery of signifying intention?”31 In other words, do the realms of art and religion create limits for the application of structuralism in terms of the understanding of cultural phenomena? And do these limits point to a deeper kind of understanding that can only be achieved from or through a hermeneutic viewpoint directed at the retrieval of the intention behind discourse? Ricoeur proposes that the temporality of signification can offer an insight to the limits of structural interpretation, when we contrast the insights of diachrony and synchrony against a historical understanding of particular “…symbols for which we possess clear temporal sequences.”32 In a note, Ricoeur points out that Levi-Strauss recognized that there are limits to the validity of structural interpretation, i.e., “…that there is a zone of optimal validity for a general theory of communication…”33 and that we must be wary of overextending its purview.

III. The Savage Mind
Ricoeur explains that it is possible to see the limits of structuralist interpretation when one considers the claims of Levi-Strauss’ The Savage Mind against a more moderate understanding of religious signification. Ricoeur claims that there is a significant shift in the scope and claims
of structuralism from Levi-Strauss’ earlier work to *The Savage Mind*. The shift occurs because Levi-Strauss, rather than progressing in stages in his analysis of primitive thought, considers primitive thought as a whole. He also sees this kind of thought as merely civilized thought in a different and prior guise. Both are characterized by logic. The only difference between these modes of thought is that savage thought is not self-reflective. This lack of reflexivity lends savage thought to structuralist interpretation, because of this distance between intention and act. Ricoeur says,

> As a result, arrangements at an unconscious level are alone intelligible; understanding does not consist in taking up anew signifying intentions, reviving them through a historical act of interpretation which would be inscribed within a continuous tradition. Intelligibility is attributed to the code of transformations which assure correspondences and homology between arrangements belonging to different levels of social reality.…

Ricoeur thinks that this wholesale subordination of thought to this approach to its understanding overlooks the limits of the validity of such interpretation. He says that such recognition of limits were present in earlier works of Levi-Strauss. Ricoeur argues that Levi-Strauss’ choice of totemic cultures from a specific geographical area in order to demonstrate the validity of the application of structuralism to religious understanding was made precisely to prove the applicability of the theory, i.e., Levi-Strauss cherry-picked his study subjects. Ricoeur contends that there might be aspects of Western-based religions that do not lend themselves well to structural analysis. He says,

> It happens that a part of civilization, precisely the part from which our culture does not proceed, lends itself better than any other to the application of the
structural method transposed from linguistics. But that does not prove that structural comprehension is just as enlightening elsewhere and, in particular, just as self-sufficient.\textsuperscript{35}

Ricoeur concludes that the totemic structural foundations might be more an exception to religious thought rather than an example of it.

Ricoeur suggests that there might be other sources of mythical thought that have a …semantic richness [that] allows an indefinite number of historical recoveries in more varied social contexts. At this other pole of mythical thought…structural comprehension is perhaps less important…and more explicitly requires being joined to a hermeneutic comprehension, which endeavors to interpret the contents themselves, so as to prolong their existence and thereby to incorporate what is in these contents is efficacious for philosophical reflection.\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{IV. The Limits of Structuralism?}

Ricoeur proposes that other approaches to religious understanding could clearly show the limits of structural analysis in religious thought. He points out that Old Testament interpretation rests upon founding events, not on classification. The founding events are understood by “…recreating the \textit{intellectual activity} born of this historical faith and unfolding within a confessional framework which is often in the form of a hymn and always a cultural manifestation.”\textsuperscript{37} Ricoeur argues that Old Testament interpretation shows the development of an interpreting tradition. He says,

The reinterpretation, for each generation, of the foundation of traditions confers a historical character upon this understanding of history and gives rise to a development possessing a signifying unity which cannot be projected into a
The tradition corrects itself through additions, and these additions themselves constitute a theological dialectic. In other words, the constant reflection and struggle over and with the founding events of God’s chosen people, creates a tradition and a people. Ricoeur adds, “But this identity is inseparable from an endless search for a meaning to history and in history….” Such an understanding of the Old Testament privileges its historicity.

Ricoeur thinks that such a view of the Old Testament opens up symbols and myths because they “…do not exhaust their meaning in arrangements homologous to social arrangements.” He adds that this does not mean that structural understanding of these myths and symbols is misapplied, he merely thinks that “…the structural method does not exhaust their meaning, for their meaning is a reservoir of meaning ready to be used again in other structures.”

This view of the possible inexhaustibility of myth and symbol demonstrates a different understanding of myth from that which sees myth as a kind of gathering of eclectic human events and pursuits—bricolage. Ricoeur suggests that a structuralist understanding of myth and symbol sees the structure that underlies the gathering as primary. But such a gathering preconstrains the possible message that the symbol or myth can impart. He recommends, “[T]he reuse of biblical symbols in our cultural domain rests…on a semantic richness, on a surplus of what is signified, which opens toward new interpretations.” Ricoeur opines that the interpretation and reinterpretation of foundational events by both the Jewish and Christian traditions demonstrates that semantics is more important than syntax. He proposes that these founding events come with a surplus of meaning and “…it is the surplus of meaning which motivates tradition and interpretation.”
Ricoeur does recognize that structuralism allows for a tradition to incorporate new events within a structural system, but he thinks that such a view of a tradition “...is much closer to the phenomenon of inertia than to the living reinterpretation which seems to us to characterize true tradition.”⁴⁴ He thinks that it is precisely the surplus of meaning of the symbol that allows for both views of a system to be valid. He says, “It is because [of]...the excess of potential meaning ...that the hidden time of symbols can carry the twofold historicity—of tradition, which transmits and sediments the interpretation, and the interpretation, which maintains and renews the tradition.”⁴⁵(48-49)

Ricoeur proposes that the perseverance of a particular system of tradition depends, not on the capacity of that system to adequately incorporate new events, but on the excess of meaning. He says, “Tradition betrothed to duration and capable of being reincarnated in different structures depends more...on the overdetermination of the contents than on the remodeling of the structures.”⁴⁶ Ricoeur suggests that this alternative view of the manner in which meaning is maintained in a system shows that a synchronic understanding of meaning is possible, but it is not exhaustive. He accedes that structuralist explanations of, for example, kerygmatic interpretations of the Old Testament, may be informative, but they are secondary to “...the surplus of meaning found in the symbolic substratum.”⁴⁷ He insists that this surplus can only be found in a diachronic understanding and interpretation, i.e., a hermeneutics. He says,

While the structuralist explanation seems to encompass almost everything when synchrony takes the lead over diachrony, it provides us only a kind of skeleton, whose abstract character is apparent, when we are faced with an overdetermined content, a content which does not cease to set us thinking and which is made more
explicit only through the series of recoveries by which it is both interpreted and renewed.  

Ricoeur proposes that, in the same manner that structuralism becomes suspect in its move from linguistics to kinship to all forms of social life, so does it become suspect when it ventures from its status as a science to a philosophy. He says, “An order posited as unconscious can never...be more than a stage abstractly separated from an understanding of the self by itself; order in itself is thought located outside itself.” He thinks that even if it were possible to show that cultural structures are merely transformations of meaning within a “super-structure,” this achievement would still need to ground itself in thought. He says,

[T]hought [cannot] become alienated from itself in the objectivity of the codes [of the structure]. If the decoding is not the objective stage of the deciphering and the latter an existential—or existentiell—episode of the comprehension of self and of being, structural thought remains a thought which does not think itself.

He proposes that hermeneutics must determine a way to accept the insights of structural anthropology, without losing itself in the latter’s objectivity. Putting it somewhat differently, Ricoeur says,

[L]inguistic laws are not what we attempt to totalize in order to understand ourselves; rather, we are concerned with the meaning of the words, for which linguistic laws serve as the instrumental mediation, forever unconscious. I seek to understand myself by taking up anew the meaning of the words of all men; it is on this plane that hidden time becomes the historicity of tradition and interpretation.
He adds, “[W]ould it not be just as much in keeping with the teachings of linguistics if one held that language, and all the mediations for which it serves as a model, was the unconscious instrument by means of which a speaking subject can attempt to understand being, beings, and himself?”

V. Hermeneutics and Structural Anthropology

In this section, Ricoeur explains how it is that “…structural considerations [are] today a necessary stage of any hermeneutic comprehension.” He begins this discussion by pointing out that his analysis of totemic and kerygmatic myths was not meant to establish an eclectic approach to interpretation that depended upon the subject matter and its conduciveness to a structural or hermeneutic interpretation. Rather, he intends to show that these approaches to understanding do not function on the same level of interpretation. He says:

The structuralist explanation bears (1) on an unconscious system which (2) is constituted by differences and oppositions (by signifying variations) (3) independently of the observer. The interpretation of a transmitted sense consists in (1) the conscious recovery of (2) an overdetermined symbolic substratum by (3) an interpreter who places himself in the same semantic field as the one he is understanding and thus enters the ‘hermeneutic circle.’

In the end, Ricoeur thinks that the difference between these two approaches rests in the purpose to be achieved by applying them. Structuralist explanation is concerned with outlining and creating a system, while a hermeneutic interpretation is concerned with “…the philosophical understanding of self and of being.”

Ricoeur explains that the difference between these two approaches to understanding is not as problematic as attempting to explain their connection. He offers “exploratory remarks”
rather than final determinations as to this question. At bottom, Ricoeur contends that any structuralist explanation of phenomena rests upon a prior hermeneutic understanding. He says, “At the base of structural homologies one can always look for semantic analogies which render comparable the different levels of reality whose convertibility is assured by the ‘code.’ The ‘code’ presupposes a correspondence, an affinity of the contents…” 56 He adds, “[T]he apprehension of similitude precedes formalization and founds it. This is why similitude must be reduced in order to bring out the structural homology…” 57

Ricoeur also argues that in the same manner that structural explanation is founded upon hermeneutical interpretation, the latter is dependent upon the former. He says, “I assert that there is no recovery of meaning without some structural comprehension.” 58 Ricoeur explains that hermeneutic interpretation depends on structuralist explanation because the symbol’s overdetermination requires some kind of order to give it sense. He says, “[A]n isolated symbol has no meaning; or rather, an isolated symbol has too much meaning; polysemy is its law….It is in an economy of the whole that differential values are separated out and polysemy is dammed up.” 59 He adds, “[T]he symbol symbolizes only in an ‘economy,’ a dispensation, an ordo.” 60

Ricoeur concludes his thoughts about the relationship between structuralism and hermeneutics thusly: “[N]o structural analysis…without a hermeneutic comprehension of the transfer of sense…without that indirect giving of meaning which founds the semantic field, which in turn provides the ground upon which structural homologies can be discerned.” 61 He adds, “But, in turn, neither is there any hermeneutic comprehension without the support of an economy, of an order in which the symbol signifies. Taken by themselves, symbols are threatened by their oscillation between sinking into the imaginary and evaporating in allegorism…” 62 He concludes, “[T]he understanding of structures is no longer outside an
understanding whose task would be to think by starting from symbols; today this understanding of structures is the necessary intermediary between symbolic naïveté and hermeneutic comprehension.”

“The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem”

In this essay, Ricoeur intends to clarify some of the conclusions he arrived at in “Structure and Hermeneutics.” He proposes that the possible conflicts that may arise between structuralist explanations and hermeneutic interpretations can be addressed so long as we understand that both approaches to understanding occur at different levels of meaning. He proposes that the analysis that occurs in structuralism is useful, but it occurs at the ‘atomic’ level of understanding. On the other hand, hermeneutics approaches understanding by connecting the symbol to reality, experience and existence. He says, “…I would like to establish that the way of analysis and the way of synthesis do not coincide, are not equivalent; by way of analysis one discovers the elements of signification, which no longer have any relation to the things said; by way of synthesis is revealed the function of signification; which is to say and finally to ‘show.’”

I. The Hermeneutic Level

Ricoeur proposes that the clarification of the difference between structural explanations and hermeneutic interpretation must be approached by considering the problem of multiple meaning from different vantage points. He determines this problem of meaning to be “…a certain meaning effect, according to which one expression, of variable dimensions, while signifying one thing at the same time signifies another thing without ceasing to signify the first.”

Ricoeur remarks that there are different kinds or approaches to hermeneutic interpretation. He informs us that hermeneutics began with the attempt to interpret the Bible and
that this approach to Biblical interpretation led to the use of hermeneutics in an interdisciplinary manner. He remarks on Freud’s use of dream interpretation as a kind of hermeneutics that attempts to find meaning in dream signs. The import of these different kinds of hermeneutics, for Ricoeur, is to show that the intent behind interpretation shapes and affects its outcome. He says,

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[T]hese differences of technique in turn refer back to different intents concerning the function of interpretation: it is one thing to use hermeneutics as a weapon of suspicion against the ‘mystification’ of false consciousness; it is another thing to use it as a preparation for a better understanding of what once made sense, of what once was said.”
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Interestingly, Ricoeur thinks that the differences among interpretative methods have to do with the reality that is understood by the interpretation. Ricoeur maintains that what distinguishes interpretation from explanation, i.e., hermeneutics from structuralism, has to do with what is explained by either approach. He argues that hermeneutics concerns itself with symbols because they are attempts to express an extralinguistic reality; but, structuralism assumes that symbols merely refer to other signs within a system of signs. Ricoeur explains that this difference points to an open versus a closed universe of signs. His project here is to show that this difference in openness has to do with the scale at which interpretation is performed. He explains: “My aim is to show that this rule of the open state is connected to the very scale on which interpretation, understood as exegesis, operates and that the closing of the linguistic universe is accomplished only by a change of scale and by the consideration of small signifying units.” In other words, explanation and interpretation occur at different levels and are not interchangeable. Ricoeur
explains that the openness of hermeneutics derives from the connection that it makes “…between linguistics and nonlinguistics, between language and lived experience (of whatever kind).”

Ricoeur adds that the difference among hermeneutic interpretations derives, precisely, from the lived experience that the symbols and signs to be interpreted claim to speak to and elucidate. He says, “What causes the specific character of various hermeneutics is precisely that this grip of language on being and of being on language takes place according to different modes.” Ricoeur reiterates that the distinguishing characteristic of hermeneutics is the referent that it ascribes to language—something different from language. This movement beyond itself is what he calls the opening of language. This movement beyond itself is what language says, i.e., what it shows. He adds that the difference among hermeneutics has to do not with “…the structure of double meaning but over the mode of [language’s] opening, over the finality of its showing.”

Ricoeur explains that this assumed extralinguistic referent gives hermeneutics its strength and weakness. He thinks that hermeneutics’ assumption of this extralinguistic referent opens up language to actually say something, but it also allows language to escape “…a scientific treatment, which can begin only by postulating the closed system of the signifying universe.” He also asserts that this extralinguistic referent provides a strength to hermeneutics because “…the place where language escapes from itself and escapes us is also the place where language comes to itself, the place where language is saying.” Ricoeur explains that the only reason that symbols and signs are philosophically instructive is that they show, because of their double meaning, “the equivocalness of being”. Ricoeur maintains that by comparing different approaches to understanding double meaning we will realize that a change in scale of referent
will provide “…progress toward scientific rigor and…[the] disappearance of this ontological function of language which we have called saying.”

II. Lexical Semantics

Ricoeur discusses several structuralist approaches to the problem of polysemy—the source of the possibility of language to say. Ricoeur explains structuralist explanations of polysemy start with the limitation of the scope of analysis to small lexical units. He argues that this limitation creates a disconnect between the word and the thing signified. He explains how Saussure’s distinction between synchronic and diachronic understanding of polysemy elucidates the difference between different levels or kinds of signs. Ricoeur introduces Jakobson’s distinction between similarities and contiguities in order to clarify the difference in levels of understanding that occur with structuralist explanations of polysemy. Ricoeur thinks that Jakobson’s distinction serves to create a correspondence between Saussure’s thought and the analysis of metonymy and metaphor. By clarifying and connecting this difference, Ricoeur thinks that two different levels of meaning are uncovered and elucidated.

Ricoeur argues that the differences between the manner in which metaphor creates meaning and the manner in which metonymy does so are parallel to the manner in which polysemy and context function to create meaning. He explains:

When I speak, I realize only a part of the potential signified; the rest is erased by the total signification of the sentence, which operates as the unit of speaking. But the rest of the semantic possibilities are not completely cancelled; they float around the words as possibilities not completely eliminated. The context thus plays the role of filter; when a single dimension of meaning passes through by means of the play of affinities and reinforcements of all analogous dimensions of
other lexical terms, a meaning effect is created which can attain perfect univocity, as in technical languages.\textsuperscript{75}

Ricoeur argues, then, based upon the above observation that ambiguity is created precisely because of the interplay of these two different realms of meaning: lexical and contextual. He says, “Discourse can…realize ambiguity, which thus appears as the combination of a lexical fact—polysemy—and a contextual fact—the possibility allowed to several distinct or even opposed values of a single name to be realized in the same sequence.”\textsuperscript{76}(71) Ricoeur attempts, here, to show that the insights of hermeneutic interpretation can offer solutions to the problems of explanation that polysemy creates for structuralism.

Ricoeur argues that such an understanding of discourse allows us to see that polysemy and symbolism are both necessary to language. He adds, though, that a semantic understanding of the problem of polysemy creates a linguistic analysis that is limited to the linguistic universe, i.e., such analysis creates a disconnect between the signs and the world to which they are meant to refer. Ricoeur explains,

[W]hen Jakobson advocates the structural analysis of the metaphoric process…it is as a metalinguistic operation that he develops his analysis of the metaphoric process. It is insofar as the signs intersignify among themselves that they enter into relations of substitution and so make the metaphoric process possible.\textsuperscript{77}

Ricoeur quotes Jakobson to affirm this disconnect between the terms of metaphor and their referent that occurs through a structuralist interpretation. Ricoeur points out that Jakobson thinks that logic has clearly shown that an analytic explanation of an expression by reference to other expressions does not assume the existence of the things to which one would think those expressions refer. Ricoeur concludes, “There is no better way of stating that a more rigorous
treatment of the problem of double meaning has been paid for by abandoning its aim toward things.”

III. Structural Semantics
Ricoeur recommends that the limitations that we see in the science of explanation of meaning suggests a special kind of relation between the philosophy of language and the science of language; and, the relationship can be elucidated by considering structural semantics. Ricoeur explains that structural semantics is characterized by three methodological choices. The first is the acceptance of a closed linguistic universe. Therefore, he says, “[S]emantics is governed by the metalinguistic operations of translating one order of signs into another order of signs.” The difference between structural and lexical semantics, though, is that the hierarchical relationship between the structures of the language and the metalanguage are clearly delineated in the former semantics. This clear delineation allows for a clearer view of the postulate of structuralism: “[T]he structures built on the metalinguistic level are the same as the structures which are imminent in language.”

The second postulate concerns the second choice of structural semantics: to guide analysis by reference to structures of a different level than words, by reference to “…underlying structures…constituted wholly for the needs of analysis.” Ricoeur suggests that this underlying structure is evidenced in the seme, “…which is always found in a relation of binary opposition of the type long-short, breadth-depth, etc., but at a more basic level than lexical units.” He explains that a seme functions according to disjunctive and conjunctive relationships. He gives as respective examples: masculine-feminine and gender. He says, “Semic analysis consists in establishing for a group of lexemes the hierarchical tree of conjunctions and disjunctions which constitute it entirely.” The benefit of this analytic tool is that it allows for the efficient processing of large amounts of data about linguistic systems. Accordingly, such analysis might
allow for the complete and exhaustive construction of semic systems of meaning based wholly on the conjunctions, disjunctions and hierarchies among semes.

The third methodological decision, according to Ricoeur, asserts that lexemes are a manifestation of discourse and are not immanent to it. The significance of this decision is that it makes meaning and symbolic function merely a ‘meaning effect’ of the interplay among lexemes. This effect is manifested in discourse, but their meaning is outside it. Ricoeur explains, “The entire effort of structural semantics will be to reconstruct, bit by bit, the relations that allow us to account for these meaning effects, following an increasing complexity.”84 In the end, concludes Ricoeur, “Structural semantics attempts to account for the semantic richness of words by…matching the variants of meaning to classes of contexts. The variants of meaning can then be analyzed in a fixed nucleus, which is common to all contexts, and in contextual variables.”85 The import of this analysis is to see that the meaning effects of words are derived from semes. As Ricoeur explains, “We can transcribe every meaning effect into formulas containing only conjunctions, disjunctions, and hierarchical relations and can thus localize precisely the contextual variable which brings about the meaning effect.”86 In other words, Ricoeur explains that such an analysis allows for a rigorous explanation of the manner by which contexts achieve the imparting of meaning to lexical units.

For all the benefits supplied by such an analysis, Ricoeur points out that the same problems that we saw earlier with lexical semantics are present here. It is just that this semantic analysis allows for greater precision in analysis. He thinks that the underlying methodological decisions of structural semantics create a homogeneity among semes so that we can speak of an isotopy of discourse. He thinks that the notion of an isotopy of discourse can provide a useful approach for the analysis of symbols. When it comes to equivocal or plurivocal discourse, the
isotopy of discourse cannot be established through the analysis of context, but the analysis of context “...allows the development of several semantic series belonging to discordant isotopies.”

Ricoeur argues that the progressive movement through different levels of analysis has allowed for a more rigorous understanding of symbols and symbolism. The structural analysis of symbols has allowed for a greater understanding of symbolism. He says,

[I]t has ceased to be an enigma, a fascinating and possibly mystifying reality. [...]

[T]he illusion that the symbol must be an enigma at the level of words vanishes; instead, the possibility of symbolism is rooted in a function common to all words, in universal function of language, namely, the ability of lexemes to develop contextual variations.

In other words, structural analysis has clarified the mechanisms through which symbols achieve their meaning. And, they do this in two ways. First symbols point directly to other meanings, but they also do this in a manner that purposefully is meant to point to other levels of meaning. Ricoeur says, “[P]lanned ambiguity is the work of certain contexts and...of texts, which construct a certain isotopy in order to suggest another isotopy. The transfer of meaning, the metaphor...appears...as a change of isotopy, as the play of multiple, concurrent, superimposed isotopies.”

Ricoeur explains that the move through structural analysis offers an understanding of the manner by which symbols achieve meaning and this understanding sees that it is achieved through more than just substitution.

This insight shows that the closed universe of language that structural analysis assumes cannot explain why symbolism is ambiguous. Ricoeur points out that the two ways of explaining the functioning of symbolism—a structural and a hermeneutic one—explain the phenomenon
“...by means of what constitutes [symbolism] and by means of what it attempts to say”, respectively. Ricoeur maintains that structural analysis cannot explain the latter function, i.e., what symbolism attempts to say. The expressivity of language (not its emotiveness) can only be explained hermeneutically. Expressivity appears in the “heterogeneity between the level of discourse…and the level of language….‖ Structural analysis is limited to explaining the latter. Ricoeur attempts to elucidate this difference by making a distinction between the mystery in language and the mystery of language. He explains that there is no mystery in language: the words and symbols that are used to effect symbolism are no different from the everyday words seen in the dictionary; but there is a mystery of language. This mystery has to do with the fact “...that language speaks, says something, says something about being. If there is an enigma of symbolism, it resides wholly on the level of manifestation, where the equivocalness of being is spoken in the equivocalness of discourse.” Ricoeur argues that it is philosophy’s task, i.e., hermeneutics’ task, to constantly question and address this equivocalness that structural analysis does not recognize.

“Structure, Word, Event”
In this essay, Ricoeur wants to discuss the debate between structuralism and hermeneutics and to do so by going to its source: the “…elimination from structural thinking of any understanding of the act, operations, and processes that constitute discourse.” He explains that structuralism can make sense of works of language that are closed, complete, and, as he puts it, dead by providing catalogs of, hopefully, binarily opposite elements or units that allow for a formulaic combination. He explains, “The aspect of language which lends itself to this inventory I will designate a language [langue]; the inventories and combinations which this language yields I will term taxonomies; and the model which governs the investigation I will call semiotics.”
The science that understands the power of language as discourse is based on the *sentence* or *utterance* [énoncé]; Ricoeur labels this science *semantics*. Ricoeur explains that he would also like to consider certain questions that structuralism cannot address because of the manner in which it understands the processes and operations of language. He says, “[T]his new understanding will be situated beyond the antinomy between structure and event, between system and act, to which our structuralist investigation will have led us.” He argues that the basis of this new understanding will be the *word*. This is the case, according to Ricoeur, because the exchange between event and structure occurs in the word.

Ricoeur argues that this different approach to understanding is based on a different approach to the rules that govern the hierarchy of levels of meaning in language. He explains that most linguists recognize these levels of meaning, but they use the same method of analysis for understanding each level. This makes all the levels homologous. He explains, “My whole study will rest on the idea that the passage to the new unit of discourse constituted by the sentence or utterance represents a break, a mutation, in the hierarchy of levels.” Ricoeur argues that the movement from one level of language to another requires a change in methodology from one level to the next. He says, “[I]f language has some hold on being, it is on the level of manifestation or efficiency, the laws of which are original to previous levels.” In other words, the approach to analysis and understanding will have to be different from that of previous levels.

1. The Presuppositions of Structural Analysis
Ricoeur explains that Louis Hjelmslev in his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* clearly outlined and explained the theoretical presuppositions of structuralism. The first is: Language can be studied by an empirical science. This presupposition privileges observation and subordinates “…inductive operations to deduction and the calculus.” (81) Ricoeur explains that Saussure, by creating a distinction between language [*la langue*] and speech [*la parole*],
relegated everything that did not deal with language outside of the science of linguistics. Saussure limited the study of language in a scientific manner to “…the rules constituting the code, the institution that is valid for the linguistic community, the collection of entities among which the choice of free combinations of discourse takes place.”\textsuperscript{99} Those aspects of language that are outside the purview of a scientific approach to their study address “…the psychophysiological execution, the individual performance, and the free combinations of discourse.”\textsuperscript{100}

The second presupposition of structural analysis is: Each process must have an underlying system. This presupposition suggests particular corollaries: the understanding of the latter is prior to the former; also, change is not understandable within that system. Change only occurs when there is movement from one system to another. Ricoeur explains, “[I]t is therefore to the system, that is, to the arrangement of elements in a simultaneous grouping, that we give priority in understanding.”\textsuperscript{101}

The third presupposition: a system is characterized by the mutual dependence of the terms within it, not by the terms themselves. Ricoeur explains that this presupposition entails that we ought not consider the meanings of individual signs within the system, but “…only the relative, negative, opposite values of signs with respect to each other.”\textsuperscript{102}

The fourth presupposition: “The collection of signs must be maintained as a closed system in order to submit it to analysis.”\textsuperscript{103} Ricoeur explains that this closure is evident at the phonemic, lexical, and syntactical level. He adds that this closure is present even in the linguistic corpus that is considered for analysis: “[L]inguistics always operates on a finite corpus of texts….”\textsuperscript{104} This closure allows linguistics to address only the internal relations among terms
in the system. The closure also allows for a definition of structure: “an autonomous entity of internal dependencies.”

The final presupposition: The sign that can function within the limits of these prior assumptions is a sign that does not stand for anything. These prior structuralist assumptions “…define the sign not only by its relation of opposition to all other signs of the same level but also in itself as a purely internal or immanent difference.” Ricoeur adds, “Under the rule of the closure of the universe of signs, the sign is either a difference between signs or a difference, internal to each sign, between expression and content.”

Ricoeur explains that structuralism takes these five presuppositions into consideration and is aware of “…the exigencies contained in this series of presuppositions.” He adds that these presuppositions and their exigencies lead to a structuralist point of view that privileges the concepts of synchrony, organism and combination. Synchrony prioritizes the present situation of a language to its history; organism sees language as a complete whole that has interdependent parts; and combination sees language as a limited catalog of possible combinations of discrete elements.

II. Speech as Discourse

In this section Ricoeur addresses the shortcomings of each of these presuppositions. He points out that the structuralist point of view does not allow for the production of new combinations of signs and words. But, according to Ricoeur, this is the very goal of speaking. Ricoeur also maintains that structuralism does not allow for the “…production of culture and of man in the production of his language.” What he means by this production of culture and man has to do with the rejection of the possibility of change within a system. Without change we cannot speak of culture, history, or the manner by which human beings understand and express themselves.
The broader cost wrought upon language, though, because of the structuralist point of view, has to do with the exclusion of the main intent of language: to say something about something else. Ricoeur states that both speaker and audience implicitly understand this intent. The aim of language is two-fold says Ricoeur. On the one hand, language is an attempt to clearly and distinctly point to an ideal understanding (the saying of something) and to attempt a matching of this to a real referent (saying about something). In the saying, according to Ricoeur, “…language leaps across two thresholds: the thresholds of ideality of meaning and, beyond this meaning, the threshold of reference.”110 This movement, thinks Ricoeur, allows for language to “mean” something. Ricoeur recommends that structuralism must recognize that the closure of language, though important for its analysis, must be balanced with the main intent of language to say, which requires an openness of language.

Ricoeur argues that this recognition of the limits of structuralism puts into question many of the presuppositions that are its basis. To begin with, the status of language as an object for an empirical science is questionable, so long as that science insists on not recognizing that that object is “…entirely defined by the procedures, methods, presuppositions, and finally the structure of the theory which governs its constitution.”111 Without this recognition, the scientist takes as absolute and given what is merely a result of her viewpoint. Ricoeur insists that the experience of language by the speaker and audience shows this absolutization in its proper light. He says,

For us who speak, language is not an object but a mediation. Language is that through which, by means of which, we express ourselves and express things…. [S]peaking is the act by which language moves beyond itself as sign
toward its reference and toward what it encounters. Language speaks to disappear; it seeks to die as an object.\textsuperscript{112}

He maintains that the closure of language is overcome by the act of speaking.

Ricoeur concludes that the methodological decision to enclose and limit the universe of language—a basic presupposition of structuralism—“…does violence to linguistic experience.”\textsuperscript{113} He proposes that to overcome the antinomy created by the structuralist viewpoint we must “…reclaim for the understanding of language what the structural model excluded and what perhaps is language itself as act of speech, as saying.”\textsuperscript{114} In other words, he proposes that language and speech must be reunified. The greatest danger in the process of achieving this goal is to set up a new psychologism in the guise of a more adequate phenomenology of language. Ricoeur proposes that we “…produce the act of speech in the very midst of language, in the fashion of a setting-forth of meaning, of a dialectical production, which makes the system occur as an act and the structure as an event.”\textsuperscript{115} He thinks that a close and clear inspection and understanding of the hierarchy of the levels of language can promote this production and understanding.

Ricoeur proposes that the movement among hierarchies of meaning from phonology to lexicon to syntax—the articulation that occurs at each of these levels—does not move us beyond the limits of structuralism. But at the moment we consider a different unit of language—the sentence, the utterance—there must be a change of approach to understanding. Structuralism is insufficient to address the new unit. With the sentence we move from language to speech. This requires a move from the consideration of the interdependencies among the units of language relevant to each articulation to a consideration of the function of the unit of speech. At this point we arrive at “…the opportunity of encountering language as saying.”\textsuperscript{116}
Ricoeur explains that the sentence is able to overcome the antinomy created by the structuralist point of view because the sentence places us in the middle of discourse that is an act; it is an event. Also, discourse makes choices among meanings of words and this is a function of the limits placed on it by the system of language. The choices made in discourse create new combinations, i.e., new meanings. This novelty of discourse “…is the essence of the act of speaking and of comprehending speech.” Ricoeur explains that this referent of discourse was the concern of Frege and Husserl. Both thinkers pointed out that the aim of discourse is both ideal and real. The ideal is the meaning of discourse and the real is the referent. In other words, there is an attempt in all discourse to connect the ideal meaning of discourse to a referent that grounds that meaning. If this is achieved, then language, i.e., the signs we use to signify, disappear, i.e., they no longer are the object of attention. Ricoeur explains of this movement achieved in discourse: “[W]hat we thus articulate is a signifying intention that breaks the closure of the sign, which opens the door onto the other, in brief, which constitutes language as a saying, a saying something about something.” He adds, “The moment when the turning from the ideality of meaning to the reality of things is produced is the moment of the transcendence of the sign. This moment is contemporaneous with the sentence.” Ricoeur maintains that this movement within discourse points to two different aspects of the sign: one that points to the structure or system within which the sign has sense and the other that points to the function of the sign in a sentence. There is no need to maintain one to the exclusion of the other.

Ricoeur also explains that discourse designates the subject that performs it. Discourse clearly shows that someone speaks to someone. This characteristic of discourse places discourse in antithesis to system. System is anonymous and purely potential; whereas, discourse is actual
and points to a subject and an audience. Ricoeur says, “System remains potential as long as it is not actualized, realized, operated by someone who, at the same time, addresses himself to another. The subjectivity of the act of speech is from the beginning the intersubjectivity of an allocation.”

The five characteristics mentioned above clearly demonstrate the difference between discourse and structure. Discourse in the form of the sentence shows “…that language has a reference and a subject, a world and an audience.” Ricoeur reiterates that structuralism because of its presuppositions excludes reference to a world and to a subject, but this supposition is necessary “…in order to constitute a science of articulations.” The suppositions of structuralism and structuralism itself cannot adequately perform their function “…when it is a matter of attaining the level of effecting speech, where a speaker realizes his signifying intention relative to a situation and an audience. Allocution and reference merge with act, event, choice and innovation.”

III. Structure and Event

Ricoeur observes that the antinomic stance between structural and historical linguistics is merely a first phase of understanding that can be overcome. He argues that it must be possible “…to find new models of intelligibility, where the synthesis of the two points of view would be thinkable once again.” He adds that it must be possible to find tools and ways of thought that might allow for a constant movement from structure to event. He proposes that a discussion of syntax will address this problem within the purview of the present essay. Ricoeur explains that Noam Chomsky’s poststructuralist linguistics, with its introduction of a generative grammar, recognizes the relative explanatory weakness of a theory of language that does not recognize the creative and innovative aspect of language that allows for the
immediate creation and reception of new sentences and that allows for an immediate recognition of deviant ones. Ricoeur identifies Chomsky’s generative grammar as a promising linguistic tool that can highlight the weakness of “…inventories of elements characteristic of the taxonomies favored by the structuralists.”125 Ricoeur thinks that Chomsky’s innovation brings linguistics back to the Cartesians who see language as production not as a product.

Ricoeur also highlights the thought of Gustave Guillaume, who, with his theory of morphological systems, is able to show how discourse is able to accomplish the innovative production of new sentences through the use of words and signs. Guillaume’s insight has to do with the position of words within the sentence. The parts of speech, i.e., the position of words within a sentence, serve to “…complete, to terminate, to close the word in such a way as to insert it into the sentence, into discourse. By placing the word in a sentence position, the system of categories [of parts of speech] allows our words and our discourse to be applied to reality.”126 Ricoeur adds, “By completing the word as noun and verb, these categories render our signs capable of grasping the real and keep them from closing up in the finite, closed order of semiology.”127 (90)

Ricoeur explains that Guillaume’s morphology is capable of making this connection between signs and their referent because the morphology is a science of operations and not of elements. Ricoeur thinks that Guillaume’s insights help us to overcome the view that syntax is “…the most interior form of language, as the completion of the self-sufficiency of language.”128 Ricoeur maintains that syntax, “[b]ecause it relates to discourse and not to language, syntax is on the path of the return of the sign toward reality.”129 He adds that one can maintain the separation of sign and reality only so “…long as one considers the closed system of discrete units which compose a language; it no longer suffices when one approaches discourse in act.”130 He
concludes that the sign is more than just separate from things, “...it is what wishes to be applied, in order to express, grasp, apprehend, and finally to show, to manifest.”

Ricoeur explains, based on the above, that the separation of the sign from things can simply be accounted for by a “…reduction of relations of nature and their mutation into signifying relations suffices.” But if one wants to consider the possibility of discourse this reduction is insufficient. This reduction is inadequate to explain the wanting-to-show of discourse. That being said, this reduction is the opposite side of this wanting-to-show; i.e., this reduction must be seen as part and parcel of discourse.

Ricoeur argues that regardless of the final acceptance and success of Chomsky’s and Guillaume’s thought, “…a new phase of linguistic theory is evident: a new relation, of a nonantinomic character, between rule and invention, between constraint and choice, thanks to dynamic concepts of the type structuring operation and no longer structured inventory.”

Ricoeur proposes that he can address a similar insight of overcoming the antinomy of structure and event in the semantic order. He begins his discussion by remarking that the word is both more and less than the sentence. It is less than the sentence, because without the sentence the word means nothing. Prior to the sentence there are only signs, i.e., “…differences in the system, values in the lexicon. But there is not yet any meaning, any semantic entity. Insofar as it is a difference in the system, the sign says nothing.” Ricoeur explains that the words of the dictionary endlessly refer to each other in a closed lexicon; but, once someone says something, “[t]he word leaves the dictionary; it becomes word at the moment when man becomes speech, when speech becomes discourse and discourse a sentence.”

Ricoeur explains that the word is more than the sentence. He explains that the eventhood of the sentence gives it an ephemeral quality. He adds, though, “[T]he word survives the
It does so, because the word can mean more in different sentences. It is always available for innovative applications in new sentences. These new uses give the word new meanings and it thereby gains a history.

Ricoeur concludes:

Thus the word is...a trader between the system and the act, between the structure and the event. On the one hand, it relates to structure, as a differential value, but it is then only a semantic potentiality; on the other hand, it relates to the act and to the event in the fact that its semantic actuality is contemporaneous with the ephemeral actuality of the utterance.

Ricoeur thinks that this dual aspect of the word helps to clarify the problem of polysemy. He argues that a distinction between semiology and semantics inadequately explains polysemy, because this distinction explains the synchrony of multiple meanings of the same word by reference to the same particular state of the system. Such an explanation is inadequate because it overlooks the process of the polysemy of words. He says,

There is a process of naming, a history of usage, which has its synchronic projection in the form of polysemy. Now this process of the transfer of meaning—of metaphor—supposes that the word is a cumulative meaning, capable of acquiring new dimensions of meaning without losing the old ones. It is this cumulative metaphorical process which is projected over the surface of the system as polysemy.

Ricoeur explains that the projection of new meanings over the system is one instance of an event returning to system. He highlights this particular instance of projection, because it
clearly shows that two different factors are part of the process of the creation of polysemy: expansion and surcharge. He explains,

By virtue of the cumulative process…the word tends to be charged with new use-values, but the projection of this cumulative process into the system of signs implies that the new meaning finds its place within the system. The expansion…and…the surcharge…is arrested by the mutual limitation of signs within the system.\textsuperscript{139}

Ricoeur argues that these two factors explain how polysemy is achieved in a regulated manner. Words can have more than one meaning, but they cannot have an infinite amount of meanings.

Ricoeur argues that this regulated polysemy highlights the distinction between semiological and semantic systems. Semiology ascribes meaning to signs based purely on their relative position within a system. He explains, “In semantics…the differentiation of meanings results from the equilibrium between two processes, a process of expansion and a process of limitation, which force words to shape themselves a place amid others to hierarchize their use-values.”\textsuperscript{140} This process of differentiation cannot be achieved through a systematic classification of elements of the system. He thinks that one can see that polysemy, as explained semantically, unifies the synchronic and diachronic orders of meaning; it shows how a history is placed upon a system.

Ricoeur thinks that this capacity of the word to acquire meanings, i.e., to project itself over a system, can explain how a word is able to mean one and many things at the same time. He explains, “All our words being polysemic to some degree, the univocity or plurivocity of our discourse is not the accomplishment of words but of contexts.”\textsuperscript{141} Ricoeur goes on to explain that context can limit to an extreme the plurivocity of words to the point of univocity, but if the
context allows for multiple simultaneous meanings then we have a symbolic language. In this situation the context allows several meanings to come “…together in the manner of the superimposed texts of a palimpsest. The polysemy of our words is then liberated….More than one interpretation is then justified by the structure of a discourse which permits multiple dimensions of meaning to be realized at the same time.” ricoeur elucidates explaining that the structure within which words are used provides them order, but the structure itself does not give them any meaning. It is only when the structure is paired with the polysemy of words that meaning can be achieved in discourse. he adds, “[t]he polysemy of our words itself results from the concurrence of the metaphorical process with the limiting action of the semantic field.” in effect, ricoeur explains that both event and structure mutually influence the other to create meaning.

the prior discussion of the role of context in the construction of meaning leads ricoeur to argue that a more adequate explanation of the creation of meaning would have to consider more than the sentence and the manner by which the word creates meaning within it. such a broadening of scope would consider a higher level of discourse—the text. that being said, ricoeur argues that it is in the word that one sees the complex playing out of meaning. he argues that the word brings together structure and function. the word can “…create new models of intelligibility…” because of the position between system and process. ricoeur says,

in rising from system to event, in the instance of discourse, it brings structure to the act of speech. in returning from the event to the system, it brings to the system the contingency and disequilibrium without which it could neither change nor endure; in short, it gives a ‘tradition’ to the structure, which, in itself, is outside of time.
At this point, Ricoeur stops his analysis of the capacities of the word to create new meaning and the manner by which it does so. He quickly adds that this analysis can be extended beyond the word to the text, and he even suggests that there are myriad ways to approach this analysis. He reminds us that his approach that ascends from basic elements to system is not the only one available. He explains that Heidegger’s ontological analysis of language begins with “spoken being”. Ricoeur proposes that he will not take Heidegger’s approach because of the former’s starting point—the closed universe of signs—prevents such an approach. Ricoeur adds, though, that particular words, great words as he labels them, point to something beyond the words. He says of these words, “They point out, they let be, that which surrounds their enclosure.”

He proposes that though the procedure that he has undertaken prevents him from an ontological consideration of language, it can hint at such a consideration. He says, “Considered against this horizon, our investigation would appear to be prompted and guided by a conviction…that the essential aspect of language begins beyond the closure of signs.” He adds that when we approach an understanding of signs through the elements of language we close ourselves off from that essential aspect. He continues,

[T]he more we distance ourselves from the level of manifestation, in order to immerse ourselves in the thickness of language in the direction of sublexical units, the more we realize the closure of language. The units we uncover by analysis signify nothing. They are simply combinatory possibilities. They say nothing, they are limited to conjoining and disjoining.”

Interestingly, Ricoeur proposes that the movement from the lexical units back to the meaning of texts is not the same as the prior motion from the text to the lexical units. The ascent brings to the fore the problem of saying in the sentence and the word. This problem “…tends to eliminate
structural analysis.” The problem of saying can only be addressed through a consideration of discourse, not signs. This consideration of discourse manifests the openness of language.

**Part II Hermeneutics and Psychoanalysis**

This section of the text is comprised of several essays wherein Ricoeur addresses the challenge and promise that Freudian psychoanalysis offers for interpretation. On the one hand, Ricoeur recognizes the strength and power that psychoanalysis offers as an interpretation of culture and the subject that brings them into question. On the other hand, Ricoeur recognizes the limits of psychoanalysis as an interpretive hermeneutics. I will approach this section by highlighting key passages in each of the essays that are instructive and illustrative of Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and his viewpoint.

“*Consciousness and the Unconscious*”

Ricoeur argues that Freud’s psychoanalysis brings into question the whole of the philosophical project. Freud, like Marx and Nietzsche, questions the assumption of consciousness and its possibility. Ricoeur argues that Freud makes us realize that consciousness—the ground and possibility of the philosophical project—can be seen merely as a prejudice. Ricoeur explains that Freud’s insights lead any good philosopher to doubt the possibility of self-knowledge. Ricoeur proposes that Freud requires the phenomenologist to rethink consciousness so that she might entertain the possibility of the unconscious: “How must I rethink and reground the concept of consciousness in such a way that the unconscious can be its other and consciousness can be fit for the sort of other that we call the unconscious?” Of course, the good phenomenologist will also attempt a critique of psychoanalysis. This critique is necessary because we now know that the doctrine of psychoanalysis leads one to a method that brings with it particular worldviews and preconceptions. Ricoeur adds that the challenge of psychoanalysis is that it requires a rethinking of philosophical anthropology. He says,
What must man be to assume the responsibility of sound thought and yet be susceptible of falling into insanity, to be obligated by his humanity to strive for greater and greater consciousness and yet remain a product of topographic or economic models insofar as ‘the id speaks through him’?

I. The Crisis of the Notion of Consciousness

Ricoeur points out that the insights of Freud as to the unconscious places consciousness in true crisis. Ricoeur explains that the certainty that is possible through immediate consciousness is not the same as truth. He says, “We have come to realize that the profoundest depths of the life of intentionality can possess other meanings besides this immediate one.” True knowledge of consciousness is not necessarily found exclusively in immediate consciousness. Such a knowledge has to be achieved. For Ricoeur this means that consciousness is a project for truth not a starting point from which truth can be found. He says, “…consciousness is what cannot totalize itself, and this is why a philosophy of consciousness is impossible.” Husserl’s insights into the prereflective and the unreflected shows that “…any investigation into ‘constitution’ refers to something pregiven or preconstituted.” Ricoeur continues as to the insights of Husserl’s Ideen I: “It belongs to the essence of consciousness to never be entirely explicit, but always related to implicit consciousness. All the facts which made the elaboration of the concept of consciousness necessary, however, are not included in this theorem.” Ricoeur proposes that this failure of the immediacy of consciousness to provide truth is not wholly negative, there is a silver lining: “Through this failure, consciousness discovers that its immediate self-certainty was mere presumption and thus gains access to thought, which is no longer that attention consciousness pays to itself so much as to saying, or rather to what is said in the saying.” In essence, the pay-off of Freud’s critique of consciousness is that it makes consciousness aware of
its self through its language. The concern of philosophy is no longer immediate experience; it is now its interpretation or expression of that experience.

II. Critique of Freudian Concepts

Generally, in this section Ricoeur points out that any critique of Freud cannot be accomplished phenomenologically. In other words, the argument that Freud’s discoveries and insights are merely a result of the method that he uses to study consciousness and the unconscious is, according to Ricoeur, misplaced and misdirected. Ricoeur proposes that one must see that the method and the insights, i.e., the doctrine, are one and the same. He thinks that this view of Freud would display Freud’s thought as a kind of empirical realism. Ricoeur proposes that Freud recognized the limits of his approach and, like Kant, arrived at conclusions about the transcendental bases for experience or consciousness without conclusions beyond them. In other words, Freud recognized that he could speak about the representations of our instincts and drives, not about the drives or instincts directly. Those latter are fundamentally unknowable.

Ricoeur also, paradoxically, recommends that Freud’s theories can be seen, in an epistemological sense, as a transcendental idealism. The point here is to show that the reality of the unconscious is only achieved though the system of relations between the conscious and unconscious. Ricoeur says, “We must thus conclude that the unconscious exists and is just as real as physical objects and yet its existence is merely relative to the ‘derivatives’ which represent it and make it appear in the field of consciousness.”¹⁵⁷ In effect, Ricoeur argues that Freud’s theories of the unconscious are “relative,” i.e., they do not establish a ding ang sich which can be known immediately; but Freud’s theories do establish “…that the reality of the unconscious is constituted in and by hermeneutics in an epistemological and transcendental sense.”¹⁵⁸ Ricoeur elaborates pointing out that the relativity of the unconscious should be seen in
the light of the central role that the analyst plays in the unconscious’s manifestation. Generally, Ricoeur demonstrates, the question of the unconscious is addressed relative to consciousness, but he suggests that the analyst is central to the discussion. He says, “[I]t is essential to the unconscious to be an object elaborated by someone other through a hermeneutics which its own consciousness cannot perform alone.” The point Ricoeur makes here is that the unconscious is not an objective reality that exists prior to its analysis. He concludes: “[T]he unconscious is an object in the sense that it is ‘constituted’ by the totality of hermeneutic procedures by which it is deciphered. Its being is not absolute but only relative to hermeneutics as method and dialogue.” Interestingly, Ricoeur submits that the relative status of the unconscious is precisely the same as that of physical objects studied by the sciences. He adds that the success of psychological therapy addresses the possible critique that the unconscious is merely a projection of the analyst. If psychoanalysis were not successful at addressing the illness of the analysand then the relativity of the unconscious would be much more problematic.

Ricoeur maintains that the relativity of the unconscious is necessary to establish in order to rid Freud’s theory of any naïve realism. We must always realize that the unconscious is not an empirical phenomenon that can be intuited immediately. The id is not immediate meaning; rather it is a representation of meaning. Ricoeur concludes:

Hence a sort of continual alternation is necessary between empirical realism and transcendental idealism. The first must be maintained against all the claims of immediate consciousness to true self-knowledge, the second against all fanciful metaphysics which would attribute self-consciousness which is always ‘constituted’ by the set of hermeneutic processes by which it is deciphered.

III. Consciousness as a Task
Ricoeur maintains that Freud’s unconscious challenges the direct and immediate givenness of consciousness. This challenge might suggest that consciousness is just as unknowable and unclear as the unconscious. But Ricoeur sees this critique as merely opening up a more adequate description of consciousness: “Consciousness is not a given but a task.” 162 He maintains that this characterization of consciousness provokes a very incisive question: what meaning can the unconscious have for a being that has consciousness as a task? A question that follows upon this one is: “What is consciousness as a task for a being who is somehow bound to those factors, such as repetition and even regression, which the unconscious represents for the most part?” 163

Ricoeur proposes that these questions can be addressed by recognizing that the problem of consciousness is closely related to the question of how the adult is able to leave her childhood behind in order to become an adult. He maintains that psychoanalysis does not adequately address this question because the science actually assumes that the adult is always subject to her childhood, i.e., she is never able to overcome it.

Ricoeur thinks that it might be possible to adequately address this question by reference to Hegelian phenomenology. Hegel’s thought, according to Ricoeur, points to the development of spirit through discourse in history. Ricoeur recommends that the development of the adult can be seen analogously. He says, “[M]an becomes an adult only by becoming capable of new key signifiers which are similar to the moments of spirit in Hegelian phenomenology and regulate spheres of meaning which are absolutely irreducible to Freudian hermeneutics.” 164

Ricoeur recommends that the new key signifiers that might more appropriately explain the movement from child to adult are those that one sees in Hegel: possession, power, and value. Ricoeur explains that the relations of possession more adequately explain the development of purely human, i.e., nonbiological relations. These relations are the basis for the human capacity
of alienation. He explains that the adult develops non-libidinal feelings and passions to the degree that new objects are open for his possession. He says,

We can claim…that man becomes self-conscious to the degree that he lives this economic objectivity as a new modality of subjectivity and enters into specifically human ‘feelings’ which are relative to the availability of goods as products or labor and appropriation, while he turns himself into their expropriated appropriator.\(^{165}\)

Ricoeur adds that power is a relation that can provide an alternative signifier for the movement from child to adult. He explains that the phenomenon of power and its relations provides the catalyst for the development of consciousness and objectivity. The relationships of ordering and obeying generate the notion of a will. He adds, “Ambition, intrigue, submission, and responsibility are the appropriate human ‘feelings’ which are organized around the ‘object,’ power.”\(^{166}\) He also says, “[M]an possesses consciousness insofar as he is capable of entering into the political problematic of power and begins to have feelings which gravitate around it and to run the risk of its accompanying pitfalls.”\(^{167}\) In other words, Ricoeur, following the lead of Hegel, thinks that psychology does not adequately explain the movement and development of consciousness because it overlooks the role of economy and power in human self-understanding.

The third relation that Ricoeur thinks better explains the development of human consciousness is that of value. He explains that self-understanding and self-constitution occurs in the sphere of culture as well as those of economics and politics. He says, recalling, somewhat, Rousseau’s critique of civilization, “My existence for myself depends utterly on this self-constitution in the opinion of others. My Self—if I dare say so—is received from the opinions of others, who consecrate it.”\(^{168}\) Ricoeur adds that the self-image is created on a more “objective”
level in the cultural works and institutions that serve to give value to the things of the world. He explains that works of literature and art serve to give “density” to the things of the world by placing them within a human context that uses and possesses those things. He says, “By the mediation of works and cultural monuments...human dignity and self-esteem are constituted.”

Ricoeur argues that the three relations discussed above are an alternative “exegesis of consciousness” that more effectively explains the simultaneous development of subjectivity, i.e., self-constitution, and objectivity. The benefit of this alternative explanation is that it overcomes the need to presuppose the possibility of a consciousness that has self-certainty or immediate knowledge.

Ricoeur points out that this alternative exegesis of consciousness poses a direct challenge to Freudian hermeneutics; but, he adds that this challenge can provide a useful dialect between two opposing moments: the regressive approach to self-understanding of Freudian analysis and the progressive approach of Hegelian understanding. Ricoeur admits that this oppositional dialectic, as fruitful as it may seem, must be made more concrete and thereby surpassed. He adds, though, that the surpassing of the dialectic is difficult and the manner and moment by which the surpassing can be achieved is unclear and at best provisional.

That being said, Ricoeur thinks that a comparison of both procedures of understanding can be quite useful. He argues that both procedures show consciousness to be a movement that constantly breaks down its origin and can only find itself at the end of this movement. He says, “[Consciousness] is something that has meaning only in later figures, since the meaning of a given figure is deferred until the appearance of a new figure.” He adds,

We can say in a very general way that an understanding of consciousness always moves backwards. Is this not the key to the dialectic between consciousness and
the unconscious? The fundamental meaning of the unconscious is in fact that an understanding always comes out of preceding figures, whether one understands this priority in a purely temporal and factual or symbolic sense.\textsuperscript{171}

Ricoeur proposes that this insight about the foundation of consciousness—its constant looking back for antecedents to provide meaning—shows that consciousness is forward looking while the unconscious is always concerned with the origins of consciousness.

Ricoeur argues that this conclusion about the differences between consciousness and the unconscious, in particular, between the different approaches to understanding—Freudian libidinal analysis and Hegelian synthesis—shows that the same experience can justifiably be interpreted by at least two competing interpretations. Most importantly, for Ricoeur, these interpretations need not be exclusionary; rather, they can intersect and broaden the understanding of each one. He adds though that each interpretation, in particular the Freudian and Hegelian ones, do not work on the same level. Each interpretation is directed or aimed at different objects and goals. He points out that the opposition between these interpretations has to do with their orientation: “…one oriented toward the discovery of figures to come (i.e., the hermeneutics of consciousness) and the other toward preceding forms (i.e., the hermeneutics of the unconscious).”\textsuperscript{172}

Ricoeur provides a compelling interpretation of \textit{Oedipus Rex} using these competing hermeneutics. In the end, he concludes that there definitively are two kinds of hermeneutics: “One is oriented toward the resurgence of archaic symbols and the other toward the emergence of new symbols and ascending figures, all absorbed into the final stage, which…is no longer a figure but knowledge.”\textsuperscript{173} Ricoeur adds that the opposing interpretations show that symbols both repeat what came before, but they also project a future different from the past. He says, “In this
second form the symbol is an indirect discourse on our most radical possibilities, and in relation to these possibilities it is prospective.”  

Ricoeur argues that the creation of culture and its expressions in monuments, institutions, etc. cannot be adequately explained with the regressive understanding of symbols. He argues that symbols when seen in a progressive light can be formative in addition to being projective. Symbols do this by promoting what they express. He says, “This is how they are paideia, education, eruditio, or Bildung. They are open to what they have disclosed.”  

In other words, the creation of culture requires symbols that are open to a future and that are supportive of such a view of themselves. A regressive understanding of the symbols of culture does not allow such an open and supportive view of those expressions of culture.

Ricoeur, having discussed the dialectic that he sees existing between these two hermeneutics, argues that though the symbolic systems of each are opposed to each other, they are actually the same. He explains that the easy explanation or reconciliation of the two systems that would explain them as dealing on different levels, i.e., one higher and the other lower, would lead to a kind of “…eclecticism in which consciousness and the unconscious would be vaguely complementary.” He states that such a ‘solution’ would actually do away with any kind of dialectic between the hermeneutics. He urges that we recognize that both interpretations address the same field—the human being. Such a recognition will bring to light the fact that both views are complete in their interpretation and are therefore exclusive of each other. But their absolute opposition and their identity of object does not allow us to propose that each can be relegated to different aspects of the human experience. Ricoeur states again, “Eclecticism is always the enemy of the dialectic.”
After reviewing the steps and analysis that have brought us to this seeming impasse, Ricoeur points out that the fundamental identity of these hermeneutics shows that “…a phenomenology of spirit and an archaeology of the unconscious speak not of two halves of man but each one of the whole of man.” He argues that the recognition of the identity between these two interpretations will provide a clearer understanding of Freud’s statement “Where id was, there ego shall be.” What exactly Ricoeur means by that statement is just as cryptic as Freud’s seems to be.

“Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture”
In this essay Ricoeur addresses the question of how and what Freud has to say about culture. Ricoeur explains that Freud’s psychoanalysis can be seen discussed regarding what he directly said about culture, but a more fruitful approach would see that Freud’s psychoanalysis interprets culture in a more indirect manner. Ricoeur explains, “[P]sychoanalysis marks a change of culture because its interpretation of man bears in a central and direct way on culture as a whole. It makes interpretation into a moment of culture; it changes the world by interpreting it.”

Interestingly, as tempting as it may be to see what psychoanalysis has to say about culture as absolute and objective, Ricoeur points out that Freud himself realized that the latter’s ideas could only be applied in a limited manner. Ricoeur explains that Freud realized that “…his explanation gives him a view which is limited as a result of his angle of vision but which gives onto the totality of human phenomenon.”

Now, for the sake of our interests there is no need to enter into Ricoeur’s extensive and exhaustive discussion of how Freud’s ideas and writings can justifiably be used to study and understand culture. Rather, it is more useful to consider how Ricoeur sees very important parallels among the ideas of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. This occurs in the second section of the second part of this essay—“The Place of Freudian Hermeneutics: Marx, Nietzsche, Freud.”
In this section, Ricoeur points out that there are significant parallels among these three thinkers, but contemporary philosophical thought relegates them to separate realms of thought. Ricoeur thinks that these differences can be overcome if we see that they address the same illusion—self-consciousness.

Ricoeur explains that the illusion of the stability and indubitableness of self-consciousness is a direct result of Descartes. After Descartes, the stability and security of physical objects and our grasp of them becomes doubtful, but Descartes never questions consciousness and our grasp on it. Ricoeur explains that for Descartes, “In consciousness, meaning and the consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, however, we doubt even this.”

Ricoeur adds quickly, though, that the doubt provoked by these three thinkers does not imply skepticism. That they break down or destroy the stability of consciousness does not imply that they reject the possibility of it. It is only after their respective critiques that we are able to ask “…what thought, reason, and even faith still mean.”

Ricoeur says that these three thinkers were able to accomplish a very significant shift in the meaning of understanding and consciousness by not only destroying our basic belief in it, but also by the creation of a new manner by which to interpret human expression. Ricoeur contrasts the methods of Descartes and these three: “Descartes triumphs over his doubts about things through the evidence of consciousness, while Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud triumph over their doubt about consciousness through an exegesis of meanings. For the first time comprehension is hermeneutics.” Ricoeur explains that the three doubters create a new relationship that consciousness must address: concealed and revealed. This relationship each thinker addresses or attempts to clarify differently, but the key is that each of them creates “…a mediating science of meaning which is irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning.”
Ricoeur adds that the methodology of each thinker is different and thereby supplies different totalistic “truths.” But the difference in “truths” does not delegitimize the insights of each. Just because the insights that each thinker can provide are limited to the method or manner by which those insights are achieved does not make them relative. In reference to Freud’s dream work, Ricoeur says,

[T]he method is justified by the fact that the discovered meaning not only satisfies understanding through an intelligibility greater than the disorder of apparent consciousness but that it liberates the dreamer or the patient when he comes to recognize it and makes it his own—in short, when the carrier of meaning consciously becomes this meaning, which up till now existed only outside him, ‘in’ his unconscious and afterwards ‘in’ the consciousness of his analyst.\(^{186}\)

Ricoeur seems to argue that so long as the insight achieves a refuguration of the past and possibilities for the future, then we can see the insight as legitimate, regardless of its limitations and its arising from a method exclusive to the insight.

This practical justification for the legitimacy of “truths” and insights achieved through the different methods of the three doubters leads Ricoeur to explain that there is another similarity among them. Ricoeur says that these three are united by the goal to extend the powers of consciousness through the uncovering of false consciousness. He explains:

What Marx wants is to liberate \textit{praxis} by the awareness of necessity….What Nietzsche wants is to augment man’s \textit{power} and restore his \textit{force}….What Freud wants is for the patient to make the meaning which was foreign to him his own and thus enlarge his field of consciousness, live better, and, finally, be a bit freer and, if possible, a bit happier.\(^{187}\)
Ricoeur adds that though we can understand what aims and goals these three thinkers had for consciousness, it is another matter to say that modern society has come to terms with them and that we have come to understand ourselves according to the approaches that they offer. He says,

There as yet exists no structure of assimilation, no coherent discourse, no philosophical anthropology which is capable of integrating our hermeneutic consciousness of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud into a whole. Their traumatizing effects accumulate and their powers of destruction add up, but their exegeses have not been coordinated in the unity of a new consciousness.  

This lack of assimilation of the ideas of these doubters is what makes the significance of Freud’s psychoanalysis to modern culture unclear and unstable. It is still to be determined. He concludes the essay: “A reflection on the limits of Freudian interpretation remains in suspense, as does the profound meaning of that great subversion of self-consciousness inaugurated by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.”

“A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud”

The key points that we need draw from this insightful essay are 1) Ricoeur’s ideas about the justification behind a philosophical interpretation of Freud and of any text and 2) the dialectic of archeology and teleology that allows for a manner by which to bring rival hermeneutic approaches into some kind of complementarity. Ricoeur begins this essay by making a very important distinction between a reading of Freud and offering a philosophical interpretation of Freud. The former, according to Ricoeur, does not present any real problems for the philosopher. In fact, it is really the job of the historian of philosophy to perform. The latter approach to Freud, though, is much more problematic for the philosopher. A philosophical interpretation
…presupposes the sort of reading which makes a claim to objectivity but goes on to take a position toward the work. It adds a relocation in a different discourse to the architectonic reconstitution of the work. The new discourse is that of the philosopher who thinks from Freud—that is, after, with, and against him.  

What makes the philosophical interpretation of Freud—and of any text—problematic is the immediate response of the devotee who might ask if the transfer of the text to a discourse that the author did not intend if justified and fair to the text. This same adherent might also question the very premise that there is a difference between a reading of a text and the philosophical interpretation of it. Ricoeur replies to the latter question by pointing out that readers, i.e., historians, of texts recognize that one can comment upon and “…understand an author in himself without necessarily deforming or repeating him.” Ricoeur goes so far in his discussion of understanding a text rightly and fairly as to point out that any understanding of a text requires a reconstruction of that text outside and beyond the initial discourse that motivated it. It is impossible—and, of course, useless—to copy a work in order to remain faithful to it. What we do when we understand a text is to choose from key themes derived “…from a network of articulations which in a sense constitute its substructure and underlying framework.” Ricoeur continues, “This is why one does not repeat but reconstructs. From a different viewpoint, however, the historian does not falsify the work he studies if he manages to produce, if not a copy of the work…it’s homologue in the strict sense of a vicarious object which presents the same arrangement as the work.” Ricoeur argues that a fairer understanding of objectivity that might address the concerns of the devotee and any reader sees that the philosopher does bracket her prejudices and preconceptions before coming to the text and she “…submits [her] reading to what the work itself—which remains the quid which guides his reading—wants and means.”
Ricoeur also argues that the application of Freud to themes and discourses beyond psychoanalysis is justified because Freud himself saw the object of his research to be outside the limited purview of this science. Ricoeur says,

[E]ven when he speaks to us of instincts, he speaks of them in and from the level of expression, that is, in and from certain effects of meaning which give themselves to be deciphered and can be treated as texts…which occur in the network of communications, of exchanges, of signs. The fact that the analytical experience belongs…to the order of signs is what fundamentally justifies…its fundamentally homogeneous character with the totality of human experience which philosophy undertakes to reflect upon and understand.  

In other words, because the analytic experience falls within the system of signs and the realm of expression, philosophy is justified in considering it within its purview.

Even with this strong justification of the application of Freud’s thought outside its perceived limits, Ricoeur continues with his defense of such an approach. He says that some might argue that “…Freud’s work is a totality sufficient unto itself and that we are falsifying it if we place it in another field of thought from which it generates.” Ricoeur thinks that there are two possible rebuttals to this argument. The first would be to deny the exclusivity or totality of the Freudian system. Ricoeur argues that Freud himself recognized the limits of psychoanalysis. Freud recognized that psychoanalytic doctrines help organize and make sense of one specific human experience—the analytic one. But, Ricoeur reminds us, there is more to the world and human experience than analysis. Ricoeur accedes that the analytic experience is homogeneous to human experience, but only as a part of the latter. The second rebuttal has to do with what Ricoeur calls a dissonance or breach within Freudian doctrines. Ricoeur claims that there is a
difference between the discovery of a theory and the theory itself. He turns to Fink to make this point: “The concepts which a theory operates are not all objectivized in the field which that theory thematizes. Thus a new philosophy expresses itself partly in the language of preceding philosophies, which is the source of inevitable misunderstandings.”

Ricoeur maintains that this difference between the discovery of concepts and the concepts themselves, i.e., between the consequence of Freud’s thought and the terms he uses to make sense of his thought, is manifest in Freud.

As to this second argument, some might argue that the difference in meaning and expression merely recommends a need for a clearer grammar to more adequately describe Freud’s thought that would maintain the totality of the doctrine. Ricoeur argues that this would be inadequate, because, if Freud is concerned with addressing “the inflection between desire and culture,” then it must operate on different levels that are incommensurate—force and meaning.

The language of force can be discussed using a vocabulary appropriate to it, but meaning will require more than vocabulary. It will require interpretation. Ricoeur says, “Between the apparent and the hidden meaning there is the relation between an intelligible and an unintelligible text.” Meaning and force are hopelessly intertwined, but that does not mean that they cannot be made sense of or that they are equivocal. Ricoeur offers that the attempt to find meaning within and among Freudian concepts leads us to see that a discussion of desire and its meaning points to a necessary symbolization of desire. And, most importantly, this symbolization requires interpretation.

Ricoeur argues that a discussion of desire and its meaning can most adequately be addressed through some ideas that Jean Nabert offers about understanding and self-understanding. Nabert, according to Ricoeur, offers very clear ideas about the close connection
between desire and its expression. Ricoeur says that he agrees totally with Nabert that “…understanding is inseparable from self-understanding and that the symbolic universe is the milieu of self-explanation.” Ricoeur argues that this ‘solves’ the problem of desire and its meaning, because signs are the manner by and through which human beings understand themselves. More importantly for Ricoeur, “[T]here is no direct apprehension of the self by the self, no internal apperception or appropriation of the self’s desire to exist through the short cut of consciousness but only by the long road of the interpretation of signs.” Ricoeur’s point is that self-knowledge cannot be achieved immediately, but must occur through interpretation of expressions of the self.

Ricoeur also points to another important gap that exists: the problematic that psychoanalysis creates for the stability of the subject and the insistence that reflective philosophy has for the establishment of consciousness. Ricoeur avers that this gap is “…responsible for the distance between the reading and a philosophical interpretation of Freud.” Ricoeur argues that two significant misunderstandings result from a possible confusion between a reading and a philosophical interpretation. The first misunderstanding that may result would be confusing Ricoeur’s ideas with those of Freud. The former reminds us that his interpretation does not assume the existence of the cogito, whereas Freud’s doctrine requires this. The second misunderstanding has to do with the use of Freud to critique religion. Ricoeur maintains that a reading of Freud would overlook the significance of a philosophical reflection on faith and religion and merely accept Freud’s critiques of them. Ricoeur offers that a philosophical reflection on religion and faith must proceed in a particular way from the positing of the subject through Freud’s archeology and a consideration of the teleology of the subject to the wholly Other. He proposes that such an ordered reflection is necessary because, “…philosophy is not a
puzzle of ideas or a heap of scattered themes which can be arranged in just any order. The way that philosophy proceeds and makes connections is all that is pertinent. Its architecture commands its theses." The point that Ricoeur makes here is that a consideration of the dialectic between archeology and teleology can clarify and ground a philosophical reading of Freud. Such a reading will ask “…anew the Freudian question of the unconscious, the id, or instincts and meaning, in the promotion of the subject of reflection.”

Up to this point we have discussed the first major theme of the essay—Ricoeur’s justification for a philosophical interpretation of Freud. But it is now necessary to introduce the second theme—the role that a dialectic between archeology and teleology might play in negotiating among rival interpretations. Ricoeur had introduced the concept of an archeology of the subject earlier in the essay. There he explained that the concept of archeology helps explain how it is that philosophy can make sense of psychoanalysis. He says, “This concept defines the philosophical position of analytic discourse. It is not Freud’s concept. I formulate it in order to understand myself in my understanding of Freud. It is in and for reflection psychoanalysis is an archeology.” In other words, the archeology of the subject helps us to understand what place psychoanalysis might have in human understanding and self-understanding. Ricoeur adds that a philosophical reading of Freud would see that Freud creates a crisis for the philosophy of the subject. Ricoeur says, “It imposes the dispossession of the subject as it appears primarily to itself in the form of consciousness. It makes consciousness not a given but a problem and a task. The genuine cogito must be gained through the false cogitos which mask it.” The destabilization of the subject that Freud engenders brings Freud directly into a philosophical discussion that could not have been entertained without the concept of archeology.
But Ricoeur is quick to point out that philosophical reflection cannot posit an *arché* without a *telos*. Ricoeur explains, “The appropriation of a meaning constituted in the past presupposes the movement of a subject drawn ahead of itself by a succession of ‘figures’…each of which finds its meaning in those that follow.”

Ricoeur offers that the dialectic of archeology and teleology provides avenues for reinterpretations of some of Freud’s ideas that Ricoeur does not think are adequately explained from within Freud’s system. In the end, this dialectic of archeology and teleology is intended to provide an avenue for the introduction of Freud’s thought into philosophical reflection, i.e., it allows for philosophical reading of Freud. Without this dialectic, though, Ricoeur maintains that any reflection on Freud would only offer arbitrary insights that would have no coherence. The dialectic offers rigorous understanding of Freud.

We can now return to Ricoeur’s prior discussion of the two misunderstandings that may arise from the introduction of Freud into reflective philosophy. Ricoeur had earlier maintained that without a clear philosophy that might guide the reflection upon Freud then we might misunderstand the philosophical import of Freud in the realm of religion and faith. He also pointed out that such a philosophical guide could reopen Freudian concepts for reflection.

This guide is the dialectic of archeology and teleology. Ricoeur argues that the question of the renewal of Freudian concepts can be understood to be asking how Freud’s insights affect reflective philosophy and vice versa. Ricoeur thinks that this question of the effect of each realm on the other cannot be addressed without seeing the reciprocity that exists between the two. He explains, “For at the same time that I say that the philosophical location of analytical discourse is defined by the concept of the archeology of the subject, I also followed Freud to say that one can no longer establish the philosophy of the subject as a philosophy of consciousness.” In other
words, if we are to insist that Freud’s psychoanalysis can be a topic of discourse within reflective philosophy, i.e., that reflective philosophy can make sense of Freud, then we must accept that Freud’s ideas provide a trenchant critique of the philosophy of consciousness. Ricoeur explains, “Consciousness must be lost in order that the subject may be found. The subject is not what we think it is. There can be evidence for the apodicticity of the cogito only if the inadequation of consciousness is recognized at the same time.”

Ricoeur proposes that reflective philosophy offers a defense of Freud’s thought in reference to the economy of desire that grounds the unconscious and the id. This economy of desire has been attacked, according to Ricoeur, on many fronts as merely culturally and historically determined, i.e., the economy of desire is not timeless. But Ricoeur claims that Freud insisted upon the anteriority of desire: “Desire is in every respect prior; it is anticipatory. The theme of anteriority pervades Freudianism.” Ricoeur claims that this anteriority is the archeology of the subject. In other words, in order to make sense of the subject as driven by desire an economy of desire, one must presuppose instincts, narcissism, ego, id, etc. But Ricoeur explains that archeology is a concept that is outside Freudianism; the concept is a philosophical one not a psychological one. The philosophical concept of archeology, though, cannot be separated from that of teleology. Ricoeur says, “It is reflective thought which says that only a subject which has an arché has a telos; for the appropriation of meaning constituted prior to me presupposes the movement of a subject drawn ahead of itself by a succession of ‘figures,’ each of which finds its meaning in the ones which follow it.” Ricoeur reminds us, though, that Freudianism does not posit a telos for the analysand. He does points out that Freud does have indications of a telos, though it is never schematized within the apparatus of the psyche. Ricoeur also remarks that Hegel’s dialectic informs a possible understanding of a telos that is not
connected to finality. Ricoeur explains, “The figures in a dialectical teleology are not final causes but meanings which draw their sense from the movement of totalization which carries them along and pushes them ahead of themselves.”

Ricoeur returns to the problematic that exists between Freudianism and reflective philosophy pointing out that in the same way that Freud problematizes the subject through his regressive explanation of drives and desires, Hegel’s dialectic also does so through the progressive explanation of figures that give meaning to spirit. Ricoeur explains, “Concrete reflection consists in this twofold self-dispossession and decentering of meaning.” Ricoeur quickly adds that reflective philosophy is what holds these two functions together. Reflective philosophy allows a way to bring Freud and Hegel together. It allows us to make sense of archeology and teleology without finality. Philosophical reflection allows us to reconcile Freud’s erotic fatalism with Hegel’s historical dialectic.

Ricoeur closes this essay with a somewhat unsatisfactory conclusion of the role that philosophical reflection can play in the reconciliation of rival hermeneutics of art, religion and morality. He indicates that his hermeneutic of the symbol can be instructive in understanding the dialectic that exists between archeology and teleology. Ricoeur proposes that the overdetermination of symbols is what provokes the need for interpretation. So long as we understand the role that interpretation must play in the understanding of symbols and that symbols, because of their overdetermination of meaning cannot be foreclosed, are a model for explaining this dialectic of archeology and teleology. This dialectic is so instructive that Ricoeur warns, “[O]utside the dialectic of archeology and teleology…interpretations confront one another without possible arbitration or are juxtaposed in lazy eclecticism which are the caricature of thought.”

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In this essay, Ricoeur provides a forceful analysis and explanation of the classification of psychoanalysis as a technique that is not a technology of domination. He explains why psychoanalysis is a technique that uncovers truth, but is not natural science that provides technologies for the domination of nature.

Ricoeur provides several pages of an explanation for the classification of psychoanalysis as a technique for the clarification of truth. He explains that Freud’s methods are techniques because they are a praxis, i.e., they are work. Psychoanalysis is work for both parties in analysis: the analyst and the analysand. The analyst must work against resistances that make clarification of the neuroses of the patient difficult. Freud wrote, according to Ricoeur, that the goal of analysis is to liquidate these resistances. Ricoeur adds that the work of analysis extends to the effort that the analyst must make to not unnecessarily extend treatment by becoming herself an element that frustrates the liquidation of these resistances, i.e., by becoming herself a resistance to health.

Psychoanalysis is also work on the part of the patient, the analysand. Ricoeur explains that knowledge of resistances to the uncovering of truth unaccompanied by the effort to uncover those resistances is useless. He says, “To cure the patient, it is not enough to communicate to him the content of an exact interpretation because, from the side of the analyst, comprehension is only a part of his own work.” He adds, “[A]nalysis does not consist in replacing ignorance by knowledge but in provoking a work of consciousness by means of work on resistances.” Ricoeur continues by pointing out that an intellectual understanding of these resistances to a cure can actually serve to reinforce them. The work that the analysand must engage in is Durcharbeiten—working-through. This working-through primarily takes the form of suffering through and re-directing the emotions that are provoked by treatment. The analysand must work
to harness the emotions provoked by confronting the resistances to cure in order to redirect them toward a cure. Ricoeur explains that these emotions are so instrumental to the healing of the patient that Freud advises against the premature resolution of those resistances, i.e., Freud recommends that the analyst must let the patient suffer for some time during the analytic experience.

In the second half of this essay Ricoeur explains how it is possible to see psychoanalysis as a technique that is not a technology of domination. He frames the discussion by referencing Castelli’s assertion that “…all technique excludes the classically casuistical, by eliminating choice and by the unique determination of intentionalities.” In other words, technique removes choice and any discussion of human responsibility and agency. Ricoeur argues that following Castelli’s understanding of technique psychoanalysis is an anti-technique. Ricoeur explains that though psychoanalysis is an anti-technique when viewed as a technology of domination of nature, psychoanalysis is a technique of veracity. The difference derives from the stakes in psychoanalysis. He says, “What is at stake in psychoanalysis is self-recognition, and its itinerary goes from lack of recognition to self-recognition.” Technologies of domination do not risk the individual at all. A technique of veracity is characterized by its presence within a field of speech. Ricoeur explains that those individuals who have attempted to integrate psychoanalysis with behavioralism overlook this characteristic. Such an attempt is grounded in the seeming similarity that psychoanalysis has to other observational sciences. Ricoeur explains that the following characteristics show this similarity to be non-existent:

[T]he ‘facts’ it deals with are not verifiable by multiple independent observers.
The ‘laws’ it formulates cannot be converted into relationships of variables….Its unconsciousness is not one extra variable inserted between stimulus and response.
Properly speaking, there are no ‘facts’ in psychoanalysis in the sense that experimental science understands ‘facts.’

Ricoeur ascribes the non-scientific character of psychoanalysis to the fact that its work occurs within language. He says, “The psychic work detected by analysis is a work of distortion on the level of meaning, on the level of a text which may be recounted in a narration.”

Ricoeur explains that analysis proceeds by interpreting a history that the patient narrates. Because of this, regardless of the presence of empirical facts, psychoanalysis cannot integrate them, i.e., make sense of them, until they are interpreted within the terms of that narration. He says,

Changes in conduct are not valued because they are ‘observable’ but because they are ‘meaningful’ for the history of desire. Hence the real object of psychoanalysis is always effects of meaning—symptoms, delirium, dreams, illusions—which empirical psychology can consider only as segments of conduct.

Ricoeur wholly agrees with the many critics of psychoanalysis who characterize it as a pseudo-science at best and mere stories and fantasies at worst. But Ricoeur thinks that this disconnect is a virtue rather than a shortcoming of psychoanalysis. This break allows us to realize that …analysis does not begin with observable conduct but rather with meaninglessness that must be interpreted. …[I]t is in the field of speech that the analytic experience takes place and that, within this field, what comes to light is…another language, which is dissociated from common language and which gives itself to be deciphered by means of these effects of meaning.

Ricoeur places psychoanalysis within its proper purview and grounds it outside of empirical sciences. But this limitation gives us a clearer understanding of what it is: a hermeneutics. He
says, “The analyst never handles forces directly but always indirectly in the play of meaning, double meaning, and substituted, displaced, or transposed meanings….A dynamics, yes—but across a hermeneutics.”

Ricoeur argues that behaviorism is guided by the goal to adapt behavior through the manipulation of drives and instincts, i.e., “for the sake of domination.” But this does not put anything at risk. Ricoeur’s proposal is that a properly conceived analysis opens the analysand to true discourse, i.e., to the possibility of undermining the established order. Ricoeur explains that the root of the confusion about the proper foundation and goal of psychoanalysis lies in a proper understanding of the reality that is uncovered through analysis. He says,

The reality in question for analysis is radically distinguished from homologous concepts such as stimuli and environment. This reality is fundamentally the truth of a personal history in a concrete situation…the true meaning which the patient must arrive at through the obscure labyrinth of the fantasy. *Reality consists in a conversion of the meaning of the fantasy.* [My italics].

Ricoeur provides a very incisive observation about the role that narcissism has played in the acceptance of groundbreaking scientific theories. He explains that Freud saw narcissism as the instinctual drive that prevented the acceptance of Copernicus and Darwin’s discoveries. These scientific advances were resisted because they undermined the centrality of human beings in the universe. Narcissism is also an explanation for the resistance to Freud’s theories, for they show us as slaves to psychic forces that we cannot control.

Ricoeur provides an additional observation that follows from the classification of psychoanalysis as a non-technique. He explains that the demythization that analysis achieves is not one that leads to disenchantment but rather to disillusion. He says,
These are not the same. Disillusion has nothing to do with progress in the usable and manipulable, i.e., progress in mastery. The demythization which belongs to psychoanalysis is expressly connected to the semantics of desire by which it is constituted.²²⁵

Ricoeur explains that the goal behind the demythization achieved through analysis is not to be able to use “…oneself, nature, and other men but to that of knowing oneself better through the detours of desire.”²²⁶ Ricoeur does recognize that the iconoclasm of analysis does make it similar to techniques of domination. In fact, he points out that the social and cultural success and acceptance of analytic theories has made it almost impossible for individuals to hide their neuroses forcing individuals to confront them.

Ricoeur is so convinced that psychoanalysis is so different from technologies of domination that he proposes that a deep meditation on Freud’s work will show that it opens up consciousness to projects beyond domination. Ricoeur explains that the destabilization of consciousness that Freud achieves leads to a necessary reconceptualization of liberty. Ricoeur argues that liberty can no longer be seen as a question of free will for consciousness; rather, reconceptualized liberty must be seen in the light of liberation. The destabilization of consciousness exposes the lie of self-control that was presumed by philosophers of consciousness. Ricoeur thinks that the destabilization wrought by Freud opens human experience to new projects—the ability to love and to speak.

As to the ability to speak, Ricoeur explains that Freud’s psychoanalysis lends itself to two different appraisals of the uncovering of truth: one that sees the disclosure of hidden motivations in a purely reductive manner, what Ricoeur calls the disclosure of secrets; and the other appraisal
that sees disclosure of instincts and motivations that in non-reductive, what Ricoeur calls a disclosure of an enigma. The difference between the two disclosures he explains thusly:

[I]nterpretation definitely does not consist in exhausting meaning…. [T]he disclosure of [a secret] does not dissipate [an enigma]. The secret is the absurd product of the work of distortion; the enigma is what is rendered manifest by interpretation. The secret is the function of false consciousness; the enigma is the result which has been restored by interpretation.227

Ricoeur points to Freud’s Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood to support the second appraisal of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur argues that once Freud offers his psychoanalytic interpretation of La Giaconda, one can presume that Freud had provided an exhaustive explanation of Mona Lisa’s enigmatic smile. Ricoeur proposes that Freud provides a much more provisional interpretation:

All that exists now before our eyes is the work of art. Thus analysis has not presented us with any reality which we might use. It has instead opened up beneath the work of art this play of references which, on every layer, denotes the wounding of desire and an absence which is itself no more than the reference of the fantasy’s impotence to the symbol’s power.228

Ricoeur proposes that the project—to speak—that Freud opens up following this second appraisal of psychoanalysis presents a project that is directly opposed to the drive to domination. Such an appraisal points to a nontechnique—discourse.

Ricoeur does accede that one could rejoin that Freud’s interpretations are always couched within the dynamic of power. Ricoeur reminds us that Freud speaks of the need to buttress the ego against the onslaught from the other parts of the psyche; he tells us that we must provide the
ego the capacity to dominate over them. Ricoeur adds, “[D]o we not regress to the usable and
the manipulable when we speak of psychoanalysis in terms of control and mastery of
energies?”

Ricoeur offers a rebuttal. He says that we must see that psychoanalysis only provides a
reorientation of desire. It provides a possibility of reeducating the patient to more satisfactorily
enjoy the world and herself. Psychoanalysis aims to expose the symptoms of the patient as a
substitution for true satisfaction. He says, “It is this reeducation which it posits as the prior
condition for all human reform, whether intellectual, political or social.” Such a reeducation
do not open analysis to classification as a technology of domination. Rather, seeing
psychoanalysis in the light Ricoeur proposes explains why it cannot provide normative or
prescriptive answers to human moral dilemmas. He offers that a proper appraisal of the pleasure
principle, of our desires, allows for free access to the world: “Only desire that has passed through
what Freud calls resignation…is capable of freely using things, people, and the benefits of
civilization and culture.”

Ricoeur proposes that a reappraisal of psychoanalysis shows that Freud cannot offer
normative or prescriptive solutions to human moral problems. The point of psychoanalysis is not
to answer moral questions but to answer whether those things we desire are freely chosen. Once
that question is addressed the rest follows.

“Art and Freudian Systematics”
This essay addresses the question of the limits of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur explains in the first
two-thirds of the essay that Freud’s interpretation of cultural phenomena runs the gamut from a
justifiable and limited interpretation of jokes to a fully unjustifiable and unsupported
interpretation of Da Vinci’s *La Giaconda*. Ricoeur explains that Freud’s interpretation of jokes
recognized the explanatory limits of psychoanalysis and merely suggested and elucidated the phenomenon of jokes within the limits that the theory has for itself.

Ricoeur clarifies that Freud’s interpretation of jokes begins with a basic explanation of the utility of fore-pleasure in the dynamic of the pleasure principle. In essence, fore-pleasure is the mechanism that allows for the eruption of pleasure within the dynamic of the repression of sexual forces. Ricoeur says, “This general conception of aesthetic pleasure as the detonator of profound discharges constitutes the most audacious intuition of the entire psychoanalytic aesthetics.”

Ricoeur argues that this mechanism of fore-pleasure helps justify and support many of Freud’s interpretations of cultural phenomena. Ricoeur adds, “[O]ne explores the limited problem of the relations between the effects of pleasure and the technique involved in producing the work. This reasonable question remains within the competence of an economics of desire.”

Ricoeur argues that Freud’s interpretation of jokes, because it did not venture beyond the explanatory power that fore-pleasure could provide, is justified and supported. Ricoeur goes on to explore other interpretations of cultural phenomena that Freud wrote that, in the opinion of Ricoeur, went beyond the limits of the economics of desire. Ricoeur considers Freud’s interpretations of The Moses of Michelangelo and Da Vinci’s La Giaconda to be clear examples of Freud’s over-reaching.

That being said, Ricoeur points to several points in these interpretations where Freud clearly recognizes the limits of the interpretations. These limits serve to maintain the enigmatic quality of the work of art. The limits are also a recognition of the manner in which the work of art serves to dissipate and sublimate the sexual drives and urges that are the source, in Freud’s view, of the work of art. The dissipation of these drives is achieved by an overcoming of them.
The overcoming takes the form of a derivative of the sexual forces; it guides them into a form that serves to reshape them beyond what they were.

Ricoeur explains that the reshaping of these forces in and through the cultural phenomenon is what “…protects us against the excesses of [the theory’s] own ‘applications.’ We never gain access to instincts as such but only to their psychic expressions, their representatives in ideas and affects.”

Because we cannot get directly at the instincts that motivate us only their expression that help in their decipherment, we cannot give definitive and final explanations of cultural phenomena. Ricoeur continues, “Hence the economics becomes dependent on textual decipherment, and the balance sheet of instinctual cathexes is read only across the grid of an exegesis of the play of signifieds and signifiers.”

In other words, the only way to make sense of instinctual drives and urges is through the interpretation of phenomena. Works of art are a clear expression of these drives; art through interpretations shows us the symptom that led to its expression, and art is the cure for that symptom.

Ricoeur comments that the above analysis and exploration of the manner by which psychoanalysis overcomes its over-reaching and unsupportable cultural interpretations provoke three problems: first, we must ask just how far psychoanalysis is justified in limiting the interpretation of works of art to its singular interpretive point of view; second, how can we explain that the work of art overcomes the regressive power of dreams and fantasies?; and lastly, how can we explain that the recognition of the limits of analysis can lead to a second interpretation that allows the work of art to remain the cultural phenomenon that presses and pulls its audience to question and reflect?

As to the first question, Ricoeur explains that psychoanalysis recognizes that a “…work of art endure[s] for the very reason that it enriches our patrimony of cultural values with new
meanings.” Freud explains this recognition through the mechanism of sublimation. But, Ricoeur is quick to explain that sublimation does not really solve the problem; it merely defers the problem to an explanation of how sublimation maintains an openness to new meanings for the work of art.

As to the second question, which follows from the unresolved aspect of the first, Ricoeur explains that the work of art shows itself to be not only the expression of instinctual drives and emotional conflicts but also the solution to them. Ricoeur says, “[W]orks are creations insofar as they are not simple projections of the artist’s conflicts but the outline of their solution….The work of art surges forward beyond the artist himself. It is a prospective symbol of personal synthesis and the future of man rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts.” Ricoeur goes so far as to say that rather than looking at the work of art as the axis around which the dialectic between regression and progression revolves and expresses itself, a more adequate characterization of the work of art might move beyond the dialectic. He suggests,

The work of art puts us precisely on the road toward new discoveries about the symbolic function and about sublimation itself. Would not the true meaning of sublimation be to propose new meanings by mobilizing old energies which have already been cathected in archaic figures?

The promise of movement beyond this opposition of regression and progression is possible, Ricoeur claims, only if we can show where the opposition breaks down, i.e., we must explore the opposition more detailedly. In other words, we must apply the opposition in interpretation and see if it offers significant explanatory power relative to other explanations.

This moves us to the third point. Ricoeur offers that, by confronting psychoanalytic interpretation with points of view that are opposed to the former, we can arrive at the limits of
psychoanalytic interpretation. He proposes that the limits that we will find are not borders, but rather, “a function of the internal validity of a theory.” In other words, we must recognize that the very justification of psychoanalysis—the study of cultural phenomena as seen through the lens of the economics of desire—is also its limitation. But this recognition of limitation can be informative. Ricoeur thinks,

It is precisely this limitation within the Freudian problematic which invites us first to contrast it with another explanatory point of view which seems to be more appropriate to the constitution of cultural objects as such and then to rediscover within psychoanalysis itself the reason why it has been surpassed.

Ricoeur claims that the application of psychoanalytic methods to cultural phenomena will show the limits of attempting to explain them libidinally. He says, “[E]xplanation by means of the libido has led us to threshold instead of a terminus.” Ricoeur argues that this wish to explain these phenomena psychoanalytically shows the need to explain them otherwise. The limits of psychoanalysis point to a recognition of the network of symbols that we utilize to explain and express human meaning. By pushing psychoanalytic interpretation beyond its reductive reading to a more symbolic one, Ricoeur offers that psychoanalysis can “…make us see what lies beneath the masks [of the repressed and repressive]…to enter into the movement of the signifier, which constantly points away from the absent signified of desire to works which presentify fantasies in a world of culture and thus create them as a reality on the level of the aesthetic.”

Part III Hermeneutics and Phenomenology

“Nabert on Act and Sign”

The purpose of this essay is to address a problem that Ricoeur found in Nabert’s philosophy. The problem, according to Ricoeur is about “…the relationships between the act whereby
consciousness posits and produces itself and the signs wherein consciousness represents to itself the meaning of its action.”

Ricoeur explains that this problem is present in all philosophy that attempts to ground objectivity in consciousness. Ricoeur asserts that Spinoza, Liebniz, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud all minimized the representation of acts to the positing of consciousness. Ricoeur says, “Representation is no longer the primary fact, the primary function, or what is best known for psychological consciousness or for philosophical reflection. Representation is no longer what brings about understanding but what must be understood.”

The problem that Nabert poses he arrives at through a discussion of Maine de Biran’s ideas. De Biran explains, “[T]he operations of active consciousness are not reducible to those which control knowledge and science, and reflective analysis applied to action must be liberated from the hegemony of epistemology.”

Ricoeur explains that Nabert sees de Biran as separating the positing of consciousness from the acts of understanding achieved by consciousness. Ricoeur quotes Nabert remarking on de Biran, “‘Never before has it been so well understood that consciousness could be liberated from the models borrowed from representation and knowledge of the external world.’”

This separation of these two acts provokes Ricoeur to ask what result this has for representation in reflective philosophy.

Ricoeur explains that Nabert’s solution to the problem of truth and freedom is not adequate. Nabert recommends the need for an interdependence “…between the regulative norms of true knowledge and the constitutive operations of free action.” Nabert thinks that this complementarity can be established by looking at the *cogito* as a unity with productive consciousness. Ricoeur argues that Nabert’s work “…is an attempt to give an account of freedom in terms of the problem of psychological causality.”
Ricoeur thinks that Nabert’s solution to this problem—the interdependence of both in the *cogito*—merely serves to establish their duality. Ricoeur proposes that the move to the *cogito* that knows and can know objectively does not serve to explain the possibility of freedom. He says, “Nothing is gained…if we seek to find in the quality of certain representations and certain ideas the capacity to set action moving. We know nothing about this motive power of ideas.”

This incapacity to motivate action on the part of clear and distinct ideas prompts Ricoeur to suggest that representation rather than consciousness must be the starting point for this discussion. At several points in this essay, Ricoeur makes it clear that the ‘solutions’ that Nabert offers to the problem of freedom and psychological determinism are ineffective. Ricoeur explains that Nabert’s attempt to bring the two together, to show their complementarity, must necessarily be unsuccessful, because any attempt to explain that consciousness itself is the motive behind an act cannot be accomplished. He says,

> All of our decisions are in reality unsuccessful attempts at this complete and concrete act. The effort itself testifies to this lack of fulfillment….The fulfilled act is to be a tireless one, an act without difficulty, without effort. The lack of identity with our own selves is therefore our lasting condition.\(^{250}\)

The human condition makes the identity of act and consciousness impossible argues Ricoeur. That being said, though, he does recognize that the gap between the act and its motive creates an opportunity to explain the act deterministically. He adds, “At the same time, the free act is exiled into the ideal of itself and is projected before and above us in the idea of the timeless choice…. This idea of absolute choice is the counterpart of the dissimulation of the act which is unfulfilled in a determinist stream of representations.”\(^{251}\) In effect, Ricoeur argues that because of the conceptualization of the act as being guided by motives, we end up in a position where
freedom and the act must be at odds. Ricoeur proposes, “The question must be raised about the entire breadth of the relation between freedom and reason.” The ideality that we ascribe to freedom and the incapacity to posit any role to any non-conscious motives in action moves us to shape the debate within the two poles of freedom and determinism.

Ricoeur argues that a move outside this framing of the debate could be achieved with a general theory of signs. He proposes that Nabert also supposes this to be the case. To make his case Ricoeur quotes Nabert from the latter’s article in *The Encyclopédie française*:

> It is therefore true that in all of the domains where spirit reveals itself as creative, reflection is called on to retrieve the acts which works conceal, because, living their own life, these works are almost detached from the operations that have produced them. It is a question of bringing to light the intimate relationship between an act and the significations in which it is objectified.

This quote is significant, because it shows that Nabert recognized the necessary connection between consciousness and representation, but more importantly, it demonstrates an agreement that one is prior to the other, namely, representation. Ricoeur continues quoting Nabert to make this point:

> Reflective analysis does not overlook the fact that in every order the spirit must first of all be operative and be produced in history and in an experience comprehensive enough to grasp its most profound possibilities. Rather, reflective analysis reveals all its richness in surprising the moment when the act of the spirit is invested in a sign which may immediately be turned against it.

Here, Nabert recognizes the tension that exists between act and sign, i.e., between an act of consciousness and its representation. Reflection upon the sign shows that the sign is primary,
but the sign is often overlooked or passed over for consciousness. Ricoeur explains that Nabert, in other texts, elaborated a theory of signs that functioned on two different levels: motive and value. These two motives corresponded to two different and exclusive points of view: psychological explanation and normative ethics.

Nabert in later works attempted to both unify these two points of view and surpass them. He achieved this, according to Ricoeur, by grounding both points of view in reflection. Nabert also explains,

If a difference always remains between the consciousness that moves itself and the consciousness that regards itself, it is because existence itself is constituted on a double relation: between an affirmation which institutes it and surpasses its consciousness, and a lack of being, which is attested to by the feelings of fault, failure, and solitude.255

This gap between act and representation is the basis of the multiplicity of the different levels of signs.

In fact, Nabert explains that the lack that exists in existence itself provokes a constant ‘alternation’ between an attempt by consciousness to ground and center itself and an attempt by consciousness to expand into its world. This constant alternation provokes a consideration of the role of value in self-understanding. Nabert claims:

‘What reflection grasps and affirms as pure consciousness of self the self appropriates as value to the extent that it creates itself and becomes really for itself. This means that value appears in view of existence and for existence when pure consciousness of self has turned toward the world to become the principle or
rule of action and, at the same time, the measure of satisfaction in a concrete consciousness."256

Value becomes central to self-understanding, because value determines the manner in which consciousness turns to the world to understand itself. Value, in other words, uncovers consciousness for itself. But value, according to Ricoeur’s reading of Nabert, also obfuscates. It covers over the act within representation. Nabert says, “‘Value is always linked to a certain obfuscation of the principle on which it is based and which sustains it. …In this respect, the obfuscation of the generative principle of value is the expression of a law which affects all manifestations of the human spirit.’”257

Ricoeur ascribes the covering over of the principle that creates the sign to a basic characteristic of the human spirit—to be affected by what it creates. He explains, “This activity of the self on itself…makes possible the division between the generative movement and the interior law of this movement: an essence is born when the creative act withdraws itself from its creations, from its rhythms of intimate existence, which are henceforth offered to contemplation.”258 This characteristic of the human spirit to objectify its acts is one way of understanding the role that value plays in self-understanding. But Ricoeur adds that value plays a role in the creation of symbols. The path that value plays in this creation begins with desire. In other words, the creation of symbols and the role that value plays in that process is informed by psychoanalysis. Ricoeur, following Nabert, explains, “Starting…from desire, we will say that all meaning and every value claim is ‘obtaining from the real and from life an expression [of creative intention which] transcends all expression and all realization.’”259 In other words, value plays an important role in the symbolization of desire as well as the objectification of acts.
In effect, what Ricoeur describes is the manner by which essences and symbols are created serves to cover over their ground. Ricoeur explains that this is very much in line with Kant’s assertion that the imagination acts as a mediator in understanding and self-understanding. Ricoeur says, “It is the imagination that conceals the double power of expression because it ‘symbolizes’ the principle in verifying it and because it elevates desire to symbol by the will for rigor.” Ricoeur argues that this role of imagination is the explanation for the “…division between the pure production of acts and their concealment in signs. Creation springs up like a stream of time, a durée; but it is as time itself that works are deposited behind the stream of time and remain inert, offered to the eye as objects for contemplation or as essences for imitation.”

Ricoeur labels this interplay between the manifestation and concealment of value and motive ‘phénomènons’. He explains that the phenomenon is the appearance in a manipulable form of the expression of consciousness to understand itself through this very expression. Ricoeur adds, “The phenomenon is the correlate of this assurance of the self in its difference from itself. Because we do not enjoy immediate self-possession and always lack perfect self-identity, because…we never produce the total act that we gather up and project in the ideal of an absolute choice, we must endlessly appropriate what we are through the mediation of the multiple expressions of our desire to be.”

The lack that Ricoeur describes that motivates the phenomenon shows that reflection cannot be a direct understanding of the self by itself; rather, the phenomenon shows that reflection must be hermeneutical.

“*Heidegger and the Question of the Subject*”

My purpose in providing an exegesis of this essay is to show how Ricoeur argues that Heidegger’s critique of the cogito, that is, of the certainty of consciousness, points to a need for a hermeneutics that interprets the self, i.e., the cogito. But the point of all this is to show that hermeneutics is necessary to make sense of the self, and it must occur through an indirect
hermeneutics. What I want to try to demonstrate is that the possibility of certainty has been problematized by Heidegger, but at the same time Ricoeur attempts to show that Heidegger’s move to language shows the necessity of hermeneutics to reclaim and explain the cogito. This essay will show the agreement that exists between Heidegger and Ricoeur, but also shows the difference between the two.

Ricoeur explains that Heidegger’s critique of the subject-object relation which is the basis for the rejection of the primacy of the cogito is the foundation of “a hermeneutics of the ‘I am,’ which is a refutation of the cogito conceived of as a simple epistemological principle and at the same time is an indication of Being which is necessarily spoken of as grounding the cogito.”

Ricoeur proposes that there are four points that he needs to address to adequately explain Heidegger’s problematizing of the cogito. First Ricoeur will address how asking the question of Being is the basis for the destruction of the cogito and for its reformulation on the ontological level as an ‘I am.’ Second, by considering some of Heidegger’s later work, Ricoeur will demonstrate that Heidegger’s critique is not of the cogito but of the metaphysics that founds the cogito. Third, Ricoeur will explain to some extent the hermeneutics of the ‘I am.’ Ricoeur will concentrate on an exegesis of §§ 9, 12, and 25 of Being and Time. The fourth point arises as a rebuttal to an argument about the very approach that Ricoeur takes to understanding Heidegger. It has to do with Heidegger’s Kehre. Ricoeur maintains “…that the kind of circular implication between Sein and Dasein, between the question of Being and the self, of which we read in the introduction of Bieng and Time, keeps ruling the philosophy of the later Heidegger. This time, however, it does so on the level of the philosophy of language and no longer on the level of the Analytic of Dasein.” Ricoeur avers that both problems—Dasein and discourse—are really the same problem.
Section I

Ricoeur explains that Heidegger’s assessment that the question of Being has been forgotten leads to a reformulation of the question of the *cogito*. Rather than starting with and assuming the *cogito*, Heidegger leads by questioning the question of Being and, more to the point, the forgetting of that question. Because the question is formulated as a question, Ricoeur maintains, this creates limitations for the discovery of the self.

First off, Ricoeur maintains that the questioning of the question leads to “…the denial of the priority of the self-positing or of the self-asserting of the *cogito*.” Ricoeur explains that the question of the question does not suggest that there is doubt in the *cogito*; rather, “An objection against the Cartesian *cogito* will be precisely that it starts with a previous model of certitude and places itself on the epistemological basis which has been raised as a mirror of certitude.” In other words, the question of the question of Being does not demonstrate a particular kind of uncertainty about the *cogito* but that the question is limited by the “object” about which the question is asked. Ricoeur reminds us that Heidegger tells us that all inquiries are guided by that which is sought.

Ricoeur also explains that a second limitation is placed on the discovery of the self by the questioning of the question of Being. It is not a limitation *per se*, but rather, a directionality to the problem of the *cogito*. Ricoeur explains that the questioning of the question allows for a “…new philosophy of the ego in the sense that the genuine ego is constituted by the question itself.” The new understanding of the ego de-centers the ego and merely places the ego in the position of the questioner of the question. The important thing is that the questioning of the question grounds an ego that is not certain of itself. Ricoeur explains, “That is to say, it is posited as being itself a being, the being for which there is the question of Being.” The point
that Ricoeur makes here is that the questioning of the question of Being demonstrates that the
questioner is not an ‘I think’ but an ‘I am.’ This gives a new understanding of the cogito.
Heidegger proposes that that being which has a mode of being wherein it asks the question of
Being be called Dasein. This possible mode of being of Dasein gives Dasein an ontic priority
among other Seiendes. But this priority has to do with the ontological character of Dasein, not
its ontic status. Ricoeur proposes that this circularity in the understanding of Being by a being
that is exceptionally able to ask the question of Being and thereby frames the answer and
question of Being gives us the basis of the subject. He says, “The question of the meaning of
Being oscillated backward and forward in the inquiry itself as the mode of being of a possible
ego.” Ricoeur proposes that this central point is the basis for the doubtfulness of the cogito and
the ‘restatement’ of the cogito ontologically.

Section II
In this section Ricoeur addresses Heidegger’s contention that Descartes’ assertion of the Cogito
sum included an omission. Ricoeur frames the omission as a positive assertion or decision that
prevented “…Descartes from raising the question of the meaning of the Being which [the res
cogitans] possesses.” Heidegger explains that the assertion of the cogito belongs to a
particular era of thought—the age of metaphysics—that asserted that truth “…is the truth of
existents…” In essence, the ground of the cogito is found in the assumption that an existent is
understandable if it can be integrated within a prior explanatory framework. Such an assumption
“…implies the objectification of an existent and…places that existent before us.” This
placement of the existent provides the ‘scientist’ with certainty. Ricoeur explains that this is
“…the point where the problem of certitude and the problem of representation coincide…”
and this is where the cogito comes to be. He adds, “In the metaphysics of Descartes, the existent
was defined for the first time as the objectivity of representation and truth as certainty of representation.‖

From the establishment of objectivity, it is but a small step to subjectivity. Subjectivity is the obverse of objectivity. Ricoeur explains, “So we have the positing of the subject and the proposition of the representation. This is the age of the world as view or picture (Bild).”

Ricoeur explains that the positing of the subject is not as straightforward as we might think. He offers that the ‘subject’ introduced by Descartes is more a subject as a substratum, rather than a subject like an ‘I’. Ricoeur explains, “This subjectum is not yet man and not at all the ‘I.’” He adds that the philosophical advance that Descartes achieves is the identity of the substratum with the ‘I’. This identity is possible, according to Ricoeur, because of the worldview that sees the world as a picture in front of which we stand. He says, “The representational character of the existent is the correlate of the emergence of man as subject.”

Ricoeur explains that Heidegger’s ideas show that the cogito is definitely culturally determined. That is why the Greeks did not have a concept of the cogito. He explains, “For the Greeks it is rather man who is faced by the existent and ‘who is gathered into its presence by self-disclosing.’” Though the Greeks did not have a cogito, they did have a notion of man whose aim they saw to be the collection and preservation of the self-disclosure of existents and the remaining open to that disclosure. Ricoeur argues that Heidegger’s interpretation of the subject-object relationship does not remain at the level of the cogito or the ego. Rather, the analysis “…digs underneath; what it discloses is the underlying event of our culture and, more than that, the event (Ereignis) which affects the existent as a whole.”

This subject-object relationship covers over the relationship that does exist between Dasein and Sein. Interestingly, Ricoeur thinks that Heidegger’s critique of the cogito does not create a break with the tradition of
Section III

Ricoeur explains that the ‘question of the ego’ is not foreclosed upon by Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein. Rather, says Ricoeur, the manner in which Heidegger defines Dasein shows two different aspects of Dasein that coincide: Dasein is “…the one who inquires [i.e., is the one who asks the question of Being,] and [is] the one who has to be its own being and has it as its own.” Ricoeur argues that this dual character of Dasein points to Dasein’s existentiality. Dasein understands itself in terms of its existence and of its realm of possibilities for action—authenticity or inauthenticity. Ricoeur explains that this is what Heidegger places at issue by his dual definition of Dasein. Ricoeur thinks that one cannot dismiss the issue of Dasein’s possibilities by merely saying that this is an existenziell concern not an existential one. Says Ricoeur, “[E]xistentiality is nothing other than the totality of the structures of an existent who exists only in the fulfillment or the lack of fulfillment of his own possibilities. If a given decision can be called existenziell, the fact that we have to decide is an ‘existential’ of existence itself.” This question of Dasein’s authenticity creates a circle between Being and existentiality.

The point that Ricoeur wants to make here is that, though we still have at issue the problem of the ego, that does not mean that we have not escaped from Cartesianism. Ricoeur argues that we have achieved an advance, because unlike the cogito of Descartes, the ontic priority of Dasein does not suggest any kind of immediateness. In fact, according to Heidegger, though ontically we are closest to Dasein, because we are Dasein, ontologically we are furthest from Dasein. The retrieval of the ‘I am’ of Dasein cannot be achieved purely
phenomenologically; it must also occur through interpretation—hermeneutics thinks Ricoeur. The retrieval must address who it is that suffers the phenomenon of ‘being-in-the-world.’

Ricoeur explains that the question of who suffers that phenomenon is one that is always open. It cannot presuppose a given ego to which to ascribe this experience or possibility. One reason why this question must remain open is that even on the ontic level Dasein does not know itself; Dasein, even at the ontic level, is concealed. But Ricoeur is quick to explain that the concealment does not imply that the self, i.e., the ego, is a dubious construct; rather, the ego is still essential to Dasein and it must be interpreted. Ricoeur explains, “We cannot proceed in the question of the who without introducing the problem of everyday life, self-knowledge, the problem of the relation to the other—and, ultimately, the relation to death.” He adds that Heidegger explains that until Dasein addresses its relation to death there is no who. Up until that point, Dasein is not really a self. Ricoeur explains, “[T]he question of the self remains formal as long as we have not developed the whole dialectic of inauthentic and authentic existence.”

The concreteness that death gives to the question of the who of Dasein requires a ‘recapitulation’ of existence, i.e., an interpretation of oneself, that can only be achieved through hermeneutics.

Section IV

Ricoeur explains in this section the resolution of Heidegger’s Kehre. Ricoeur explains that some might argue that Heidegger’s attention to the ‘I am’ of Dasein in Being and Time had to be overcome by a shift to an “…exegesis of the speech or discourse, the word, of the poet and the thinker.” The argument, according to Ricoeur, is that the issues of authenticity and resoluteness in the face of death were existenziell ones rather than existential ones. Ricoeur argues, though, that there is a connection between Heidegger I and II, and this connection is found in the persistence of the circle between Being and existentiality. The question of Being
still asks as to the inquirer of the question and recognize the question to be a mode of being. The ‘difference’ lies in that the question is not addressed through an analytic of Dasein; it now occurs through a philosophy of language.

Ricoeur explains, “The same problems which have been linked to the self of Dasein now occur in the problem of language; they are linked to the problem of the word, of speech. This is the problem of bringing Being into language.”

Ricoeur explains that Heidegger’s discussion of the phenomenon of naming, in his Introduction to Metaphysics, reiterates the disclosure and concealment that we saw in his earlier analytic of Dasein. The word serves to preserve and collect the opening of Being, but the word also delimits and closes off Being. Just as importantly, the word “…designates the place and role of man in language. Here, Being is brought into language, and a finite, speaking existent is born.”

The word shows the relationship of man to the world. Ricoeur explains that this relationship, because it is founded on the capacity of the word to simultaneously disclose and conceal Being, is the basis of “…man’s domination of Being by reasoning….“ He explains that the concealment of Being gives us the impression that language is a tool that we have at our disposal to disclose Being. We consider ourselves to be the creators of language.

Ricoeur argues that this discussion of the word and naming is Heidegger’s restatement of the cogito and of his analytic of Dasein. Quoting Richardson, Ricoeur explains that the emergence of the word repeats the emergence of the Da, the There, of Dasein in Being and Time.

Ricoeur explains that the similarity between the analytic of Dasein and the disclosure and concealing of the word is much greater than it might seem on the surface. He points out that the culmination of the hermeneutics of Dasein—the resolve in the face of death—is similar to the resolve of the poet or thinker to be “…bound by the word which creates them. In Urdichtung,
primordial poetizing, the poet testifies to a kind of language in which the Over-powering of Being founds the power of man and his language.”

Ricoeur thinks that Urlichtung takes over as the answer to the who of the questioning of Being and the authenticity of that who. He explains, “Authentic Dasein is born from the response to Being and, in responding, preserves the strength of Being by the strength of the word.”

Ricoeur concludes that the main difference between Heidegger I and II is that “…the self no longer finds its authenticity in freedom for death but in Gelassenheit, which is the gift of a poetic life.”

“The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology”

In this essay, Ricoeur will address the challenges that structuralism and psychoanalysis pose to the approaches that reflective philosophy has taken in the consideration of the subject. Ricoeur explains that reflective philosophy has taken up the problem of the subject in myriad ways—Socrates’ concern for the soul, Augustine’s understanding of an inner man, Kant’s requirement that an ego must accompany all representations, etc. Ricoeur explains that all of these approaches to the question of the subject “…respond to a challenge, whether from Sophism, empiricism, or in the opposite sense, dogmatism of ideas; for all these represent the allegation of a truth without a subject.”

Ricoeur proposes that reflective philosophy can shore up a philosophy of the subject by directly addressing the challenges that psychoanalysis and structuralism pose. He claims they challenge reflective philosophy, because “They…have in common a consideration of signs which questions any intention or any claim that the subject’s reflecting on himself or the positing of the subject by himself is an original, fundamental, and founding act.”

Section I. The Challenge of Psychoanalysis
Ricoeur explains that the challenge of psychoanalysis to the subject derives from Freud’s undermining of meaning for consciousness. Freud explains or gives meaning to our actions without reference to a subject. He explains actions through the systems of the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. They are “…sets of representations and affects governed by specific laws which enter into mutual relationships which, in turn, are irreducible to any quality of consciousness….”

Ricoeur explains that Freud required these systems to interpret actions and desires because there is a divide between the meaning of our actions perceived consciously and their explanation at the unconscious level. Our actions are not truly intelligible to ourselves. Ricoeur adds, “[T]his intelligibility is inaccessible to consciousness because the latter is itself cut off from the level of the constitution of meaning by the bar of repression.” Because we have repressed desires and motivations, we cannot adequately explain the meaning of our actions. The only way to do so is through psychoanalysis and dream interpretation. Ricoeur argues that this separation between consciousness and meaning serves to undermine the primacy of consciousness; it is merely one of several sights where meaning can be found. Ricoeur says, “[C]onsciousness is not the principle, not the judge, not the measure of all things; and this is the challenge that counts for a philosophy of the cogito.”

Ricoeur adds that Freud’s identification of the ego, id, and superego serve to further separate psychoanalysis from any philosophies of the subject. Ricoeur explains, “[T]he unconscious is not only characteristic of the repressed; it is also characteristic of the complex operations by which we internalize the imperatives and the rules which come from agencies of society and, first of all, from the parental agency…. The functioning of these roles in the psyche—a battle for supremacy on the part of the ego, according to Ricoeur—shows us that we...
still have a subject, but this subject is displaced by the mechanisms that Freud describes to explain actions and neuroses. The subject is displaced because neither the ego nor consciousness is primary or the origin of action.

Ricoeur contends that Freud’s description of the machinations of the ego and the id show consciousness to be a task to be achieved rather than an origin for action and knowledge. Ricoeur explains that this task of consciousness keeps psychoanalysis within the ambit of the *cogito*, but it is a cogito different from the one that existed prior to Freud’s science. Ricoeur explains that, prior to Freud, the apodicticity of consciousness and its adequation were identified. Prior to Freud, my existence, regardless of any errors that I may make in my judgments, could not be doubted. Ricoeur adds, “But this impregnable moment of apodicticity tends to be confused with the moment of adequation, in which I am *such as* I perceive myself…[T]he absolute positing of existence…is identified with a judgment of perception, with the apperception of my *being-such.*”  

Freud’s psychoanalysis serves to separate these two moments such that the more certain I am of my existence the more uncertain I am about what I am.

Ricoeur explains that Kant and Husserl’s transcendental philosophy also arrived at this dissociation between the certainty of the *cogito* and the character of consciousness. The difference between these two and Freud, according to Ricoeur, is that “…the philosopher [arrives at this knowledge] only abstractly. Now, psychoanalysis teaches that to know something theoretically is nothing so long as the economy of underlying desires has not been altered.” In other words, the abstract knowledge that the philosopher can achieve, though true, does not provide any concrete knowledge of the *cogito*.
Ricoeur proposes that, apart from actually going through analysis to make concrete the critique of consciousness that philosophy attempts, there must be a kind of philosophical catharsis of the identification of apodicticity and adequation. Ricoeur explains, “Narcissism induces the identification of the reflective cogito with immediate consciousness and makes me believe that I am such as I think I am. But if the subject is not who I think he is, then consciousness must be lost if the subject is to be found.” In other words, if we are to reacquire the subject, we must abandon any preconceptions we may have of consciousness—in particular, its adequation. Ricoeur explains that Freud’s critique gives us “…a wounded cogito, a cogito which posits but does not possess itself, a cogito which understands its primordial truth only in and through the avowal of the inadequation, the illusion, the fakery of immediate consciousness.”

In addition to the negative critique that Freud offers of the cogito, Ricoeur explains that Freud provides a positive implication of his psychoanalysis. This positive aspect is his economy of desire, i.e., the timeless system of unconscious desires that pre-date the conscious. This system is what analysis attempts to discover in order to afford a cure to neuroses and illness. Ricoeur states, “This thesis of the anteriority, the archaism, of desire is fundamental to a reformulation of the cogito…Freud places desire at the center of the act of existing.” He adds that prior to positing itself the subject finds itself already as an existent at a purely instinctual level. Ricoeur explains, “The anteriority of instinct in relation to awareness and volition signifies the anteriority of the ontic plane to the reflective plane, the priority of I am to I think.” The consequence of this priority is that we arrive at an understanding of the cogito that is less idealist and more ontological. The cogito that is posited is empty until it is “…mediated by the totality of the world of signs and by the interpretation of these signs.” We arrive at a
cogito of whose existence we are certain, but of whose character we are dubious. Ricoeur argues that Freud’s philosophical accomplishment is to place a gap between the adequation and apodicticity of consciousness. This gap is filled in by the critique that shows the false cogito, the ideals that consciousness has of itself. In the end, “…the loss of the illusions of consciousness is the condition for any reappropriation of the true subject.”

Having established the separation of the apodicticity and adequation of the cogito and the manner by which the subject is to be reappropriated, Ricoeur proposes that Freud’s critique provides a new project or aim for reflective philosophy. Ricoeur argues that there must be a teleology that must accompany the archeology that Freud establishes for the cogito. Ricoeur says, “This polarity of the arché and the telos, of the origin and the end, of the instinctual ground and the cultural aim, can alone tear the philosophy of the cogito from abstraction, idealism, solipsism, in short, from all the pathological forms of subjectivism which infect the positing of the subject.” Ricoeur argues that such a teleology must follow the form of Hegel’s dialectical phenomenology, but it must do so in a manner that “…would unfold on the very terrain of the regressive analysis of the forms of desire.” Ricoeur explains that Hegel’s dialectical model is more appropriate to this task than Husserl’s phenomenology, because “…Hegel uses a dialectical instrument to conceive a sublation on the naturalist level of subjective existence which preserves the initial instinctual impulse.” Because Hegel provides a model of the interpretation of prior forms that maintains their presence in subsequent forms, this is why Ricoeur considers him a more appropriate model for this new task of reflective philosophy. He says, “The task of a philosophical anthropology after Freud is to pose the problem in ever more rigorous terms and to resolve it in a synthesis which satisfies both the Freudian economics of desire and the Hegelian teleology of spirit.”
Section II. The Challenge of ‘Structuralism’

Ricoeur proposes that the critique that Freudianism makes of the subject is very similar to that made by linguistics. Ricoeur argues that the critique of linguistics of the subject occurs on the ground of Husserlian phenomenology. The critique is aimed at phenomenology, because “…phenomenology unites three theses: (1) meaning is the most comprehensive category of phenomenological description; (2) the subject is the bearer of meaning; (3) reduction is the philosophical act which permits the birth of being for meaning.”

Ricoeur explains that these theses can be viewed in a descending or ascending order, depending on the view of discovery or founding. Seen in the light of founding meaning comes to cover all phenomenological descriptions,

…because this field is founded in its entirety by the transcendental reduction, which transmutes every question about being into a question about the sense of being….Our relation to the world becomes apparent as a result of reduction; in and through reduction every being comes to be described as a phenomenon, as appearance, thus as a meaning to be made explicit.

Ricoeur argues that when we see phenomenology in this light, we can see how it can be seen to be a theory of language. He explains, “Language ceases to be an activity, a function, an operation among others: it is identified with the entire signifying milieu, with the complex of signs thrown like a net over our field of perception, our action, our life.” As promising as this view of philosophy may be for a possible dialogue between phenomenologists and semiologists, Ricoeur explains that “…phenomenology has radicalized the question of language in a way which excludes dialogue…. Ricoeur ascribes this incapacity of dialogue between phenomenologist and semiologists to the rush by phenomenologists to ‘return to the speaking
subject’ without considering what “…the objective science of signs…” might have to offer to this return. Ricoeur explains that phenomenologists, like Merleau-Ponty, see the objective and phenomenological attitudes to be antithetical. He elucidates that phenomenology reverses the placement of synchrony and diachrony: “Having placed synchrony on the side of the speaking subject and diachrony on the side of objective science, the phenomenologist tries to incorporate the objective viewpoint in the subjective viewpoint, to show that a synchrony of speech envelopes the diachrony of language.” In effect, Ricoeur explains that phenomenologists see the system of language to occur at the moment speech while they see the semiological understanding to place language in the past.

Ricoeur offers a possible solution to this impasse between phenomenology and semiology: to show “…how past language lives in present language: it is the task of a phenomenology of speech to show this insertion of the past of language into the present of speech.” He explains that it is possible to see that when an individual speaks, her intention is empty until it is filled in with words. But these words gain new meaning only because of the already existing systems and instruments of language. He says, “In this way, speech is itself the reanimation of a certain linguistic knowledge which comes from previous words of other men, words which are deposited, ‘sedimented,’ instituted, so as to become this available credit by which I can endow with verbal flesh this oriented void in me…when I want to speak.” But this seeming solution has one drawback. It sees language as a habitus that humans must acquire. The solution overlooks the structural aspect of language. He explains that this situation holds, particularly in the case of Merleau-Ponty, because phenomenologists are concerned with the attainment of “…truth as the process of recovering available meanings in new meanings, in the absence of any ultimate statement given in a pure, absolute, total meaning.”
Ricoeur proposes that many of the questions that phenomenology does address are completely overlooked by structuralism, but he considers them to be premature. He offers that they can only be addressed after a detour through the science of signs. He explains, “[T]his detour includes...bracketing the question of the subject with the intention of constituting a science of signs worthy of the name.” The detour that Ricoeur proposes will pose a significant challenge that is similar to that of psychology: structural linguistics displaces signification in a field different from that of the intention of the subject. This displacement is grounded on the basic assumptions that he addressed earlier in “Structure, Word, Event.” To recap though, the first assumption is that language and speech are dichotomous; the second, the diachronic view of language is subordinate to the synchronic; the third, phonemic and semantic aspects of language are reduced to purely formal ones; the last, it is legitimate to describe language as an independent system that is made up of internal relationships, i.e., as a structure. Ricoeur explains that the closed system of language that structuralism proposes is a significant test for phenomenology because the latter does not see language as

...an object but a mediation through which and by means of which we are directed toward reality...; language consists in saying something about something; by this it loses itself as it moves toward what it says, going beyond itself and establishing itself in an intentional movement of reference. For structural linguists, language is self-sufficient: all its differences are immanent in it, and it is a system which precedes the speaking subject.

Ricoeur offers that this system is analogous to Freud’s unconscious in that the system places meaning outside the subject. This is why, he thinks, that both viewpoints—psychoanalysis and structuralism—are semiological challenges to phenomenology.
Ricoeur proposes that phenomenology can address this semiological challenge of structuralism by recognizing that the assumptions of structuralism mentioned above all address the subject from a theory of signification and a theory of reduction. In other words, both structuralism and phenomenology approach the topic of the subject along similar trajectories, but in different manners. The challenge of structuralism must be addressed directly, according to Ricoeur. It cannot be addressed by merely “…repeating descriptions of speech which do not acknowledge the theoretical status of linguistics and the primacy of structure over process which serves as an axiom for linguistics.”

Also, phenomenologists have to do more than oppose the closed system of signs of structuralism with their open system. They must directly confront the presuppositions of structuralism.

To begin with, Ricoeur thinks that phenomenologists can confront structuralism by proposing a new unit for language: the sentence or utterance. This unit is a semantic unit not a semiological one, “…because it is what properly signifies.” Ricoeur argues that the move to this unit does not obviate the problem of signification, it merely recognizes that signs and utterances address the problem at different levels. He explains the difference between the semiological and semantic levels: “Opposing sign to sign is the semiological function; representing the real by signs is the semantic function, and the first is subordinate to the second. The first function serves the second; or, if one prefers, language is articulated for the purpose of the signifying or representative function.”

Ricoeur explains that this recognition of the different levels of addressing the problem of signification can bring a kind of reconciliation between phenomenology and structuralism, but it does limit the direct movement in phenomenology to speech. He says, “One must patiently disentangle semantics from semiology and, consequently, must first take the detour of the
structural analysis...then build the level of the utterance....” Ricoeur adds, “A philosophy of expression and signification which has not passed through these semiological and logical mediations is condemned to stop short of the properly semantic level.” Ricoeur adds, though, that in the same way that phenomenology is ‘limited’ and informed by the challenge that structuralism presents, phenomenology constrains certain aspects and conclusions that structuralism proposes. He says, “[I]t is legitimate to affirm that, outside the semantic function in which they were actualized, semiological systems lose all intelligibility; one can even wonder whether the distinction between the signifier and the signified would retain a sense outside the referential function.” According to Ricoeur, the signifier and signified could not be held together unless one presupposes that the aim of signification is a referent that may or may not exist. He explains, “[T]he semiological order, considered alone, is only the set of conditions of articulation without which language could not exist. But, the articulated as such is not yet language in its power of signifying.” In other words, one must recognize that the semiological is the potential for discourse, but it is the semantic that actualizes discourse.

Ricoeur thinks it necessary to explain how this reappraised phenomenology might explain “…how the speaking subject arrives at his own discourse.” Ricoeur offers that this reconceptualized phenomenology can address this question because unlike the semiological explanation of language, which does not even ask the question of who is speaking because it makes no sense at that level, the semantic explanation, at the level of the sentence, does ask the question, though there may be no answer to it.

Ricoeur offers some explanation of how a structural analysis of personal pronouns can offer a tying together of the rigor of linguistics with the vagueness of phenomenology, i.e., can explain how language becomes speech in discourse. For our purposes, we need not review this
analysis. The important point that Ricoeur draws from this analysis is to show that personal pronouns, until they are utilized by a subject, are empty signs. He concludes, “[T]he pronoun is waiting there, in my language, like an instrument available for converting this language into discourse through my appropriation of this empty sign.”

The difficulty that this analysis does present, though, is the competing interpretation of the foundation of the subject, the I. Ricoeur explains that linguists would explain the creation of the ‘I’ as a function of language. The phenomenologist would disagree. The distinction between the semantic and the semiological would help clarify that

…it is only in language that signs are reduced to internal differences; as such, I and you as empty signs are creations of language,, but the hic et nunc use of this empty sign through which the vocable I becomes a signification and acquires a semantic value supposes the appropriation of this empty sign by a subject who posits himself in expressing himself.

He adds, “Language is no more a foundation than it is an object; it is mediation; it is the medium, the ‘milieu,’ in which and through which the subject posits himself and the world shows itself.” Ricoeur explains that this reconceptualization of the foundation of the subject in its relation to signification must be followed by a discussion of the subject in relation to reduction, i.e, the phenomenological and structuralist reduction. In other words, in addition to explaining how structuralism affects phenomenology in its explanation signification, we must also address the former’s affect upon the latter in terms of the reduction.

Ricoeur succinctly explains Husserl’s phenomenological reduction as a radicalized subjectivism. Ricoeur describes the reduction as “…the primordial philosophical act by which consciousness cuts itself off from the world and constitutes itself as an absolute; after reduction,
every being is a meaning for consciousness and, as such, is relative to consciousness.”

Ricoeur characterizes Husserl’s reduction as the foundation for a *cogito* very much in line with the Cartesian, a *cogito* that can overcome solipsism through itself and establishes the other based on its own foundation. The problem with this reduction, of course, is that it “…is radically incompatible with the primacy that structural linguistics accords to language over speech, system over process, structure over function.”

Ricoeur proposes that it might be possible to overcome this antinomic impasse. He proposes that the phenomenological reduction, in the same manner that the foundation of the subject required a detour, must take a detour through “…the necessary conditions of signifying relations, of symbolic function as such.” This shift in the path of the reduction will show the reduction as “…the possibility for [the human being] to relate to the real by designating it through signs.”

The detour through signs is supported by an extensive quote from Levi-Strauss himself in which he remarks that the instantiation of human language must have come about instantaneously not gradually. Levi-Strauss explains that the discontinuous character of the meaningfulness of the world stands in contrast to the continuous character of knowledge. Knowledge and meaning, achieved through symbols, are fundamentally opposed. Ricoeur concludes, “The symbolic function is thus not on the same level as the various classes of signs that can be discerned and articulated by a general science of signs, by a semiology; it is not any kind of class or genus but a condition of possibility. What is at issue here is the very birth of man to the order of signs.” The consequence of this understanding of the reduction is to recognize it as the foundational moment of the human being’s signifying life with the most important quality that it is nonhistorical and nonchronological; it is transcendental.
Ricoeur explores a possible structuralist rebuttal to this transcendental origin of meaning. He explains that a structuralist might explain that even though the birth of the sign, i.e., its meaning, occurs timelessly, that does not mean that one need posit a subject. Levi-Strauss strongly rejected any explanation that “…would place the subject at the origin of language and is more willing to speak in terms of ‘unconscious categories of thought.’” Ricoeur says that Levi-Strauss would describe the origin of meaning in the differences that exist among and between signs, a “…subjectless difference [that is] the necessary condition of all the differences that appear in the linguistic field: difference between signs, difference, within the sign, between the signifier and the signified….” Ricoeur argues that if Levi-Strauss’ objection is correct then the philosophy of the subject that Ricoeur espouses would gain nothing by founding the symbolic function on the reduction, “…since the transcendental order to which the difference belongs would require no transcendental subject.”

But Ricoeur is quick to rebut that Levi-Strauss’ objection is not valid. Ricoeur explains that the objection is based on a confusion between the semiological and the semantic. Once we recognize that discourse is not language, that the sign is not signification, then any discussion that limits itself to considering only the “…necessary conditions of the semiological order…” would overlook the problem of the semantic order and its establishment.

Interestingly, Ricoeur explains that even Husserl, as well as Sartre, overlooked this problem. Ricoeur explains that it is possible to discuss the transcendental of language without positing a subject. One can discuss the signifying relation and explain the creation of meaning from the difference between the sign and its referent. Husserl was able, through the reduction, to make this difference stand out and in so doing establish the foundation of consciousness. But, Ricoeur points out, this consciousness has no egological character. He says, “As a result, the
birth of consciousness as the difference of nature…does not require a subject, even if it does require a consciousness, that is, a field of *cogitationes.* In other words, explains Ricoeur, the semiological does not require a subject.

But Ricoeur explains that “…the semiological order does not constitute the whole of language. One must still pass from language to discourse: it is only on this level that one can speak of signification.” Ricoeur thinks that once this is recognized then we can speak of what happens to the reduction on the semantic level. He proposes that the reduction at the semantic level demonstrates or reveals its positive side. That is, the reduction shows us that signs are directed to the world, i.e., “…it is the moment of the sentence, which says something about something.” Ricoeur elucidates that at the semantic level we recognize that the reduction which suspends our relation to things is merely the other side of the signifying relation that does and is related to things and the world. Ricoeur adds, though, that if we are to see the referential aspect of language and recognize the reduction as the condition for it, then we must see that this reduction has a subjective aspect as well. Ricoeur explains that we must see the reduction “…as the possibility for an *ego* to designate itself in the occurrence of discourse. Positing and subjectivity go hand in hand to the degree to which the reference to the world and self-reference—or…the showing of a world and the positing of an *ego*—are symmetrical and reciprocal.” He adds that one cannot make any claim to the truth without also asserting a subject that is “…determined by and involved in his speaking.”

Ricoeur asserts that though one can posit the foundation of the sign as a “nonsubjective origin of difference,” one cannot do likewise for reference. He thinks that the symbolic function is, of course, the ability to place things under a rule, but this depends on the ability to make that rule actual. Discourse is the model of this occurrence. The significance of this model is that
discourse places me in a relation of the question and answer, i.e., “...symbolism implies a rule of recognition between subjects.”

Ricoeur’s point is that the reduction is concerned with a “...return to the self by way of its other....”

Section III. Toward a Hermeneutics of the ‘I Am’

Ricoeur proposes in this section that a philosophy of the subject that can stake out a position that has a future must address the disparate critiques of psychoanalysis and structuralism. He recognizes that the two critiques do not have similar foundations, but he does think that any philosophy of the subject must “...be able to project a new receptive structure for including in its thought both the lessons of psychoanalysis and those of semiology.”

He hopes to sketch out just such a philosophy in this section.

The first thing that Ricoeur points out is that the apodicticity of the ‘I think’ that Freud was not able to undermine through his psychoanalytic critique of the subject can be seen to be the basis of the symbolic function. He says, “[W]hat is beyond all doubt is the act of retreat and distance which creates the separation through which the sign is possible, and its possibility is the possibility of being related in a signifying—and not just a causal—manner to all things.”

Ricoeur offers that the benefit of making this connection between the apodicticity of the subject and the symbolic function is that we see that any discussion about the lessons of psychoanalysis must consider the meaning or sense of its lessons. In other words, says Ricoeur,

If the subject is the speaking subject par excellence, the whole adventure of reflection, when its passes through the interrogation of psychoanalysis, is an adventure on the level of the signifier and the signified. This rereading of psychoanalysis in the light of semiology is the first task imposed on a
philosophical anthropology that wants to reassemble the scattered results of the human sciences.\textsuperscript{350} 

Ricoeur explains that Freud’s psychoanalysis functions on two different levels: one is the level of meaning and the other force. Meaning is derived in psychoanalysis through the interpretation of dreams, symptoms, word plays, etc. Force is seen in the interplay and resistances of drives, the id, ego, and other parts of the psyche. Ricoeur points out that these two levels often are intermingled and ‘entangled.’ He says, “[R]elations of meaning are thus found entangled in the relation of force; the entire dream work is expressed in this mixed discourse: relations of force are exhibited and disguised in relations of meaning at the same time that the relations of meaning express and represent relations of force.”\textsuperscript{351} Ricoeur argues that this mingling of levels of explanation is not an equivocation on the part of Freud; rather, this mingling is merely a manifestation of a ‘semantics of desire.’ And this mingling has hectored philosophers since Plato.

The reconceptualization that semiology offers of psychoanalysis shows it to be concerned with the relationship that exists between the libido and the symbol. This theme places psychoanalysis in the realm of hermeneutics, where hermeneutics is understood as “…any discipline which proceeds by interpretation…: the discerning of a hidden meaning in an apparent meaning.”\textsuperscript{352} Ricoeur proposes that hermeneutic understanding of the relation between the two levels of understanding in Freud (and of Freud’s psychoanalysis generally) helps us to see:

[O]n the one hand, understanding the world of signs is the means of understanding oneself; the symbolic universe is the milieu of self-explanation; in fact, there would no longer be any problem of meaning if signs were not the
means, the milieu, the medium by grace of which a human being seeks to situate himself, to project himself, to understand himself.\textsuperscript{353}

Ricoeur also adds that the connection between symbols and desire shows that one cannot maintain the immediate connection between the apodicticity of the self and its adequation. In other words, this understanding of psychoanalysis as a part of hermeneutics shows that direct intuition of the self by the self is not possible.

The second consideration that Ricoeur proposes a philosophy of the subject must reflect upon is the refiguring of semiology by the lessons of psychoanalysis. Ricoeur reminds us that for semiology language is primary in the sense that without language the things in the world that man grasps cannot manifest themselves. But language is also secondary. This reversal is anathema to semiology. Ricoeur elaborates upon this secondary character of language: “The absence of the sign from the thing is only the negative condition for the sign to reach the thing, touch it, and die in this contact. This sense of language as belonging to being requires, then, that one reverse the relation…and that language appear itself as a mode of being in being.”\textsuperscript{354} In other words, we must recognize that the role of language is to disappear in the moment of signification, i.e., of discourse. Language is merely the medium for being to manifest itself.

Ricoeur explains that psychoanalysis prepares the way for such an understanding because psychoanalysis subordinates the subject, consciousness, language to instinctual desires. Ricoeur explains, “Before the subject consciously and willingly posits himself, he has already been posited in being at the instinctual level.”\textsuperscript{355} This is just another way of saying, “The I am is more fundamental than the I speak.”\textsuperscript{356} Ricoeur offers that the goal of philosophy of the subject is to show what ontic structures are the occasion for language to speak.
For all the significance that semiology and psychoanalysis offer to a philosophy of the subject, Ricoeur relates that this philosophy must re-travel the path of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Philosophical anthropology must begin with being-in-the-world toward the problem of interpretation and language. But hermeneutics must not only explain this path, but it must also go back from language to return at being-in-the-world. Ricoeur recognizes the circularity of this voyage, but he thinks that this circle of hermeneutics is not a vicious circle; “…it is the living circle of expression and of the being-expressed.” 357 What this means for hermeneutics is that it must not limit itself to merely discussing the play of language to create meaning and double meaning; rather, hermeneutics must address the *I am*. He argues,

Only in this way can the illusion and the pretensions of the idealist, subjective, solipsistic *cogito* be conquered. This hermeneutics of the *I am* can alone include both the apodictic certainty of the Cartesian *I think* and the uncertainties…of the self, of immediate consciousness. 358

Ricoeur adds that his view of a philosophical anthropology that has any kind of future must take “…the long and roundabout route of an interpretation of private and public, psychic and cultural signs, where the desire to be and the effort to be which constitute us are expressed and made explicit.” 359

**Part IV - The Symbolism of Evil Interpreted**

*“The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: I”*

The main question of for this essay is:

How can thought that has once entered into the immense problematic of symbolism and into the *revealing* power of symbol develop along the line of rationality and rigor that has been proper to philosophy from its origins? In brief,
how can philosophical reflection be articulated upon the hermeneutics of symbols?\(^{360}\)

In other words, how can hermeneutics be made more rigorous and how can philosophical reflection be more receptive to the insights offered by hermeneutics? Ricoeur explains that this move to hermeneutics is necessary because of the recognition from within philosophical reflection of the insufficiency of reflection itself to arrive at a ‘first truth’ or a ‘radical starting point’ for reflection. This incapacity of reflection to arrive at this point drives reflection to “…the archaic, the nocturnal, and the oneiric, which is also an approach to the birthplace of language…”\(^{361}\) Ricoeur explains that a presuppositionless philosophy, i.e., a Cartesian or Husserlian philosophy, in its drive for a purely objective ground for thought leads to a recognition of this impossibility. He recommends that a philosophy grounded in the symbol, i.e., hermeneutics,

…starts from the fullness of language and of meaning already there; it begins from within language which has already taken place and in which everything in a certain sense has already been said; it wants to be thought, not presuppositionless, but in and with all its presuppositions. Its first problem is not how to get started but, from the midst of speech, to recollect itself.\(^{362}\)

Ricoeur observes that this opposition between, on the one hand, hermeneutics and, on the other, Cartesian and Husserlian philosophy does not effectively express the ground upon which he wishes to ground his discussion and analysis. He explains that a better ground would be the present situation of modernity. He points out that the present philosophical cultural moment offers to Western culture two different avenues of thought: one of forgetting and the other of restoring. On the one hand, Western culture is driven by the rejection and moving on beyond the
stories and symbols of the sacred and humanity’s relation to the sacred. He explains that this
forgetting is a result of the drive by technical and scientific thinking to address the practical
needs and wants of humanity. He explains that the drive to make language more precise and
univocal, which is the result of this scientific enterprise, actually leads to an opposing drive
“…to recharge language, start again from the fullness of language.” He offers that
phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and linguistic analysis, among other movements of
interpretation, offer both the possibility to empty language of this fullness, but they also offer the
opposite.

He proposes that this dual directedness of these movements can also be found within the
symbol itself. He offers the following insight: “‘Symbol gives rise to thought.’” He explains
that this maxim shows the symbol in both these tendencies. On the one hand, the symbol gives
meaning, but on the other hand, this meaning must be reflected upon, i.e., it must be thought. He
elucidates, “[A]ll has already been said in [the] enigma [of the symbol] and yet it is necessary
ever to begin again and rebegin everything in the direction of thought.” In other words, the
symbol calls out for interpretation; it does not offer its meaning straightforwardly. And yet, the
symbol, though it lays claim to a foundation wholly antithetical to the scientific enterprise, does
allow for insight as rigorous as that found within science. It is this possibility that Ricoeur hopes
to open up and explore.

Section I. The Order of Symbol

Ricoeur explains that an analysis of the symbolism of evil can elucidate the manner by
which the symbol provides both a source back to the fullness of language but also gives a
foundation for the provocation of thought and reflection. He thinks that the symbolism of evil
lends itself well to such an analysis, because this symbolism is the “insubstitutable language” of
guilt. He avers, “[T]here is no direct, nonsymbolic language of evil undergone, suffered, or committed….”366 In other words, the symbol is the only manner by and through which humans are able to articulate this experience of guilt. And the expression through the symbol is performed prior to and, at times, exclusive of a religious dogma that could shape this experience of guilt. He explains that the primacy of the experience of guilt and its expression through the symbol is derived from its constitution in the “…first-level meaning…borrowed from the experience of nature—of contact, of man’s orientation in space.”367 Ricoeur makes a distinction between these kinds of symbols and mythical symbols for this very reason. He explains, “Mythical symbols are more articulated; they leave room for the dimension of narrative, with its fabled characters, places, and times, and tell the Beginning and End of the experience of which the primary symbols are an avowal.”368

Another significant difference between these two is that the primary symbols show the “intentional structure of symbol.”369 Ricoeur explains that the symbol is a sign, because it intends and stands for something else. But the symbol is more than a sign. Unlike the sign that intends one specific thing, the symbol has a double intentionality. The first intention of the symbol points to that which is more than the physical thing that is specified by the natural sign. A stain, when used symbolically, is more than a stain. But this first intentionality is the basis of a second intention, according to Ricoeur. This second intention “…points to a certain situation of man in the Sacred….370 The difference between the sign and the symbol, then, is that unlike …technical signs, which are perfectly transparent and say only what they mean by positing the signified, symbolic signs are opaque: the first, literal patent meaning analogically intends a second meaning which is not given otherwise than in the first. This opaqueness is the symbol’s profundity, and inexhaustible depth.371
Ricoeur clarifies that the analogical connection between both the first and second meaning of the symbol is not like that of an analogy. In an analogy one compares the relation between one pair of things to the relation that exists between two others. Once the relation of the first pair is understood, one no longer needs the first to understand the connection between the second pair. But Ricoeur proposes that the relation that exists in the symbol between the first and second meaning cannot be objectivized. He says, “By living in the first meaning I am drawn by it beyond itself: the symbolic meaning is constituted in and through the literal meaning, which brings about the analogy by giving the analogue.”

Ricoeur elaborates that a comparison between relations is not what is being performed in a symbol. The symbol requires an assimilation of the first meaning so that the movement to the second meaning is possible. The symbol and its meaning cannot be understood from outside. More importantly, even once we assimilate the symbol in order to understand it, unlike the typical analogy, we cannot claim to definitively understand the symbol. We are not “…able intellectually to dominate the similarity.”

Ricoeur explains that a second reason why the symbolism of evil is appropriate to the analysis of the intersection between the symbol and reflective philosophy is that the symbolism of evil shows the life of symbols. He explains that the movement from one symbol of evil to another—from stain to sin to guilt—shows the dynamics that exist in this movement. More to the point, Ricoeur argues that this movement from one to the next refutes a progressivist or historicist interpretation of the change or evolution of symbols. Such an interpretation does not recognize the continuing influence of the first symbol within the following ones. A progressivist or historicist interpretation sees the development of symbols as a dynamic that constantly and definitively overthrows and discards what came before.
The primary symbols of evil show this not to be the case. Ricoeur offers that the first symbol is always present in the later ones that follow in the following way: “[A]n archaic symbol survives only through the revolutions of experience and of language which submerge it. The iconoclast movement does not proceed first from reflection but from symbolism itself; a symbol is first of all a destroyer of a prior symbol.” In other words, new symbols arrive and derive from the insufficiency of prior symbols to adequately point to the new experience that the later symbol more adequately signifies. But this movement to the new is not achieved reflectively. Rather, the movement to new symbols comes from the application of the old symbols to contexts to which it initially had not been applied. This change in context requires a change in symbol and, more importantly, the change in symbol opens up a new experience that the prior symbol had not anticipated. But the meaning of the old symbol still is effective within and informs the new.

Ricoeur explains that a third reason why the symbolism of evil lends itself to the analysis of the intersection of hermeneutics and philosophical reflection is that the distinction between primary and mythical symbols precisely demonstrates a tension that, in his eyes, can only be overcome through philosophical thought.

Ricoeur explains that the difference that exists between primary and mythical symbols derives from the orientation or narrative directionality of the latter. Mythical symbols introduce the human element of experience within the symbol. He says, “[M]yth can exercise its symbolic function only through the specific means of narrative; what it wants to say is already drama.” An additional tension that the mythical symbol presents that must be addressed through philosophical reflection is the problem of interpretation of these myths. The tension, according to Ricoeur, derives, on the one hand, from
...the infinite multiplicity of the myths [that] must be overcome by imposing upon them a typology that permits thought to become oriented within their endless variety, while not doing violence to the specificity of the [myths]...[while] on the other hand, the difficulty is to move from a static classification of myths to a dynamics of them.\textsuperscript{376}

The benefit of a dynamic understanding of myths is what makes the tension between these two approaches to myth so troublesome. Ricoeur explains that the dynamic understanding of myth must be achieved if philosophy is to assimilate or understand them. He remarks that the primary world myths are in constant opposition to each other. He says, “[M]yths have never stopped battling one another; every myth is iconoclastic toward others...”\textsuperscript{377} He proposes that philosophy must engage in this dynamic if symbolism is to be overcome.

The opposition among myths of evil occurs between two easily identified camps: those myths that see evil originating in an event prior to human creation and those that ascribe that origin to humans themselves. Ricoeur points out that this opposition is not limited to the two camps; it occurs within the camps as well. He points out that the Adam myth encompasses both camps. Adam’s fall is caused both by his choice and by the temptation of the serpent and Eve. Ricoeur explains, “The same myth that concentrates the event of the Fall in one man, one act, one instant, likewise disperses it over several characters and several episodes.”\textsuperscript{378} Ricoeur proposes that this ascription of evil to a time or event prior to humanity is merely a consequence of the constant opposition between the two major camps of myths of evil. He points to several older mythological traditions that exteriorize evil. Ricoeur offers, “It is the war of the myths that invites us to attempt the passage from simple exegesis of myths to a philosophy through symbols.”\textsuperscript{379}
Section II. From Symbolism to Reflective Thought

The movement from the static classification of myths seen from an objective viewpoint to a more accepting and open view of myths is a difficult one to achieve. Ricoeur recognizes that the requirement for philosophy to more adequately interpret and understand myths in a manner that recognizes their genius and insight without at the same time attempting or claiming to master them is quite a tall order or may seem to some philosophers as a capitulation of the philosophic project. Ricoeur responds,

…I do not in the least abandon the tradition of rationality that has animated philosophy since the Greeks. It is not at all a question of giving in to some kind of imaginative intuition, but rather of thinking…of elaborating concepts that comprehend, and make one comprehend, concepts woven together, if not in a closed system, as least in a systematic order. But at the same time it is a question of transmitting, by means of this rational elaboration, a richness of meaning or signification that was already there, that has already preceded rational elaboration.  

Ricoeur explains that his project is to attempt, in a way, a faithful translation of the enigmatic insights of the oracular truths of myth. He calls for a “…conjunction within one and the same philosophy of both the abundance of signs and retained enigmas and the rigor of a discourse without complacency.” He adds, “The key, or at least the crux, of the difficulty lies in the relationship between hermeneutics and reflection. For every symbol gives birth to understanding by means of an interpretation. How can this understanding be both in the symbol and beyond the symbol?” This problem seems to be the main hermeneutic concern.
Ricoeur proposes that it might be possible to address this movement from myth to philosophy through three stages of understanding, a movement that takes us from living in symbols to thinking from symbols. The first level of understanding Ricoeur calls a phenomenology of symbols. It effectively creates and extends a coherent system of symbols. Symbols are understood and used to understand other symbols. The problem with this mode of understanding symbols, according to Ricoeur, is that the truth of the symbol is not addressed. The question of the truth of the symbol is never asked at this stage. The phenomenologist is merely a comparative analyst. Ricoeur explains,

Now this question [of truth] cannot be raised as long as one remains at the level of comparativism, passing from one symbol to another without taking stand. This stage can only be a stage, the stage of an understanding that is horizontal and panoramic, curious but not concerned.\(^383\)

To move to the next stage, Ricoeur explains that the interpreter must be willing to become engaged with the symbol while at the same time looking upon it in a critical manner. He says, “…I must follow the exegete and become implicated in the life of one symbol, one myth.”\(^384\)

The second level of understanding symbol moves us into hermeneutics proper. He asserts, “It is in modern hermeneutics that the symbol’s giving of meaning and the intelligent initiative of deciphering are bound together.”\(^385\) The problem with this next level of understanding is that it moves us into the hermeneutic circle, which Ricoeur encapsulates: “‘You must understand in order to believe, but you must believe in order to understand.’”\(^386\) He elaborates, “No interpreter in fact will ever come close to what his text says if he does not live in the aura of the meaning that is sought. And yet it is only by understanding that we can believe. The second immediacy, the second naïveté that we are after, is accessible only in hermeneutics;
we can believe only by interpreting.” A hermeneutic understanding of the symbol allows the symbol to speak to the interpreter, but it also allows room for some critical distance away from the symbol. There is no need for unreflective belief in the symbol. But such an understanding of the symbol is still not philosophy, according to Ricoeur. The reason for this is that hermeneutics remains wedded to those texts that it interprets.

Before moving to the next level of interpretation of symbols, Ricoeur discusses two specious alternative approaches to the philosophical understanding of symbols. The first alternative is an allegorical interpretation of the symbol. In such an interpretation the symbol is discarded once the meaning of the symbol is achieved. Ricoeur claims, “Allegory implies that the true meaning, the philosophical meaning, preceded the [symbol], which was only a second disguise, a veil deliberately thrown over the truth to mislead the simple.” The other alternative is a gnostic one—“…repeating the symbol in a mime of rationality, of rationalizing symbols as such, and thereby fixing them on the imaginative plane where they are born and take shape.”

The problem with the latter alternative for Ricoeur has to do with the fact the Gnostics exteriorized evil. Such an interpretation does not adequately recognize the standing opposition between the competing explanations of evil. In other words, the Gnostic interpretation already sides with a particular interpretation. It moves us outside thought. We move to a ‘dogmatic mythology.’

The problem that Ricoeur sees himself addressing is to explain how “…meaning [can] be disengaged from symbol [so] that [it] will put thought into motion, without presupposing a meaning already there, hidden, dissimulated, covered over, [and] without getting involved in the pseudo-knowing of a dogmatic mythology?” Ricoeur offers that the other way to move to thought through the symbol is by way of creative interpretation. Such an interpretation
“…would respect the original enigma of symbols, let itself be taught by this enigma, but, with that as a start, bring out the meaning, give it form, in the full responsibility of an autonomous systematized thought.”

Ricoeur explains that such an approach to interpretation has two manifestations in the understanding of evil specifically: reflection and speculation.

Thought manifests the former as demythologizing. Such an interpretation sees the myths of evil merely as allegorical. It is what Ricoeur calls an ethical interpretation of evil. Speculative thought, on the other hand, attempts to save the myths from such an ethical interpretation. It attempts to show the presence of evil to be a necessary one. Such an explanation Ricoeur considers a Gnostic one.

Ricoeur explains that it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the ethical interpretation, because it is the basis of the move that philosophy must make. The ethical interpretation is based on a presumption that evil arises only within a context of freedom. He says, “[T]he freedom that evil supposes is a freedom capable of digression, deviation, subversion, wandering. This mutual ‘explanation’ of evil by freedom and of freedom by evil is the essence of the moral vision of the world and of evil.”

Ricoeur explains that this moral vision of the world connects to the symbolic in two ways. First, such an interpretation is a radical demythologization of the myths; and second, it assimilates the Adam myth within an intelligible philosophical concept. He says, “The moral vision of the world is thought that goes counter to evil as substance and in accordance with the fall of primordial man.”

Ricoeur supports this contention of the connection between a moral worldview and its philosophical assimilation by pointing out that both Augustine and Kant influenced this worldview. Ricoeur explains that Augustine’s ideas about the nullity of evil—that evil is not a substance but a choice that humans make against God—was the result of the union of Platonic
nonbeing to Aristotelian discussions of voluntary and involuntary actions. This union, brought about by Augustine, “…so radicalized reflection upon freedom as to make it into the originary power of saying ‘No’ to being, the power of defaulting…of declining…of tending toward nothingness…”394 Ricoeur does remark that for all that Augustine provided the latter was not able to make the full step to a moral worldview.

Ricoeur proposes that Kant, in his elaboration of the framework necessary to understand the role of the will in truly ethical action, was able to bring about the formation of a moral worldview of evil. Ricoeur proposes that Kant’s concepts—will, free will, and maxim—“…bring to full explicitness the opposition will/nature sketched out by Augustine…”395 In the end, according to Ricoeur, Kant’s analysis of the role of the maxim and the will in the estimation of moral action, i.e., Kant’s formalization of the moral realm, showed that “…evil resides in a relationship, or the subversion of a relationship. It is what happens…when man subordinates the pure motive of respect to sensible motives, when ‘he reverses the moral order of motives by accepting them as his maxims.’”396 Kant, according to Ricoeur, was the first thinker who was able to rationally explain that evil is not about going against one’s duty to god, country, etc. but “…the fraudulent justification of the maxim by apparent conformity with law—it is the semblance of morality.”397 Ricoeur submits, though, that for the all the power that Kant’s insight may offer as to the character of evil the insight leads to a loss of depth.

Section III. Dimming of Reflection and Return to the Tragic

Ricoeur proposes that what is lost in the ethical vision of evil is “…the darksome experience of evil which surfaces in different ways in the symbolism of evil and which constitutes properly speaking the ‘tragic’ aspect of evil.”398 This tragic aspect has to do with the always already present character of evil that primary symbols of evil always recognize. This character speaks to
the exteriority of evil. Ricoeur proposes that it is this quality of evil that needs exploration and can be expressed by seeing evil as a tradition. But this view of evil lends itself to a Gnostic interpretation. Ricoeur warns that in trying to understand this always already presence of evil we must not reify evil into a ‘nature.’ He says, “We are going to try to think something like a nature of evil, but a nature which would not be a nature of things but an ordinary nature of man, a nature of liberty, hence a contracted habitus, freedom’s manner of having come to be.”

Ricoeur devotes several pages to the analysis of the always already there character of evil. He discusses that both Augustine and Kant are informative here. The point Ricoeur makes is that Augustine’s ideas about original sin provide the ground for an understanding of evil that is always present, but Kant’s ideas about the a priori of evil in human action presented the same concept in a rational guise. Unfortunately, according to Ricoeur, Kant’s analysis, though destroying the Gnostic aspects of Augustine’s ideas about original sin, also serves to diminish the symbolic depth of original sin. Ricoeur proposes that this loss of depth results from the split that Kant initiates by grounding evil in the subject. This separates the symbol of evil from its “cosmic, nocturnal, oneiric, poetic” sources. He says,

A symbolism of subjectivity already marks the breaking-up of the symbolic totality. A symbol starts to be destroyed when it stops playing on several registers: cosmic and existential. The separation of the ‘human,’ of the ‘psychic,’ is the beginning of forgetfulness. That is why a purely anthropological symbolism is already on the way to allegory and foreshadows an ethical vision of evil and of the world.

Ricoeur offers that the part of the symbol that resists allegorization is that part that is the nonethical part of evil. Ricoeur proposes that the original sin symbol is the tragic part of evil.
that resists allegorization. Ricoeur clarifies this connection of the tragic to this resistance; he says, “[I]t is an aspect irreducible to the ethical, and complementary to every ethics, which has found a privileged expression in the tragic.”

The difficulty with the assimilation of the tragic within reflective philosophy is that the affirmation of the tragic questions the supremacy of the subject. He says, “The function of the tragic is to question self-assurance, self-certitude, one’s critical pretensions, we might even say the presumption of the moral conscience that is laden with the entire weight of evil.” Ricoeur explains that the symbolism of evil affirms the unity of the subject with being, i.e., the subject cannot separate itself from being, there is no possibility of complete self-awareness. He affirms, “One must, then, come to the point where one sees evil as the adventure of being, as part of the history of being.”

Section IV. Speculative Thought and Its Failure
In this section Ricoeur explores the possibility of overcoming the seeming return to unknowing that follows from his prior discussion of the traditionality and ever-presence of evil. He asks, “Does the battle between reflective rigor and symbolic richness cease with the return of the impenetrable symbol of the Fall?” He proposes that this return is not necessary, so long as we consider the other aspect of the myths of evil—they are myths of the end as well as of the beginning. He points out that several myths of evil derive their meaning in reverse chronology, i.e., they mean something only when viewing their arché in reference to their telos.

Of course, the question that must be asked is how this other aspect of these myths provides an outlet for thought rather than just further mystery. Ricoeur warns again that such an approach to understanding these myths can lead to both allegorical and Gnostic interpretations. He explains that to interpret these myths fairly we must see that these myths put forward a
necessity of evil that does not establish something prior, i.e., according to a Gnostic interpretation. Rather, these myths establish a necessity of evil that “...appears only afterwards, viewed from the end...”

Ricoeur offers Saint Paul’s interpretation of the Adam myth as a possible model for the former’s proposal. The central characteristic of the Pauline interpretation has to do with the ‘superabundance’ of grace that is implied in the parallel figures of Adam and Jesus. Adam was the cause of many ills, but Jesus even more was the cause of many more blessings. As promising as this interpretation may be, Ricoeur recognizes that thought, i.e., philosophy cannot adequately provide a ‘meaningful schema’ by which to understand it. He explains that philosophy either accepts the necessity of evil to the exclusion of any contingency, i.e., we have a Gnostic interpretation, or contingency is so accommodated within any interpretation that it cannot adequately explain the ‘tragic’ aspect of evil that is always already present.

Plotinus’ attempt to explain evil as a necessity derived from the order that derives from dissonance, i.e., God creates harmony even from evil that God does not produce. Ricoeur rejects such a philosophical explanation because it makes a farce of the real events of human suffering. He claims such an interpretation of evil is guilty of bad faith, because this interpretation is more concerned with maintaining a harmonious totality than with actually trying to explain real suffering and evil.

The necessity of evil that Spinoza posits is just as suspect, according to Ricoeur. Spinoza’s axiom that every given thing in nature always presupposes the givenness of a power more powerful than the first is, according to Ricoeur, merely “...a law of internal contrariety...” But this contrariety is necessary like the movement [of the expression of
Ricoeur asserts that such a view merely explains away the contingency of evil; it does not do it justice.

A third thinker that Ricoeur considers is Hegel. Hegel’s dialectic seems promising, because he does address and incorporate the tragic aspect of evil. There is no longer any abstraction that explains away evil. Says Ricoeur, “Evil is given its place at the same time that the history of figures of Spirit starts to unfold. Evil is truly retained and surpassed; conflict is enlisted as instrument of the recognition of consciousnesses….” The problem with Hegel’s dialectic is that its integration changes the character of evil as well. In the dialectic, says Ricoeur, we are dealing with contradiction not with evil *per se*. The specificity of evil, its uniqueness proper to particular acts and events is lost, because Hegel subsumes it under a universal function—negativity. Other oppositions also fall under this function. Says Ricoeur, “All negativities are drowned in the negativity.” The result of Hegel’s subsumption of evil within the function of negativity removes any sense of “…the injustice of evil [and] of the gratuity of reconciliation.”

Ricoeur proposes that if both a nondialectical and dialectical approach to the philosophical understanding of evil are inadequate, then the question must be approached in a “meaningful history” not in a logic of any kind. He thinks that it might be possible to explain evil in a manner that maintains the contingency of evil and its reconciliation. He thinks that it might be possible to arrive at a “becoming of being in which the tragic of evil—of this evil always already there—would both be recognized and surmounted.”

Ricoeur thinks that any interpretation of evil that can adequately address its necessity and contingency must address three aspects of evil and its reconciliation. First, any understanding of evil must recognize that the reconciliation of evil is always hoped for in spite of evil. This hope
constitutes a contradiction of evil. But this contradiction cannot be proven through any kind of logic; rather, this contradiction is only hinted at through signs, i.e., historically in an eschatology. Second, the “in spite of” also includes a “thanks to.” The problem with this “thanks to” is that we can never be sure of the lesson to be learned from evil. Third, according to Ricoeur, the meaningful history of evil always asks or considers the possibility of more, of superabundance. Ricoeur says, “That is the miracle of Logos; from Him proceeds the retrograde movement of the true; from wonder is born the necessity that retroactively places evil in the light of being.” These three aspects of evil indicate a hope that attempts to understand the necessity of evil.

“The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection: II”

In this essay, Ricoeur brings to fruition the whole of the previous essay. He points out that the point of the previous essay was not merely to analyze the problem of evil in particular Judeo-Christian myths. Rather, the point of the previous and present essays is to ask: “[W]hat is the function of the interpretation of symbols in the economy of philosophical reflection?” Ricoeur explains that this problem is the hermeneutic problem.

The first issue that Ricoeur addresses is the insight that any interpretation of myths, but of myths of evil in particular, requires the recognition that “…the only access to the experience of evil is through symbolic expressions.” Ricoeur remarks that the source of symbolic expressions is a literal meaning, but they aim at existential meaning. The important point that Ricoeur makes here, though, is “The existential signification is here given indirectly, analogically, by means of the primary, literal signification. For this reason, to undergo the experience of evil is to express it in a language; but furthermore, to express it is already to interpret its symbolic expressions.” In other words, the symbol is necessary to signify the
experience that the symbol indicates through itself, but in addition, the expression of the existential experience of the symbol is to already be in the symbolic realm.

In essence, Ricoeur points out that the symbols we use reveal new parts of experience, new manifestations of the experience to us. He says, “[S]ymbols not only have an expressive value…but also an exploratory value, because they confer a universality, a temporality, and an ontological significance on the expressions of [human experience.]” The temporal aspect of symbols derives from the fact that they refer to a time long before. By doing so, “…they give our experience a certain temporal orientation. They direct it from a beginning toward an end, from memory toward hope.”

These insights into the capacity of symbols to uncover meaning lead Ricoeur to ask if there is a connection between the interpretation of symbols and thought. At first blush, it would seem that the interpretation of symbols and myths would definitively not be the concern of the philosopher, but Ricoeur argues that philosophy must address this issue of symbols, because their use is “astonishing and even scandalous.” The use of symbols has these qualities because symbols, if appropriately and fairly understood retain their opacity. Though they have a literal meaning, they never mean only what they say literally. This literality does give the symbol “material density and opacity,” though. Also, the use of symbols immediately provokes the question of why a particular symbol was used to express its meaning. In other words, the symbol “remains contingent” and grounds the symbol giving it a concreteness that abstract discussions of the same issues lack. Finally, symbols can only be thought through interpretation. Ricoeur points out, “There is no myth without exegesis, no exegesis without contestation.” What is worse about the interpretation of myths and symbols is that there is no science or method that can be applied to them without consideration of their uniqueness. Ricoeur concludes, “Opacity,
cultural contingency, and dependency on a problematical interpretation—such are the three deficiencies of the symbol as measured by the ideal of clarity, necessity, and scientific order in reflection.\textsuperscript{418}

Ricoeur adds that the interpretation of any symbol cannot allow for one particular general theory of their interpretation. What we do have are “various separate and contrasting hermeneutic theories.”\textsuperscript{419} The problem that symbols causes for the philosopher is not only that they need interpretation but also that there must be competing interpretations. Ricoeur devotes the first part of the essay to discussing the opposition between a phenomenological and a psychological interpretation of religion and the need for this opposition in philosophy.

\textit{Section I. The Conflict Between Interpretations}

Ricoeur describes three central assumptions that are the basis of the phenomenology of religion: 1) interpretation of symbols in phenomenology is concerned with the description of the intentional object not with its explanation; 2) the truth of the symbol lies in its fullness relative to the emptiness of mere signs; and 3) symbols show that there is already within them an ontological understanding that they express. Ricoeur asserts that these three assumptions have their respective counterparts in psychoanalytic interpretation of religion. They are: 1) symbols can be understood through the economic function that they perform for the psyche and its drives and desires; 2) symbols merely cover over and are merely illusions; and 3) the symbol is merely an expression of the return of the repressed.

Of the three previous assumptions of phenomenology, the one that most concerns us is the last—ontological understanding implicit in symbols. Ricoeur argues that the first two assumptions lead us to the third that shows language to be less a tool that allows humans to speak than that Being speaks through humans. He says, “[This assumption] reveals that language is
less spoken by men than spoken to men, that men are born at the heart of language within the light of the Logos ‘which illuminates each man who enters the world.’”

Ricoeur adds that this ontological assumption of phenomenology shows that mere analytic manipulation of signs and language is insufficient for the interpretation of symbols. He says, “The modern concern for symbols implies a new contact with the sacred, a movement beyond the forgetfulness of Being which is today manifested in the manipulation of empty signs and formalized languages.”

Having briefly described the three foundational assumptions of a phenomenology of religion, Ricoeur turns to the opposing assumptions of psychology. The first thing Ricoeur remarks upon is the appropriateness of psychology to study this object—religion. He points out that there is no way to limit either approach to interpretation to one particular realm of human experience. This incapacity to limit psychoanalysis to the psychiatrist’s office or to the ward has to do with the aim of psychology. He says,

“There is no way to distinguish the various hermeneutic perspectives with regard to their domain, for each one of them embraces the whole of man and each claims to interpret and understand the totality of man’s being. If there is a limit to psychoanalytic interpretation, we must look for it not in its object but in its point of view.”

Because psychology is concerned with trying to explain how the instincts or drives of humans express themselves in humans’ endeavors and work, it is only appropriate to expand the interpretation of human experience beyond the clinical realm.

The first assumption then that Freud makes in reference to the cultural phenomenon that is civilization is that civilization itself is a function of the limitations and sacrifices that human beings must make in order to live in society. Ricoeur says, “Thus, the problem of civilization is
immediately taken up within the context of an economic point of view.” Freud interprets religion according to this viewpoint. Religion reduces the strain and guilt humans feel for their drives; it consoles them for the sacrifices we make for social life; and finally, it provides pleasures for the sublimation of erotic drives.

Ricoeur offers that this assessment of the role or purpose of religion in Freud is founded upon a prior assumption—the truth of religious symbolism, i.e., the aptness of the symbol to be more than merely the literal understanding of the sign and yet its appropriateness for that particular intention beyond the literal. According to Ricoeur the “truth” of symbols, i.e. their plenitude, is explained in Freud as mere illusion. But this illusion does not address the ‘truth’ of the symbol in a phenomenological sense; rather, the illusion of religion is necessary to balance “…the renunciations and satisfactions [of civilization] by means of which man tries to sustain his life.” Ricoeur explains that illusion, as understood by Freud, is yet another tool or method by which human beings reconcile themselves and mollify the cruelty of fate and nature.

Ricoeur explains that Freud’s interpretation of symbols as illusion places this interpretation in direct conflict with the phenomenological interpretation of religion. Ricoeur explains that the phenomenological interpretation sees all symbols as a ‘precomprehension of Being’ and the interpretation of these symbols is seen as “the renewal of the ancient doctrine of recollection.” But psychoanalysis also interprets these symbols by a return to their origin. But this return is a genetic interpretation of the symbols that shows the ‘truth’ of the symbols to be “…in those originary representations which lie at the root of the ideational distortion.” In other words, the symbols are shown to be merely the return of repressed traumas of human history and civilization. It is here, according to Ricoeur, that we see the direct opposition between these two interpretations. He says, “Recollection of the sacred [the phenomenological
interpretation], in the sense of ontology of the symbol, and the return of the repressed [Freud’s psychoanalytic interpretation], in the sense of the etiology of fantasies, together constitute the two poles of a dynamic tension."\(^{427}\)

**Section II. The Hermeneutic Polarity**

The problem that Ricoeur wishes to address in this section is to explain how these two opposing interpretations might coexist. He proposes that this might be possible if we recognize that each interpretation is valid within its context. But he recommends that we cannot merely set each interpretation in juxtaposition to the other; rather, “[I]t is necessary to set up a dialogue between them and demonstrate their complementary functions.”\(^{428}\) Ricoeur proposes that if we consider the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious we might be able to clarify the interaction and interplay between the two interpretations. He readily accedes that this approach is already derivative of the Freudian interpretation, but he offers that after Freud it is impossible to take consciousness as given. Ricoeur reminds us that after Freud we realize that “[c]onsciousness is not the first reality which we can know but the last. We must arrive at it, not begin with it.”\(^{429}\) Ricoeur adds, “The principal motive which animates the analytical attempt to demystify is the desire to contest the privileged status of consciousness.”\(^{430}\) In other words, Freud’s analysis and interpretation are grounded in the basic assumption that consciousness is not primary in human behavior, that if we want to make sense of human cultural phenomena, then we must explain and describe the structures of the psyche under and prior to consciousness that influence human action.

But Ricoeur is quick to point out that Freud’s topographic and economic interpretation of human action is not the only way to interpret that action. In fact the questioning of the supremacy of consciousness has served to strengthen the validity of those other interpretations.
Most importantly, the consequence of this reinforcement of these other interpretations is to reinforce the necessity of consciousness for the interpretation of human action. Freud’s critique of consciousness, in other words, “…does not serve to eliminate consciousness but in fact radically renews its meaning. What is definitely denied is not consciousness but its pretension to know itself completely from the very beginning, its narcissism.”431 Ricoeur proposes that because of Freud we must let go of the belief that we know the meaning of consciousness in order to understand how consciousness might be a mode of being that has the unconscious as its other. And it is this relation between the two that might clarify the relationship between the two hermeneutic approaches.

Ricoeur offers that the problem of consciousness can be best addressed after Freud by asking how an adult becomes so, how a child becomes an adult. After Freud, it would seem that the answer to this question would be a purely psychological one, but Ricoeur thinks that after Freud one can begin to inquire into the figures, images, and symbols that direct the maturation of the person. Such an indirect approach places and explains growth as the interplay of two different hermeneutics.

Ricoeur argues that, after Freud, we now need a new hermeneutics that opens up “…new figures, new symbols, which are irreducible to those that are rooted in the libidinal ground. These figures and symbols draw consciousness forward out of its own infancy.”432 Ricoeur thinks that after Freud the only kind of hermeneutic is one that understands consciousness in the mode of a Hegelian phenomenology of spirit. Ricoeur says, “An exegesis of consciousness would involve an inventory and a step-by-step constitution of the spheres of meaning which consciousness must encounter and appropriate for itself so as to reflect upon itself as a self, as an adult, human, ethical self.”433 Such an approach to the understanding of the self precludes a
direct approach to self-understanding through introspection. Consciousness will only be achievable through the “…objective structure of institutions, monuments, works of art, and culture.”

Ricoeur draws some insights from the opposition of the Hegelian and Freudian interpretations of consciousness. He points out that the Hegelian interpretation always arrives at meaning only after the overcoming of what came prior. He says, “The truth of one moment resides in the subsequent moment; intelligibility always from the end to the beginning.” In other words, when applied to self-understanding and consciousness, in a Hegelian understanding past moments achieve or derive their truth from what has come to be in the present. But Freudian interpretation derives meaning and truth of the present from what has come before. Ricoeur explains, “[T]he concept of the unconscious signifies that understanding always proceeds from figures that are prior to it…..” The insight that Ricoeur draws from these two opposed hermeneutics is precisely that symbols have multiple dimensions that allow for different and, sometimes, opposing interpretations. He says,

[T]he same play of symbols can support two types of interpretation; the one is oriented toward the emergence of figures that are always ‘behind’ us, while the second is oriented toward the emergence of figures that are always ‘ahead’ of us. The exact same symbols are endowed with these two dimensions and offer themselves to these two opposing interpretations.

Section III. Reflection and Interpretation

Ricoeur asks in this section why it is that philosophy that is reflection needs symbolic language: “Why must reflection become interpretation?” Ricoeur offers that reflection, or thought, is always reflection, or thought, on itself. But to understand what this self-reflection means we
must understand what the self is. He maintains that the first truth from philosophy since Descartes has been the positing of the self. Ricoeur says, “For this tradition…the positing of the self is a truth which posits itself. Incapable of being either verified or deduced, it is simultaneously the positing of a being and an act, a form of existence and an operation of thought: I am, I think; to exist for myself is to think; I exist insofar as I think.” \(^{439}\) This is the beginning of philosophy.

Ricoeur explains that so long as we think of self-reflection as the immediate consciousness of the self, we will not be able to understand why thought reflection requires interpretation. In order to see the need for this interpretation, we must understand that “…reflection is not intuition; or in positive terms: reflection is the effort to recomprehend the ego of the ego cogito in the mirror of its objects, it [sic] works, and ultimately its acts.” \(^{440}\)

Of course, one would ask why the ego must be understood through its acts. Ricoeur thinks that this is the case because psychological, mystical and intellectual understandings of the ego profess to understand the ego directly. But Ricoeur says,

The first truth—\emph{I think, I am}\textemdash remains as abstract and empty as it is unassailable.

It must be ‘mediated’ by representations, actions, works, institutions, and monuments which objectify it; it is in these objects, in the largest sense of the word, that the ego must both lose itself and find itself. \(^{441}\)

A philosophy of consciousness cannot be one of immediate consciousness, because, as Ricoeur has previously pointed out, consciousness is a task; consciousness is not a given. Now, Ricoeur readily accedes that there is apperception of the self in one’s acts, but the important question is what is the meaning of that apperception? Ricoeur, following Malebranche and Kant, offers that the immediate apperception of the self is true, but it is empty. Ricoeur says, “[A]n apperception
of the ego can accompany all of my representations, but this apperception is not self-
knowledge.” The consequence of this empty truth of self-consciousness if interpreted as
immediate apperception is the recognition that “reflection is not intuition”, but more
importantly, it “…permits us to adumbrate the role of interpretation in knowledge of the self;
this role is reciprocally designated precisely by the difference between reflection and
intuition.”

Another reason that Ricoeur offers for the need of interpretation in philosophy has to do
with the difference between the task of reflection and epistemology. He proposes that a critique
of knowledge reduces reflection to a singular aspect: “The only canonical operations of thought
are those which found the ‘objectivity’ of our representations.” But Ricoeur proposes, along
with Fichte and Nabert, “…that reflection is less a justification of science and duty than it is a
reappropriation of our effort to exist. Epistemology is only a part of this much broader task. We
must recover the sense of existential activity, the positing of the self within all the density of its
works.” Ricoeur offers that the sense of the self has to be recovered or reappropriated,
because “…I am lost, ‘astray’ among the objects of the world, separated from the center of my
own existence….Whatever may be the secret of this separation…it signifies that I do not
originally possess that which I am.” This insight Ricoeur arrives at through Heidegger’s
analysis of Dasein. This separation makes reflection on the self a task that must be achieved and
is not a given. Ricoeur explains that I have to equate my concrete experience with the I am.

Ricoeur next addresses the critique that this turn away from the epistemological aspect of
experience only overemphasizes the ethical part of thought and limits thought to that realm. But
Ricoeur thinks that if one understands the project of philosophy to be ethics then it is not a
limitation. He proposes, “Philosophy is ethical insofar as it transforms alienation into freedom
and beauty….‖ Here he is following Spinoza, who offered that knowledge of the self was equivalent to knowledge of the uniqueness of the self. The goal of ethics is “…to grasp the ego in its effort to exist, in its desire to be.” This insight about the effort and desire to exist for the first time does inform concretely the prior empty apperception of the ego.

Ricoeur proposes that the prior analysis of reflection and its meaning leads us to a new insight: “[R]eflection is the appropriation of our effort to exist and our desire to be by means of works which testify to this effort and this desire.” This insight, according to Ricoeur, demonstrates why ethics is more than morals, because before we make moral judgments thought reflects on our desire and effort to be. This is why we require a hermeneutics. We have found that the effort and desire to be cannot be immediately intuited, but must be found through the expressions of that effort and desire. More to the point, those expressions have a “…meaning [that] remains uncertain and revocable. Reflection here appeals to interpretation and seeks to transform itself into hermeneutics.” What Ricoeur is getting at is that the activity of existence is the only way to arrive at a concrete meaning for the ego, but “…I can grasp the activity of existence only through those signs that are scattered through the world. This is why a reflective philosophy must include the results of the methods and presuppositions of all the sciences that attempt to decipher and interpret the signs of man.”

Section IV. Justification of the Hermeneutic Conflict

In this section, Ricoeur hopes to provide a justification for the need that reflection occur through symbols of the sacred or the unconscious. He asks, “Is not reflection a method of immanence? Must it not resist a transcendence from above as much as a transcendence from below?” Ricoeur’s answer to this critique is to point out that both Freudianism and a phenomenology of religion “…reduce the status of consciousness and displace the source of meaning….The
problem would be resolved if we understood why reflection implies both an archaeology and an eschatology of consciousness.”

Ricoeur addresses the first aspect by explaining how and why it is that reflection needs an archaeology. He says simply, “Reflection requires a reductive and destructive interpretation because consciousness is originally false consciousness, ‘the pretension to self-knowledge.’”

What this means, of course, is that in order to become conscious one must demystify the false consciousness that one finds oneself in. Ricoeur compares Freud’s psychoanalysis to the insights of other ‘masters of suspicion’ like Nietzsche and Marx. The comparison to Nietzsche, according to Ricoeur, is most apt because Nietzsche used the concept of Deutung to philosophically elucidate the will to power. Ricoeur argues that Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* borrows directly from Nietzsche’s use of the concept to uncover the ruse that consciousness finds itself in. For Freud, according to Ricoeur, “‘Consciousness’ of the self must become ‘knowledge’ of the self, i.e., indirect, mediate, and suspicious of the self. In this manner, reflection is disassociated from all immediate consciousness. Such immediate consciousness offers itself to be explicated as a pure symptom and to be interpreted by an external observer.”

Self-understanding requires the mediation of another individual in order to occur.

Ricoeur next addresses the need for interpretation to occur within a phenomenology of religion. Ricoeur points out that Hegel’s insight about the order of Spirit demonstrates that the movement of Spirit occurs in “…a progressive and synthetic movement through various figures or stags, in which the truth of one moment resides in the truth of the following moment….Thus the meaning of consciousness is not in itself but in Spirit, that is, in the succession of figures that draw consciousness forward away from itself.”
Now, Ricoeur is quick to recognize that the progression of figures in Hegelian Spirit does not provide us with a phenomenology of religion. He accedes, “Between the figures of Spirit and the symbols of the sacred there is a serious ambiguity.” Ricoeur proposes that in order to overcome the ambiguity we must substitute Hegel’s end point of the progression—absolute knowledge—with promise. Ricoeur says,

Would it not be possible to say…that the end is not absolute knowledge, that is, the completion of all reflections in a whole, in an all-inclusive totality, but rather that the end is only a promise, promised through the symbols of the sacred….The meaning of the sacred remains eschatological and can never be transformed into knowledge or gnosis.

Ricoeur is quick to point out that this ‘substitution’ is precisely not merely a substitution nor is it arbitrary. He argues that there are certain symbols of the sacred that resist final analysis and determination. Such symbols, like those of evil,

…are resistant to any reduction to rational knowledge. The failure of all theodicies, of all systems that attempt to deal with the problem of evil, is testimony to the failure of absolute knowledge in the Hegelian sense. All symbols invite thought, but the symbols of evil demonstrate in an exemplary manner that there is always something more in myths and symbols than in all our philosophy and that, hence, a philosophical interpretation of symbols will never become absolute knowledge. [These symbols]…announce…the limits of all systems of thought which would try to incorporate these symbols in an absolute knowledge.
Ricoeur recommends here that the symbols of the sacred, though they invite reflection and lend themselves toward interpretation and the discovery of meaning, cannot ultimately be definitively interpreted. The symbols require a constant reappraisal. The important aspect of these symbols, though, is that although they resist final interpretation they do point to an end, toward an *eschaton*.

Ricoeur concludes that it is now possible to see why interpretation must follow the directions indicated by Freud and phenomenology of religion. He explains that reflection demonstrates a “…double dependence of the self on the unconscious and on the sacred, since this double dependence is manifested only in a symbolic mode.” Reflection has to see that consciousness requires elucidation through symbols that provide an archaeology and an eschatology.

Ricoeur concludes that the opposition of these two interpretations of religion is not the result of mere accident; rather, this opposition is necessary for reflection. It is necessary because we understand, after Freud, that “…religion is idolatry, falsity, fabulation, illusion….” This understanding demonstrates the need for demystification. But, Ricoeur adds, the demystification of religion is the opposite side of a renewal of those very symbols. The symbols are a…prophecy of consciousness…[that] always remains ambiguous and equivocal; we are never certain that a given symbol of the sacred is not also a ‘return of the repressed’; or rather, it is certain that every symbol of the Sacred is also simultaneously a return of the repressed, the reemergence of both an ancient and an infantile symbol.

Ricoeur argues that both tendencies of interpretation are found in symbols. At the same moment that the symbols point to a moment beyond the self they also point to a moment before the self.
He says, “The eschatology of consciousness is always a creative repetition of its own archaeology.”

Conclusion

Our extensive examination of Ricoeur’s *The Conflict of Interpretations* has brought us significant insight to his hermeneutics. We have seen how Ricoeur’s ideas draw upon those of Heidegger, Hegel, and Freud, among others. Ricoeur argues that hermeneutics is necessary for the retrieval of self-consciousness. His exploration of the insights of structuralism and psychoanalysis demonstrates the strong challenge that these two fields create for philosophy. In particular, these fields serve to question the immediacy and certainty of consciousness and self-consciousness. Ricoeur’s insistence that the philosophic project must incorporate their critique does not lead to a capitulation to these fields; rather, Ricoeur demonstrates that structuralism and psychoanalysis also have limits to their critique, and these limits, according to Ricoeur, serve to maintain the philosophic project, but merely in a different vein. Philosophy must mediate among the competing claims of the human sciences. It must also attempt a retrieval of the meaning of human Being, but this retrieval must be achieved through a hermeneutic detour. Ricoeur’s discussion of the symbolism of evil served to demonstrate how such a hermeneutic detour might be accomplished, but this discussion also demonstrated the limits of hermeneutic analysis of symbols. Ricoeur demonstrates that human meaning is expressed not only through symbols, but a much more complex mediation: the text. Ricoeur examines the text in *Time and Narrative.*

II. Time and Narrative

Ricoeur's theory of poetics is an interesting and fruitful approach to the interpretation of narrative. His hermeneutic approach to narrative suggests a method that seems to address narratives on their own terms, but the method does not abandon the possibility of "rigor" or understanding, i.e., knowledge. Ricoeur’s understanding of narrative is based on his
interpretation of poetics. He uses the term to refer to processes of “semantic innovation” – myth, metaphor, symbol, dream, narrative, fiction, as well as, utopian and ideological conceptions of social imagination. The benefit of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach is that it, “…includes an appreciation of how poetics transgresses the narrow limits of the cognitive.” This understanding of poetics allows a move beyond speculative, i.e., theoretical knowledge. It allows language to give sense to things that aren’t immediately graspable or calculable. This move beyond the cognitive doesn’t mean that we’ve moved to nonsense. This poetics is a kind of knowledge that is more provisional, tentative, and made up of the trial and error of lived experience and example.

The connection of poetics and actual lived life is no accident. For Ricoeur, “The practical wisdom (phronesis) of ethics would be impossible without the narrative plots of poetics.” So what poetics accomplishes for us is to give us models with which to guide and to interpret our actions, action, seemingly, being the final goal of poetics. If poetics doesn’t see its connection to ethical action then, for the creative producer, it becomes a creative action of producing a fantasy world. “If, however, poetics recognizes its bond to ethics and acknowledges its origin and end in the world of action, then, far from being a threat to responsibility, poiesis [poetics] becomes its guarantor.”

This goal seems to be what Ricoeur intends when he describes the three acts of narrative. Configuration, is, “…carried out by the productive imagination in the text…” but it presupposes prefiguration which is our everyday experience and the acts culminate in refiguration where, “…textual narratives return us to a world of action. When the story is over we reenter our life-worlds transformed, however imperceptibly.” This rough outline of Ricoeur’s approach toward narrative and myth demonstrates the advantage of his method for interpreting Plato’s myths. But
a more thorough analysis of these three acts of narrative is necessary to elucidate how Ricoeur's ideas might offer an alternative path for the interpretation of Platonic myth.

**Ricoeur's Three Acts of Narrative**

Ricoeur's third chapter of *Time and Narrative* discusses the three acts, or moments, of narrative. In this chapter he attempts to show the possible connection, or intersection, of an understanding of time and the narration of a story. He says, "... time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."\(^{465}\) Ricoeur argues that in order for time to "make sense" in human terms, individuals must refer to, or use, narratives. Although this issue is not directly relevant to the purposes of this paper specifically, it does point out the centrality of narrative for Ricoeur in any attempt of human self-understanding.

Ricoeur argues that to adequately address the problem of emplotment in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, he must demonstrate the connectedness of narrative to a human understanding of time. Ricoeur thinks that in order to demonstrate this connectedness he must show, "...that the very meaning of the configurating operation constitutive of emplotment is a result of its intermediary position between the two operations [he calls] mimesis\(^1\) and mimesis\(^3\), which constitute the two sides [l'amont et l'aval] of mimesis\(^2\)."\(^{466}\) Ricoeur thinks his approach to narrative is different from a semiotic one. His hermeneutic approach is concerned with more than just the text of the narrative; it is concerned with, "... the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work."\(^{467}\) Ricoeur's approach attempts to describe and analyze more than just the phenomenon of the text; it also strives to consider the situation that allows for the writing and reception of the text, as well as, the text's transformative possibilities. Ricoeur's main argument is that, "...temporality is brought to language to the extent that language configures and refigures
temporal experience. Put differently, humans' experience and understanding of time depend upon their capacity to shape and mold them through the use of language, i.e. narrative.

**Mimesis$_1$ – The Prefigurative Act**

The first moment of narrative, mimesis$_1$, prefiguration, is the preunderstanding within which the very act of narrative might make sense. The prefigurative act involves a preunderstanding of three features of the “world of action”: its structures, symbols, and temporality.

1) **Structural Feature**

The structural feature of mimesis$_1$ requires a preunderstanding by the individual of the distinction between a "world of action" and the physical realm of cause and effect. According to Ricoeur, this preunderstanding of difference occurs within a conceptual network of terms that serve to give intelligibility to actions. Some of these terms are: agent, motive, interaction with other agents, environmental contingency, etc. The main characteristic of this preunderstanding, "…is that to employ any one of these terms in a significant fashion, … is to be capable of linking that term to every other term of the same set. In this sense, all the members of the set are in a relation of intersignification." Ricoeur calls this ability to manipulate the conceptual network of terms practical understanding. The connection between narrative and practical understanding, which are seeming contraries, involves two aspects: presupposition and transformation.

According to Ricoeur, all narratives must have a narrator and audience that have a mutually presupposed familiarity with the terms of the previously referred to conceptual network. Put differently, a narrative requires a narrator and audience who understand the complexities involved in even the simplest action sentence, and that narrative requires a narrator and audience that have already *mastered* the “conceptual network of action.”

B) **Transformation**
But Ricoeur is quick to point out that this mastery is not enough to distinguish narrative from a series of action sentences. The difference, according to Ricoeur, is analogous to the semiotic difference of a paradigmatic and syntagmatic order. In a paradigmatic order the terms of the conceptual network function in a synchronous manner. That is, the relationships among agent, motive, circumstance, etc., are infinitely reversible. For Ricoeur, “The syntagmatic order of discourse, on the contrary, implies the irreducibly diachronic character of every narrated story.”471 In other words, in a narrative the order and relationship among terms is essential, whereas a mere understanding or familiarity of the conceptual network of action does not maintain the centrality or essentiality of the relation and order of the terms. As Ricoeur puts it, “…narrative understanding is not limited to presupposing a familiarity with the conceptual network constitutive of the semantics of action. It further requires a familiarity with the rules of composition that govern the diachronic order of a story.”472 Ricoeur considers plot to be the literary equivalent of the syntagmatic order which narrative supplies to the practical world. Narrative plot, therefore, allows for a transformation of the terms of the conceptual network of action. The move to the diachronic order makes them actual, not virtual or abstract; and it integrates the terms into a whole, rather than discreet unconnected events.473

2) Symbolic Feature

The second feature of mimesis1 involves a symbolic preunderstanding of action. Ricoeur’s analysis of the symbolic feature of mimesis1 reveals: 1) it is a necessary feature of narrative, 2) symbols play an interpretive role within a social context, and 3) they implicitly involve an ethical concern. Ricoeur says, “… the symbolic resources of the practical field … will govern those aspects of doing something, being able to do something and knowing how to do something that stem from the poetic transposition.”474
Ricoeur shows that part of the connection between narrative and the world of action is precisely the very fact that the world of action is always already mediated through symbols. He goes so far as to say that this symbolic mediation is a “precondition” for the possibility of the narration of human action. Ricoeur agrees with Cassirer that symbols, “…are cultural forms that articulate experience.” But he also disagrees with Cassirer. Ricoeur thinks that symbolic mediation of actions is implicit at the stage where the symbols, “…underlie action and … constitute its first signification,” and is prior to the explicit, secondary kind of symbolic understanding that occurs in an oral or written tradition which separates the symbols from their meaning in the practical field.

Ricoeur also agrees that symbolism is a meaning that exists already in the action of the subject and this meaning is understood and obtainable by other individuals by mere reference to those actions. Ricoeur also thinks that the symbolic meaning of a particular action cannot be gleaned merely by reference to itself; the meaning depends upon the context within which the action is performed and the function that that action plays within that context. Ricoeur thinks that even before any kind of secondary interpretations of actions occur, symbols already interpret action in a more radical and internal manner. Ricoeur adds that symbols, “…provide the rules of meaning as a function of which this or that behavior can be interpreted.” Symbols in a sense give us a roadmap or a structure by which to measure and/or interpret the actions of an individual within a cultural context. Ricoeur also sees the symbol performing a programmatic and normative role for the acting individual. Symbols, “… are ‘programs’ for behavior; they give form, order, and direction to life.”

C) Ethical Role
Ricoeur reveals the “ethical” character that symbols imprint upon actions. Because there is a normative role that symbols play in the performance of actions by an individual, Ricoeur holds that these actions can be, “…judged according to a scale of moral preferences.” He thinks these judgements of moral preference, which are ascribed first to the actions, are easily transformed to judgments about the actors themselves.

Through this roundabout trajectory, Ricoeur is able to show how ethical considerations are also present in mimesis. Put differently, there is an ethical component inherent in the practical preunderstanding of both an author and her audience prior to the text of narrative. Ricoeur thinks that narrative is capable of presenting good and bad characters, “…because the practical understanding authors share with their audiences necessarily involves an evaluation of the characters and their actions in terms of good and bad.” The point Ricoeur makes is not that ethical neutrality is impossible in narrative --- that’s an issue that he says he will take up later --- rather, that all action inherently cannot be ethically neutral. He says, “The very project of ethical neutrality [in narrative] presupposes the original ethical quality of action on the prior side of fiction. This ethical quality is itself only a corollary of the major characteristic of action, that it is always symbolically mediated.” Through this rather convoluted discussion of the symbolic feature of mimesis, Ricoeur is able to ascribe to the preunderstanding of narrative an ethical one as well.

3) Temporal Feature

Ricoeur thinks that a preunderstanding of action, necessary for narrative, must go beyond a mastery of the conceptual network of action and of the symbolism inherent within action. This preunderstanding of action must, “…recognize in action temporal structures that call for narration.” These temporal structures are difficult to ascertain because of the easy confusion
between a mechanistic, abstract account of time and a more existential and human account of it. Ricoeur attempts to show that the latter account allows for a non-linear understanding of time, and that this understanding is a basis of narrative.

Ricoeur, in his analysis, is concerned with the manner in which action seems to abolish the abstract divisions among past, present and future and seems to expand and conflate these temporal structures. As he says, “What counts here is the way in which everyday praxis orders the present of the future, the present of the past and the present of the present in terms of one another.” The terminology is borrowed from Augustine’s consideration of a threefold present, which Ricoeur expands to demonstrate the elasticity of the seemingly definite structures of temporality, i.e., past, present, future. According to Ricoeur, it is this elasticity that action introduces to the aforementioned abstract temporal structures which allows for the possibility of narrative.

Ricoeur’s analysis also borrows from Heidegger. Ricoeur thinks one aspect of Heidegger’s thought, the structure of within-time-ness (Innerzeitigkeit), is promising. Ricoeur concentrates upon this Heideggerian structure because it presents a viewpoint of time that is non-linear and more existentially authentic than an abstract conceptualization of time provides. Heidegger’s within-time-ness simultaneously allows for a mechanistic and “vulgar” (Heidegger’s term) approach to time or a deeper phenomenological understanding of it. Within-time-ness is characterized by our thrownness into the world and our preoccupation with those things of the world. Heidegger’s structure thereby leads to a description of time that is, “…dependent on the description of things about which we care.” But the structure also allows for a description of time that moves beyond the external objects of the world to a properly existential one. Ricoeur thinks that the everyday language which Heidegger uses to analyze
within-time-ness is perfectly understandable because language and its “storehouse of meanings” are what make the descriptions of human experience capable of truly describing that experience, instead of describing the things in the world that preoccupy us. For Ricoeur it is this possibility of language to adequately describe human experience that allows Heidegger’s structure of within-time-ness to express, “…features irreducible to the representation of linear time.”

Ricoeur thinks that these features of temporality, which are beyond representation in a linear fashion, point to the fact that human beings “reckon with time” and therefore measure it. And for him, “It must be possible, …to give an existential description of the ‘reckoning with’ before the measuring it calls for.” Ricoeur has a concise explanation of the difference between an existential description of time and an abstract measure of it that lends itself to a linear account of time. He says, “The existential now is determined by the present of preoccupation, which is a ‘making present,’ inseparable from ‘awaiting’ and ‘retaining’.” The reason that an abstract expression of time of the existential moment is possible is that, “…Care tends to get contracted into the making present and its difference with respect to awaiting and retaining is obliterated…” Although these two statements seem somewhat contradictory --- on the one hand, awaiting and retaining are inseparable from making present, and on the other hand, there is a difference among them that is often overlooked --- it is precisely the point that Ricoeur wants to make. It is only if the differences among, to put it simply, past, present and future are overlooked that one can look at time in an abstract manner. So long as the content of those moments, past, present and future, is inseparable from their meaning and import, and their content is infused with respect to each other, then the existential expression of time is possible. Ricoeur says, “…to the extent that the hour and the clock are perceived as derivations from the day, which itself links Care to the world’s light, saying-now retains its existential meaning, but
when the machines that serve to measure time are divested of this primary reference to natural measures, that saying now returns to the abstract representation of time.” Saying-now is Ricoeur’s expression for the act which Heidegger describes as “an articulation of making present” which maintains the connection to awaiting, i.e., the future, and retaining, i.e., the past.

Ricoeur thinks there is a connection between narrative and Heidegger’s within-time-ness. The advance that within-time-ness accomplishes is the possibility of seeing, or representing, time as more than just a succession of abstract moments, i.e. linearly. By moving the discussion of time from an abstract to an existential concern, within-time-ness makes a connection between narrative and temporality. Ricoeur says, “Narrative configurations and the most elaborated forms of temporality corresponding to them share the same foundation of within-time-ness.”

The connection of narrative to temporality is significant, because for Ricoeur, it points to a preunderstanding of human action that is the foundation of emplotment. And emplotment is the foundation of mimetics, i.e., narrative. If there were no relation between the narrative order and the human existential preunderstanding of temporality, not to mention the structural and symbolic ones, then narrative would be incomprehensible.

**Mimesis₂ - The Configurative Act**

Ricoeur begins his discussion of mimesis₂ by clearly outlining the field of phenomenon to which he will apply the term. He stresses that the debate about the referent or truth of historical narrative is not relevant to his analysis. He says that provisionally he will use the term “fiction” as an antonym to the term “history”. He will use the terms of “configuration” and “composition” to speak of the manner in which narratives are constructed without regard to, “... the problems of reference or of truth.” Ricoeur also wants to move beyond the paradigms that Aristotle established in the Poetics. His concern is to explore and better understand the "dynamic character" of the operation preformed in mimesis₂, i.e., emplotment. He wants to analyze its
mediating role, "…between the preunderstanding and, … the postunderstanding of the order of action and its temporal features."\textsuperscript{495}

1) Mediation between Mimesis\textsubscript{1} (Preunderstanding) and Mimesis\textsubscript{2}

Ricoeur begins by discussing how mimesis\textsubscript{2} mediates between itself and mimesis\textsubscript{1}. He says that there are three ways that mimesis\textsubscript{2} does this: a) it mediates between the events of the story and the story, b) it mediates among the events of the story, and c) it mediates the different temporal dimensions of narrative.

Ricoeur quickly addresses the first two mode of mediation. First, emplotment takes the events of a narrative, which are really just isolated incidents, and it gives them a context within which they serve to move the story along. Also, it serves to make a story more than just a list of events; it gives intelligibility to the events. He says, "…emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession."\textsuperscript{496} Second, Ricoeur's term for how emplotment brings together the heterogeneous elements that make up a story, like agent, motive, etc., is concordant discordance. Ricoeur describes this operation simply as a move from a paradigmatic order to a syntagmatic one with the terms of action. He says, "This passage from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic constitutes the transition from mimesis\textsubscript{1} to mimesis\textsubscript{2}. It is the work of the configuration activity."\textsuperscript{497} In other words, emplotment moves us from a preunderstanding of action to the actual expression of narrative and the connections that it makes among the elements of action.

Ricoeur addresses the third mode of mediation more extensively. Emplotment brings together two different temporal dimensions: chronological and non-chronological. The chronological dimension is constituted merely by the events of the story, i.e., "…the episodic dimension of narrative."\textsuperscript{498} The bringing together of these events into a whole constitutes the
non-chronological dimension. Ricoeur likens this bringing together accomplished be
emplotment to Kant's reflective judgement, which he says, "…extracts a configuration from a
succession."499

Ricoeur says that there is a "living dialectic" between these two dimensions. This
dialectic is demonstrated by the fact that the chronological or episodic dimension tends to give a
linear representation of narrative time. The episodic dimension suggests that the relations
between the events of the story are external to one another and it gives a causal explanation for
the events that is inexorable.500 Ricoeur explains that the non-chronological, or configurational,
dimension presents the temporal aspects of a story in exactly the opposite light.

He discusses four aspects of this different temporal presentation. First, this dimension
provides a unity to the story that can be summarized as the point or theme of the story. Of
course, though, this point has to make reference to the events of the story; it is not
"atemporal."501 Second and third, Ricoeur argues that the configurational dimension gives an
ending to the successive events of a story, which are given an open-ended character by the
episodic dimension, and it creates a new kind or quality of time. Ricoeur explains that this is
accomplished not merely by the telling of a story, but rather, by its re-telling. Ricoeur is
suggesting that once a story is known widely enough within a culture or group, what the story
provides is not merely its point or conclusion, but also it highlights the events that led up to its
conclusion. This is the kind of closure that a story gives to the succession of events. In a sense,
the story fills out the meaning of the prior events of a story by giving them an ending.502 Finally,
the configurational dimension allows for a representation of time that inverts the natural order.
By retelling a story, or as Ricoeur puts it, "In reading the ending in the beginning and the
beginning in the ending,…" we are capable of looking at time backwards.503
2) Mediation between Mimesis$_2$ and Mimesis$_3$ (Postunderstanding)

Having addressed the mediation of emplotment between mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_2$, Ricoeur turns his attention to the two features of the mediation between mimesis$_2$ and mimesis$_3$. They are schematization and traditionality and they both have a connection to time.

In his explanation of schematization Ricoeur leans upon Kant's description and analysis of the schematism of judgement. As Ricoeur explains it one must consider the analogousness of, "…the production of the configurational act to the work of the productive imagination." If one understands this analogy, then, if one follows Kant's explanation of the schematism and the role which the productive imagination plays in bringing together the intellectual and intuitive realms of knowledge, it is not so difficult to see how, "Emplotment, too, engenders a mixed intelligibility between what has been called the point, theme or thought of a story, and the intuitive presentation of circumstances, characters, episodes, and changes of fortune that make of the denouement. In this way, we may speak of a schematism of the narrative function." The role that schematization plays in the mediation between mimesis$_2$ and mimesis$_3$ is to allow for a synthesis of heterogeneous elements to occur. (Here is seems like we are right back to a discussion of the mediation between mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_2$.) In order to see how this discussion is moving forward, one must keep in mind Ricoeur's assertion that the schematism of the narrative function is, "…constituted within a history that has all the characteristics of a tradition."

In a sense, the first feature, schematization, depends upon the second, traditionality, to provide an apt explanation of the connection between mimesis$_2$ and mimesis$_3$. By ascribing to this mediation a feature that has to do with history and tradition, it would seem that these two features more fittingly describe the mediation between mimesis$_1$ and mimesis$_2$. But Ricoeur's
understanding of the term "tradition" clearly indicates that he is not dealing with the latter mediation. Ricoeur thinks that traditionality adds a new aspect to narrative that is not comprehended in the latter mediation. This new aspect has to do with Ricoeur's understanding of tradition not as, "...the inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity."\(^{507}\) This understanding of tradition allows for the interaction between innovation and sedimentation. And it is this interaction that points to a mediation of mimesis\(_2\) and mimesis\(_3\).

To understand how innovation and sedimentation could possibly interact, Ricoeur thinks that one must uncover the history of the genesis of the paradigms within which particular narratives are written. This is their tradition, their history. According to Ricoeur, these paradigms were not given to cultures ready-made; rather, they too were the result of the creative activity of authors. The formal features which a plot or narrative must fulfill or have; the genres which are produced by cultures attempting to tell stories within those formal structures; and even particular works that are considered to fall within those genres, these three are paradigms which, "...are born from the labor of the productive imagination, ...[and they] furnish the rules for a subsequent experimentation within the narrative field.\(^{508}\) Having briefly explained how the seemingly unchangeable tradition of narrative came to be it is relatively easy to see how sedimentation has within it some openness to innovation and change.

From the previous discussion, it seems understandable to see how a tradition, at least in its creation, had to be open to innovation, but it is less intuitively obvious how innovation is in any way influenced or governed by tradition. According to Ricoeur, the paradigms of the past serve as rules to influence the creation of new stories and narratives. Also, the range of reactions
by an author to these paradigms runs along a continuum, "…between the two poles of servile application and calculated deviation, passing through every degree of 'rule-formed deformation.'\textsuperscript{509} Ricoeur thinks that this deviation from the paradigms is evident at each level of paradigm, i.e., the individual works are different from each other and if a particular work is different enough from what came before it may create a new genre. His point is that, "Rule-governed deformation constitutes the axis around which the various changes of paradigm through application are arranged."\textsuperscript{510} Each new particular work is a response to the demands and limitations by which an author finds herself confronted, and that particular response will have to follow certain determined conventions to a greater or lesser degree. It is this possibility of an unending dialogue that authors have with these paradigms that allows for a narrative tradition and Ricoeur says, "This is the final enrichment by which the relationship of narrative to time is augmented at the level of mimesis.\textsuperscript{511}

\textit{Mimesis}_3 - The Refigurative Act

Ricoeur then moves on to discuss the third moment of narrative, mimesis\textsubscript{3}. He says that he must discuss this moment of mimesis because this moment provides the fullest meaning to narrative, "…when it is restored to the time of action and of suffering…."\textsuperscript{512} What he indicates is that this third moment of mimesis brings the world that a story creates into contact with that of its audience. Regardless of how fantastical the world of a story is, so long as its audience follows it and relates to it and configures its "real-world reality" according to it, then that narrative has achieved its fulfillment by mediating between narrative and time. There are several issues and points that Ricoeur thinks he must clarify and explain to adequately represent this third moment of mimesis. First, he must address criticism that mimesis\textsubscript{3} merely creates a vicious circle of interpretation of action. Second he must show how the act of reading actually fulfills or "completes" the mimetic act. Third, he must address the issue of reference in narrative. Finally,
he must show how a dialectic between "a phenomenology of Time" and "a hermeneutic of narrative" is possible.513

1) The Vicious Circle of Interpretation

The criticism against Ricoeur's representation of mimesis and its moments is that the semantic, symbolic and temporal aspects of mimesis have an, "…endpoint [that] seems to lead back to the starting point or, worse, the endpoint seems anticipated in the starting point."514 The result of this vicious circle is that the mediation between narrative and action would actually just be a mediation within narrative itself. Put differently, narrative would have no contact with the world of action; it would be pure fantasy. Ricoeur does not deny that a circle exists, but he does refute the contention that it is a vicious one. He ascribes this contention to two different interpretations of circularity: "The first emphasizes the violence of interpretation, the second is redundancy."515

The circularity of narrative is characterized by recognition of the accomplishment of narrative to create consonance out of dissonance. But at a certain point of inquiry into narrative paradigms one recognizes that the consonance is a literary lie. Yet, one adheres to the need for consonance. And Ricoeur says, "From then on, the narrative consonance imposed on temporal dissonance remains the work of what it is convenient to call a violence of interpretation."516 Ricoeur does not repudiate this characterization of the relationship between the worlds of narrative and physics, but he does object to the representation of the exclusivity of dissonance and consonance respective to each world. He thinks that there exists a much more dialectical relationship between them.

Ricoeur does not think that "our experience of temporality", i.e., the physical world, is reducible to pure dissonance. He says rather, "We ought to ask instead whether the plea for a
radically unformed temporal experience is not itself the product of a fascination for the unformed that is one the features of modernity. In other words, our representation of the physical world as one composed of chaotic and random events is merely a representation effected by a particular cultural outlook, i.e., it also is interpretive violence. Ricoeur also disagrees with the representation of narrative as pure consonance, he says, "Emplotment is never the simple triumph of 'order.'" He reminds us that Greek tragedy had implicit within it a requirement for events that completely overturned the fortunes of its protagonists. Also, the apocalyptic paradigm within Western narrative serves to highlight the tension between the "between times" and the "end times". Ricoeur points out that this paradigm is not the only paradigm of Western narrative. He argues that there is a creative dialectic and tension between the received narrative paradigms of Western culture and the attempt by later authors to reject them. His discussion of traditionality supports this argument.

The second foundation to the criticism of circularity is a "redundancy of interpretation". Ricoeur summarizes the issue by rhetorically asking, "How, indeed, can we speak of a human life as a story in its nascent state, since we do not have access to the temporal dramas of existence outside of stories told about them by others or by ourselves?" This claim of redundancy argues that if Ricoeur maintains the existence of structures (semantic, symbolic, and temporal) in the first moment of narrative that already mediate human actions, then the stories that people end up telling about those actions will of necessity reflect those structures. In other words, Ricoeur's hermeneutic of narrative provides no real advance to the understanding of human action.

Ricoeur's only response to this criticism is to point to situations within which individuals find a need for narrative. Put differently, Ricoeur thinks that there exist "(as yet) untold stories"
within everyday experience. One example is that of the analysand within psychology. For Ricoeur, a goal in psychology is for the patient to become more aware of the repressed influences that determine his phobias, urges, and obsessions. The psychoanalyst can best do this, according to Ricoeur, by helping the patient to create a narrative from repressed memories. Ricoeur says, “This narrative interpretation implies that a life story proceeds from untold and repressed stories in the direction of actual stories the subject can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity. It is the quest for this personal identity that assures the continuity between the potential or inchoate story and the actual story we assume responsibility for [sic].”\textsuperscript{520}

Another example of an “(as yet) untold story” is that of a judge trying to understand the motivation behind the actions of an individual in his court. This example highlights the fact that all individuals are entangled in plots and stories that create a background to the actual story which they choose to tell about themselves. Ricoeur says, “Told stories therefore have to ‘emerge’ (auftachen) from this background,” of untold stories.\textsuperscript{521}

Also, Ricoeur thinks that the untold story highlights the artifice of narrative. He says, “We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated.”\textsuperscript{522} He adds that this necessity is greater in reference to the history of oppressed and defeated individuals and groups.

Ricoeur attempts a different tack to argue for the “(as yet) untold story”. Literary criticism deals with the dissimulation and obscurity that some (maybe all) narratives utilize to keep non-members, and even some members, from full understanding of a group’s narrative. These “secret places in the text,” as Ricoeur calls the narrative dissimulations, make the text amenable to endless interpretation, and he thinks that they have consonance or resonance with,
“…the untold stories of our lives.” He argues for a correspondence between the sources of the narrative dissimulations, which he thinks are the untold stories of everyday lives, and the goal of those secret narratives, which is to reclaim some of everyday life within the text. For Ricoeur, the circularity of mimesis is not a problem. He thinks that the circularity among and within the three moments of narrative is a healthy, and he is hesitant to see the relationship between, “…the temporal form inherent in experience and the narrative structure,…” as a merely static and predetermined one.

2) The Act of Reading

The second issue that Ricoeur addresses in his representation and explanation of mimesis is the act of reading and how it completes the mimetic act. Ricoeur thinks that this act accomplishes the transition from mimesis to mimesis. More importantly, the act of reading allows the narrative to “model experience”. According to Ricoeur, the act of reading does this by eliminating the difference between the inside and outside of a text. Ricoeur suggests that this difference is eliminated by the act of reading because of the way that a reader’s expectation are both created from outside the text, by the narrative tradition within which the text falls, and met from inside the text by how well the text fulfills or falls within that particular narrative tradition. Put differently, Ricoeur thinks that the act of reading actualizes the dynamic that is inherent in each of the two features of mimesis, namely, schematization and traditionality.

Ricoeur also points out that the act of reading completes the text, or narrative, in a different sense. He argues, in agreement with Roman Ingarden, that all texts have breaks, gaps, and holes that the reader is compelled to fill in order to configure the text, i.e., to follow the text. Ricoeur points to Joyce’s, Ulysses, as an extreme case of this claim upon the reader.
In the end, for Ricoeur, the act of reading is what completes the narrative because reading and the effect that it has on the reader is also part of the narrative. He says, “…the effect the text produces on its receiver, whether individual or collective, [is] an intrinsic component of the present or actual meaning of the text. …[T]he text is a set of instructions that the individual reader or the reading public executes in a passive or a creative way.”

3) Reference

According to Ricoeur, any discussion of how an audience receives narrative must deal with the issue of reference. He presents his thesis straightforwardly, “What is communicated, in the final analysis, is, beyond the sense of a work, the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon.” He also points out that narrative, in the moment of mimesis, serves to fuse or bring together the world of the text and the world of the audience. It is obvious that the world of the text does not have a referent in the sense that other simple communicative statements or acts have referents. In order to explain what narrative's referent is, Ricoeur must describe discourse in a manner that is different from a standard understanding of it. He says as much when he points out that the definition of mimesis, “…rests upon three presuppositions which underlie, respectively, acts of discourse in general, literary works among these acts of discourse, and narratives among these literary works.” By addressing these three presuppositions Ricoeur will be able to reconstitute a theory of reference that is more conducive to understanding how and what narrative communicates.

Ricoeur, agreeing with Benveniste, argues that what is intended in discourse, is different from what is signified by a particular signifier. As he puts it, “The complete event [of discourse] is not only that someone speaks and addresses himself to an interlocutor, it is also the speaker’s ambition to bring a new experience to language and share it with someone else. It is this
experience, in turn, that has the world for its horizon." Ricoeur suggests here that there is a difference between what an interlocutor points to and what she wants to communicate. What is communicated, ideally, is an experience of the world, not the world itself. Ricoeur explains that experience occurs within a horizon that helps to delimit and distinguish that experience. This occurs in two aspects: internal and external. He says that internally the horizon helps to distinguish the experience from others because one can provide more and more details and specifics to contradistinguish it from the rest of the world. Externally, the horizon helps to provide a context and environment for that experience because the experience always has potential relationships to other things within that world.

The significance of this approach to discourse is that it implies a difficulty, if not an impossibility, of arguing that language refers only to itself, that language is mere groundless fiction, that it has no referent. According to Ricoeur, "Because we are in the world and are affected by situations, we try to orient ourselves in them by means of understanding; we also have something to say, an experience to bring to language and to share." Because of this "ontological presupposition," as Ricoeur calls it, it is possible to understand that discourse intends a referent that is extralinguistic. Ricoeur goes on to say that this "ontological presupposition" is grounded in the ontological condition in which individuals always and already find themselves, namely, being in a world and in time, and that that condition needs to be expressed in language.

Ricoeur adds that this different approach to understanding discourse must also address what an audience receives. As he puts it, "What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but, through its sense, its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the force of this experience." In the
end what Ricoeur suggests is that with a different understanding of discourse the intention of the
author or speaker can be amplified beyond a mere pointing to a referent. Discourse can be
viewed as an act that intends both the sense of a statement as well as its referent. This alternative
approach creates an amplification or a radicalization of what that referent is in discourse.

The second presupposition adds complexity to the first one because it holds that,
“...literary works, too, bring an experience to language and thus come into the world, just as all
discourse does.” Ricoeur recognizes that this thesis is counter to the predominant thinking of
contemporary literary theory. Ricoeur thinks that predominant literary thought holds that
literature (or narrative) has no place for reference and sees language as a world unto its own. He
thinks literary theory decrees that all the claims which literature makes about the “real world” are
merely a “referential illusion”. In other words, literature, though seeming to make reference to
the “real world”, actually does not. Claiming that there is no problem does not obviate the
problem of how literature is related to the world of the reader (or audience). Ricoeur thinks that
even if the claim that the text makes no reference to the world of the reader is valid, there still
must be an explanation for what occurs in the act of reading. As he says, “…reading poses anew
the problem of the fusion of two horizons, that of the text and that of the reader, and hence the
intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader.”

Ricoeur argues further, that if one does not address the interaction of these two worlds,
then by enclosing literature within its own realm without any contact to everyday experience, one
reaffirms the positivist contention that only those data that are empirically verifiable and
scientifically explainable are real. Also, a rejection of interaction serves to undercut the
possibility of literature to challenge and subvert the social and moral status quo.
Ricoeur thinks that the manner in which these two worlds interact remains to be analyzed. He maintains that this interaction must recognize, “...that language’s capacity for reference [is] not exhausted by descriptive discourse and that poetic works [refer] to the world in their own specific way, that of metaphorical reference.” Metaphorical reference accomplishes two things. First of all, it allows for the possibility of speaking about the world in a non-descriptive manner, because it eschews descriptive reference. What is significant about metaphorical reference is that this rejection of descriptive reference is necessary if one is to speak to, or refer to, “...those aspects of our being-in-the-world that cannot be talked about directly.” Second, Ricoeur maintains that metaphorical reference broadens the concepts of horizon and world by including nondescriptive reference to the readily available descriptive references. He says, “...we owe a large part of the enlarging of our horizon of existence to poetic works. Far from producing only weakened images of reality —...literary works depict reality by augmenting it with meanings that themselves depend upon the virtues of abbreviation, saturation and culmination, so strikingly illustrated by emplotment.” In other words, by allowing for the possibility of a language that refers to aspects of human experience that cannot be addressed with descriptive reference, poetic language opens up a world that is not limited to merely everyday practical concerns.

Ricoeur thinks that this possibility of refiguration, that is, the broadening of horizon and world, depends upon a hermeneutical foundation that is less concerned with finding the intent of the author of a text and more with the manner in which the text opens a world to its audience. He says, “For some years now, I have maintained that what is interpreted in a text is the proposing of a world that I might inhabit and into which I might project my ownmost powers. In the Rule of Metaphor, I held that poetry, through its muthos, redescribes the world.” Ricoeur
indicates here that a poetic work serves as an invitation to its audience to reconfigure or reassess its world and its possibilities for action in the everyday world.

The third presupposition that underlies the referential possibilities of mimesis, posits that if narrative is to have a capacity to refigure the audience’s world one must see narrative as a kind of poetics. Ricoeur thinks that this subsumption of narrative under poetics is both unproblematic and problematic. The subsumption is unproblematic because what narrative accomplishes to refigure for its audience are possibilities for human action, whereas a poetic work frames and attempts to bring to light a “cosmic pathos.” Put differently, the refigurative task which narrative must accomplish, or does accomplish, is much less complicated than that of poetic works generally. Ricoeur says, “What is resignified by narrative is what was already presignified at the level of human activity.”540 Ricoeur suggests, in other words, that the refigurative capacities of poetic works generally are clearly and straightforwardly present and obvious in narrative

But Ricoeur thinks that the subsumption of narrative’s refigurative capacities within poetic works is not so straightforward. The problem arises from the fact that narrative is comprised of two large groups of discourse, history and fiction, each with respective referents and truth claims. The differences between history and fiction problematize the subsumption of narrative under poetics. The most obvious difference between history and fiction is their reference to reality. History's referent, an event that has already passed, an event that is as ethereal as that of fiction’s referent, actually occurred; fiction's referent did not. As Ricoeur says, “The past event, however absent it may be from present perception, nonetheless governs the historical intentionality, conferring upon it a realistic note that [fictional] literature will never equal, even if it makes a claim to be ‘realistic.’”541 History refers to the past through documents, both first and second hand accounts, letters, etc., what Ricoeur calls traces of the past. But these
traces do not necessarily give an unbiased, objective, and complete view of the past. The historian must reconstruct the past. So Ricoeur can ask, “…what this reference through traces borrows form the metaphorical reference common to every poetic work….“ In other words, there is an aspect of fiction and poetics even within history. By the same token, there is an aspect of history in fiction. Ricoeur remarks that fiction also refers to traces. He asks, “Is not every narrative told as though it had taken place, as is evident from the ordinary usage of verbal past tenses to narrate the unreal.”

So to summarize, the difficulty with subsuming narrative under poetic works generally is that both fiction and history have referents that draw upon aspects of each other and there is no straightforward relation or dynamic that conclusively demarcates the limits of each. Ricoeur refers to this problem as that of interweaving reference. According to Ricoeur, the interweaving of reference serves to refigure human time or temporality. In some sense, poetic works, through their metaphorical reference, and history, through its traces, and by each genre borrowing from the other’s mode of reference can accomplish the refiguration of an audience’s world, which is an important aspect of mimesis. And this refiguration occurs regularly within the realm of human temporality.

4) A Dialectic Between Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Ricoeur follows the uncovering of the site within which refiguration occurs by stating that he, “…must sketch the temporal features of the world refigured by the configurational act.” In other words, he must bring to light how it is that narrative (whether fiction or history) refigures human temporality. Ricoeur applies the concept of iconic augmentation to address this temporal refigurative capacity of narrative. Iconic augmentation refers to the manner in which literature, through metaphorical reference, expands or "intensifies" an audience's world. Ricoeur
applies this concept to each of the three features of the preunderstanding of action - structure, symbol, and temporality - to demonstrate how and what refuguration does. But Ricoeur is most concerned with the last feature because, of the three, its "intensification" is the most difficult to explain.545

According to Ricoeur, any theory of refugured time must deal with the phenomenology of time. He characterizes this phenomenology as the third partner of a conversation, “…between the epistemology of history and literary criticism applied to narrativity,…” which was brought forward in the discussion of an interweaving reference of narrative546. An explanation of the refuguration of the time of action is complex, thinks Ricoeur, because a thorough treatment of the phenomenology of time must deal with the solutions offered since Augustine through Heidegger to address the possibility of a pure phenomenology of time. Ricoeur characterizes a pure phenomenology of time as, “…an intuitive apprehension of the structure of time, which not only can be isolated from the procedures of argumentation by which [it] undertakes to resolve the aporias received from an earlier tradition,…” but also would not result in new aporias more difficult to resolve than the first.547

Ricoeur argues (or, will argue in volume 2 of Time and Narrative) that a pure phenomenology of time is impossible. As he puts it, “…the endless aporias of the phenomenology of time will be the price we have to pay for each and every attempt to make time itself appear…”548 Ricoeur claims that this impossibility of phenomenology to be rid of aporias must be clearly and fully proved if his thesis that a poetics of narrativity addressed the limitation of a phenomenology of time is to be valid.

Ricoeur highlights and establishes the aporetic character of any phenomenology of time to show how the hermeneutic circle within which one finds oneself in temporal phenomenology
is comparable to the interpretive circle which narrativity creates for itself. The benefit of this comparison is the augmentation of the hermeneutic circle of each field of study to include each other and literary criticism. Put differently, Ricoeur suggests that the discoveries and advances of the three fields – phenomenology, poetics, and literary criticism – can serve as solutions, or at least, foundations for solutions to each field. Each can become a participant of the three-way conversation. Of course, this participation is prefaced upon a need to go beyond the limits, or the inability, of any phenomenology of time to solve its own problems (aporias) on its own terms.\(^{549}\)

Ricoeur is cognizant that Heidegger’s phenomenology is a break with the “traditional” phenomenology of time from Augustine through Husserl. Ricoeur accepts that Heidegger’s approach to temporality, which is founded in an ontological investigation of Dasein, avoids the problems of a subjectivist hermeneutics. Ricoeur also admits that, “…the properly phenomenological originality of the Heideggerian analysis of time – an originality due entirely to its anchorage in an ontology of Care – consists in a hierarchization of the levels of temporality or rather of temporalization.”\(^{550}\)

Ricoeur recognizes the roots of Heidegger’s accomplishment already in Augustine. Ricoeur thinks Augustine realized that measures of time are not an exhaustive explanation for the problem of human temporality. Augustine, Ricoeur says, already recognized a qualitative aspect to time in addition to its readily apparent quantitative one. In other words, Augustine recognized many levels of temporality.\(^{551}\)

Ricoeur thinks that Heidegger’s approach to phenomenology, with an ontological analysis of Dasein, also demonstrates, “…that our experience of temporality is capable of unfolding itself on several levels of radicality….\(^{552}\) Ricoeur remarks also, that Heidegger showed that this unfolding of the experience of temporality could occur in two opposite
directions, from an authentic experience of time to a more inauthentic one of public time, or in the opposite direction. Ricoeur points out though that Heidegger’s achievement is not his discussion of, “[t]he direction in which the range of temporalization is traversed … [but] the hierarchization of temporal experience.”

Ricoeur readily accepts the originality of Heidegger’s approach and that his is an advance over previous phenomenological studies of time - qualities that Ricoeur correlates directly to its foundation in the ontological analysis of Dasein. Yet, Ricoeur just as readily points out that Heidegger’s solution also leads to an aporetic phenomenology. He says, “…it must be admitted that the ontology of Dasein remains tied up with a phenomenology that poses problems analogous to those raised by Augustine’s and Husserl’s phenomenology. Here, too, the breakthrough on the phenomenological plane engenders difficulties of a new sort that again augment the aporetic character of pure phenomenology.” Ricoeur ascribes the aporetic character of Heidegger’s phenomenology to its attempt to be the foundation of any epistemology of the physical and human sciences.

More importantly, Ricoeur thinks that Heidegger’s phenomenology creates a dynamic among narrative, history, and itself within which they each cannot communicate to the other. Heidegger’s phenomenology, says Ricoeur, does not explain how to, “…pass from a temporality so privatized by being-towards-death to that common time that requires interaction among multiple characters in every narrative and, all the more to the public time required by history.” Put differently, Ricoeur thinks that a major shortcoming of Heidegger’s phenomenology is that he offers no method by which to move among the different levels of the hierarchy of temporality.

Ricoeur sees a solution to Heidegger's aporias in his approach to the phenomenology of time, which allows for an interaction, or dialectic, between narrative and time and which allows
for a method whereby to negotiate the hierarchy of the levels of temporality. Ricoeur explains that this movement among levels will depend upon the dialogue between phenomenology and narrative. He says, “At times it will be the hermeneutic phenomenology of time that provides the key to the hierarchizing of narrative, other times it will be the disciplines concerned with historical and fictional narrative that allow us to resolve poetically – to use an expression already employed – the most speculatively intractable aporias of the phenomenology of time.”

**Conclusion: Time and Narrative**

Ricoeur begins and closes his study of mimesis and the dialectic of narrative and time by explaining the achievements of the study to this point and by highlighting the problem that is yet to be solved. He says that the analysis of mimesis has, “…brought us from a conception where the hermeneutic circle is identified with the circle of the stages of mimesis to one that inscribes this dialectic within the larger circle of poetics of narrative and an aporetics of time.” Put differently, by asking what the relation is between narrative and time, Ricoeur has been able to elucidate the analogous structures of both human experiences of time and narrative. And, based on this elucidation, Ricoeur has been able to suggest a much broader inter-relation and dependence between the issues and concerns of both.

**III. Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue**

Our extensive examination of two of Ricoeur’s major texts addressing hermeneutics was motivated by Lawlor’s seemingly harmless question about how both Gadamer and Ricoeur might respond to the possibility that the word might distort, deceive, or err. We suggested that Gadamer might not be able to adequately address Lawlor’s challenge, while Ricoeur’s hermeneutics might have the resources to do so. Our exegesis of both thinkers’ significant texts should have demonstrated the weakness of Gadamer’s hermeneutics to address Lawlor’s
Ricoeur, though, has directly addressed the insufficiencies of Gadamer’s thought in a short essay, “Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue”. In this essay, Ricoeur directly explains the strength of his hermeneutical approach in contrast to Habermas and Gadamer to effectively explain the antinomies of axiology. Ricoeur thinks that his brand of hermeneutics can adequately show how our values are both self-created but grounded objectively. He argues that Gadamer’s and Habermas’ ideas are limited in explaining the development and application of value systems.

Ricoeur wants to address moral philosophy by relating it to the connection between a moral actor and her cultural heritage. Ricoeur says the major problem of moral philosophy is axiology: how to explain value/s. He sums up the problem:

Drawing the most extreme consequences of the Kantian concept of autonomy we say that values are the work of freedom, that they express its power of innovation or renovation, its creative spontaneity. On the other hand, it does not seem that it depends on our will that values outline a certain order, a certain hierarchy…. It seems here that values can only orient action because they are discovered, not created. Without being things, they would then have the status of being an essence.\

In other words, the debate is whether our values are self-created and imposed or whether they are objectively discoverable, determinable and universally applicable.

Ricoeur thinks that this debate is problematic because it seems that we accept both sides of the debate though we don’t understand how they are in any way compatible. He says, “On the one hand, experience seems to say that we most merit being called a moral agent when, confronted by a unique situation, we respond to its challenge with an equally unique decision,
which is not justified by any precedent.”\textsuperscript{559} The other side of our opinions on values is that morality is determined by “…our willingness to obey [a moral] principle…”\textsuperscript{560} regardless of the situation or personal interests. Ricoeur suggests that the debate is most brought to the fore in the situation of those individuals who “invent” new values. He says that this kind of innovation is best exemplified by the overturning of the rule of vengeance for the rule of law in ancient Asia and with the ancient Greeks. Ricoeur remarks though that this innovation is claimed by those who brought about those innovations as merely a rediscovery of a prior moral law. He says, “Here is the most extreme antinomy: the only true creators, it seems, are those who are capable at the same time of reactivating the meaning of or the feeling of an \textit{ordo amoris} which it is not ours to create.”\textsuperscript{561}

Ricoeur thinks that this central debate in moral philosophy can be addressed by comparing it to a similar debate “…in the philosophy of culture which has the advantage of offering the perspective of a practical and concrete mediation.”\textsuperscript{562} The aspect of the issue of culture that he thinks is most pertinent to the moral debate is “…that every culture comes to us as a received heritage, therefore as transmitted and carried by a tradition.”\textsuperscript{563} Three central concepts are concerned when speaking of culture according to Ricoeur. They are: heritage, transmission and tradition. A heritage is how generations “[institute] the continuity of an historical memory across the biological discontinuity of the generations.”\textsuperscript{564} Transmission points to the formal and informal institutions that a culture has for maintaining its continuity. Tradition is different from heritage, according to Ricoeur, because the latter is value neutral while the former gives or ascribes authority to the past. He says, “All at once the word ‘tradition’ loses all neutrality. It is not limited to describing our dependence on the past as a fact; instead it accords a positive value to that dependence. It presumes the superiority of a certain teaching because it is
old, or ancient, or even archaic.” The cultural debate comes to the fore here with tradition. Tradition can be seen in one of at least two ways: 1) it is “...a form of violence exercised against our thinking, which prevents us from advancing to maturity of judgment…” or 2) it is “...a necessary guide on the pathway from infancy to maturity.”

The Antinomy of Tradition

Ricoeur thinks that a good place to start the debate on tradition, i.e., the debate on culture, is with the debate that exists between Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers. Enlightenment thinkers saw tradition in a very negative light. These thinkers saw reason as a way to overcome the limitations of tradition which they saw merely as prejudice. Ricoeur says, “For the Enlightenment, reason and tradition were antinomous.” Romanticism, according to Ricoeur, merely turned this valuation on its head: “It magnified mythos where the Enlighten [sic.] had celebrated logos. It pleaded for the old at the expense of the new....” Ricoeur thinks that Romanticism’s response to the Enlightenment was very ineffective, because it was unable “...to bring to light the necessary presuppositions for a critique of prejudice....” Because the Romantics were unable to explain the philosophical underpinnings of the Enlightenment, they were unable to present a direct attack upon it and were thereby unable to pose more than a romantic reaction against the Enlightenment’s claims.

Ricoeur thinks that the debate between a negative and positive view of tradition can best be explored in the debate between hermeneutics as expressed by Gadamer and critical theory as delineated by Habermas. Ricoeur thinks that the debate between these two thinkers can help in the analysis of “...the status of historical heritages, transmission, and tradition, as the locus of the emergence of values in history.” Ricoeur presents the debate between these two philosophers thusly:
While hermeneutical philosophy sees in tradition a dimension of historical consciousness, an aspect of participation in cultural heritages and reactivation of them, the critique of ideologies [i.e., critical theory.] sees in the same tradition the place par excellence of distortions and alienations and opposes to it the regulative idea, which it projects into the future, of communication without frontiers and without constraint.  

According to Ricoeur, this debate between Gadamer and Habermas is very effective for addressing the values debate, because the values debate becomes very concrete “…when it is placed within the framework of a meditation on historicity and the notions which follow from it: preunderstanding, prejudgment, and therefore also tradition and authority.”  

The issue of freedom is also made very concrete, because the debate helps to uncover illusions and deceptions that ideologies manipulate to restrict freedom. He says, “Freedom is then no longer the free examination of the Enlightenment, but the liberation engendered by a real critique of the systematic distortions of communication.”  

Ricoeur thinks that this debate between hermeneutics and critical theory addresses the debate of values and tradition, because it is much more radical in its analysis. Because of this debate says Ricoeur, “We are forced to ask whether doing philosophy is to assume a condition of finitude for which historicity, preunderstanding, and prejudice are the implications, or if to do philosophy is to say ‘no’—to criticize in the strongest sense of the word, in the name of the future freedom, anticipated in a regulative idea.”  

Ricoeur also proposes that this debate between Gadamer and Habermas might offer an avenue for mediating their seemingly antinomous positions. Ricoeur thinks that this is the case, because it is possible to see values as not deriving from our freedom yet not imposing upon it, and values can be seen as deriving from us yet not be arbitrary and relative.
Hermeneutics and Tradition

As fruitful as Ricoeur thinks that the debate between Gadamer and Habermas may be, Ricoeur does think that they both “repeat the theses of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism.” On the one hand, hermeneutics, because of its concern for the claims of knowledge beyond the limits of the scientific enterprise, seems, in Ricoeur eyes, to have “…only renewed the positions of Romantic philosophy against the Enlightenment without really rejuvenating them.”

Ricoeur explains that hermeneutics, as expressed and delineated in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, attempts to get at the root of the problems of value and epistemology in the human sciences, i.e., the problems that guide the present analysis. Ricoeur proposes that *Truth and Method* is guided by an analysis of a basic experience: alienating distanciation, which is “…the ontological presupposition which underlies the objective conduct of the human sciences. The methodology of these sciences necessarily implies a taking of distance, which in turn expresses the destruction of the primordial relation of participation—of *Zugehörigkeit*—without which there would not exist any relation to the historical as such.”

Unpacking the import of this insight that guides *Truth and Method*, Ricoeur, in effect, proposes that Gadamer’s hermeneutic insight revolves around the need for critical distance from which to effectively observe cultural phenomena, while at the same time demanding a participation within that phenomena so as to adequately understand and fairly critique it. Ricoeur suggests that Gadamer’s analysis of the aesthetic, historical, and linguistic spheres shows just how central to understanding of any kind the initial participation within the phenomena being studied is. Ricoeur recommends that Gadamer’s insight about this need for participation in the phenomena being studied leads to a recognition of the limits of a wholly separate and objective viewpoint from which to study them. Ricoeur explains, “It is rather a question of becoming conscious of the action which affects us
and of accepting that the past which is a part of our experience keeps us from taking it totally in charge, of accepting in some way its truth." 579 But again, according to Ricoeur, if we see the hermeneutic project in the light of these two antinomous stances—distanciation and participation—then we have not really progressed very far beyond the Enlightenment and Romantic debate. Ricoeur thinks that hermeneutics must recognize a critical moment or distance as central to the hermeneutic process.

The Critique of Ideologies

In this section, Ricoeur explains the two fundamental insights of critical theory, i.e., philosophical critique of ideologies. The first insight is to see the whole philosophical project, i.e., philosophical discourse, as grounded in a misunderstanding of the construction of the object anthropologically. Ricoeur explains,

The initial vice of a philosophy of interpretation is that it leaves out the most fundamental anthropological structure articulated in terms of the concepts of work, power, and language. This preliminary extension of the anthropological sphere...echoes the great discovery...that the 'synthesis of the object' is incomplete in pure understanding and complete in work. 580

Ricoeur explains, in essence, that the philosophical project to understand the world through theory is misguided. We must see that humans grasp the world through action, i.e. work.

Ricoeur thinks that this insight has some consequences for the question of the creation or foundation of values, i.e., the axiological problem. He says, "The problem of the origin of values is perhaps insoluble as long as it is posed by a philosophy which is conceived of as theoria. The solution may be less inaccessible on the ground of praxis, though, as the priority of the concept of interest over that of knowledge suggests." 581 In other words, the first insight of critical theory that any attempt of understanding the world, a philosophical one in particular, is founded in a
particular viewpoint that is founded upon the interests of the individual searching for that understanding.

The second insight that critical theory makes that Ricoeur thinks might be helpful in understanding the creation of values has to do with the uncovering of those interests that create values and understanding. He says, “If it is the task of a metacritique to unmask the interests hidden behind every pretension to pure knowledge, it is also its task to resist every effort to reduce the sphere of interests to a single kind of interest.”582 Ricoeur explains that Habermas has assigned three interests that govern any and all human activity. These three interests are: instrumental, practical, and emancipatory. The first is concerned with the determination of ‘facts’ that we manipulate and control through objective processes. The second is concerned with the exchange of information, the reception and understanding of tradition, and the “…interiorization of norms which institutionalize social roles.”583 The expression of these interests allows for the categorization of the historical sciences under the purview of hermeneutics. He says this understanding of the historical sciences allows for “…present historical agents to take up the significations of the past in a creative interpretation and thus to promote communication.”584

The third interest that Habermas delineates—the interest in emancipation—is central to the debate between Gadamer and Habermas. This interest, according to Ricoeur, is the foundation of the critical social sciences. This interest marks a radical break with hermeneutical philosophy, i.e., the philosophical project. He says, “The problem is no longer to reinterpret traditions by struggling against alienating distanciation, but to project our future autonomy as the very meaning which we give to every critical enterprise.”585 In other words, the philosophical
project is no longer to understand the world in terms of those phenomena under study; rather, the project is guided by a view to a future against which the present is measured and critiqued.

This interest in emancipation is what allows for a critique of ideology. The critical social sciences recognize that ideology “…cannot be treated as a particular case of misunderstanding, amenable to interpretive methods which could dissolve it into a higher understanding.” These sciences recognize ideology for what it is: a distortion. More importantly, according to Ricoeur, the hermeneutic sciences are incapable of recognizing this distortion so long as they keep to “…the limits of philosophy of discourse.” Ricoeur explains that what makes ideology so problematic for the hermeneutic sciences is that “…an ideology is not aware of itself as an ideology.” This lack of self-awareness on the part of ideology determines the possibilities for explanation or interpretation of that ideology. He says, “[T]he movement from ‘desymbolization’ to ‘resymbolization’ takes place through the dissolution of a system of distortions which can in no way be understood as an extension of the interpretive method, that is, as a movement from misunderstanding to understanding.”

This difference in the object of study and the interest that motivates it explains, according Ricoeur, why that interest must be critical. He says, “The interest in emancipation is only active in the work of unmasking hidden systematic distortions.” Ricoeur adds that this interest needs to be seen as guided by a future form of communication that lacks limits and constraints. He clarifies that the interest of emancipation is guided by anticipation of what is to come rather than a reminiscence for what was. The interest in emancipation is marked by both a critical and utopian character that “…that seems to oppose this philosophy diametrically to a hermeneutical philosophy, which in contrast appears to renew the philosophies of reminiscence. The critical thinker does not speak as the
Ricoeur comments that the rest of his analysis will be guided by the recognition of the shortcomings of both hermeneutics as presented by Gadamer and critical theory as presented by Habermas. Ricoeur explains that hermeneutics requires critical distance if it is to achieve its program, while critical theory can only achieve its project if it sees its project as a kind of reinterpretation of the past.

Productive Distanciation

Ricoeur takes issue with Gadamer’s strict division of participation and objective analysis of history. Gadamer, according to Ricoeur, holds that in order for history to have any effect upon the individual studying it, i.e., in order for history to be adequately understood, “…consciousness [must be] exposed to the effects of history….”

Ricoeur proposes, though, that it is precisely the exposure to the effects of history that has within it the presence of distance. He says, “The history of effects is precisely what takes place under the condition of historical distance. Historical efficacy is efficacy at a distance, which makes the distance near.” In other words, in order for an individual to become aware of the past, she must recognize the difference between the past and her present. In order to have a ‘fusion of horizons,’ i.e., in order for the past to speak to the present, there must occur a “…dialectic between participation and distanciation….”

Ricoeur proposes that, though we may agree with Gadamer that historical knowledge is necessarily finite and that this finitude excludes any possibility of an objective overview of history, this agreement does not impose the limitation to a singular historical viewpoint. Ricoeur says, “Where there is a situation, there is a horizon which may either be narrowed or expanded. This makes possible communication at a distance between two differently situated consciousnesses. Their intentions blend in the distant and open horizon. We
do not live therefore within closed horizons or within a unique horizon.\textsuperscript{595} If we were not able to move beyond our unique historical viewpoint, we would not be able to understand other previous viewpoints and future viewpoints could not understand ours.

Ricoeur suggests that the linguisticality of human experience is what introduces distance in historical experience. He says, “The universal linguisticality of human experience signifies precisely that my belonging to a tradition or to traditions takes place through the interpretation of signs, texts, and works, within which cultural heritages are inscribed and offered for our decipherment.”\textsuperscript{596} He adds that the possibility of linguisticality to create this understanding between and among viewpoints happens when both viewpoints efface themselves in reference to the thing about which they are speaking. Ricoeur thinks that this effacement is most clearly seen in the case of the text. The effacement in the face of the text is the based on the distance that both the audience and author must take from the text. He says, “That which makes us communicate at a distance is the ‘issue of the text,’ (\textit{la ‘chose du texte’}) which no longer belongs to either its author or its reader.”\textsuperscript{597}

Ricoeur reminds us that Dilthey had observed that the ‘objectification’ of the text through the detachment of the text from the author, i.e., the release of the text from the author’s intent, had positive effects, because this objectification allowed for the autonomy of the text to have historical effect. In other words, the objectification of the text, i.e., the liberation of the text from authorial intent, allows for the creation of tradition and the communication of cultural heritage. Writing, and “…all comparable procedures for the inscription of human discourse…”\textsuperscript{598} demonstrate just how autonomous the text is: the text is autonomous relative to the reader and her intentions, relative to the cultural context within which it was written, and relative to the original audience.
Ricoeur explains that this autonomy of the text is what he calls the productive distanciation that allows for the transmission of any heritage. In other words, productive distanciation is applicable not only to cultural phenomena but also to the transmission of values. He says, “[W]hat is true of the signification of a work of art or for discourse is equally true for the signification of values created by moral geniuses, or by specific communities, or by historical cultures.” He explains that values are like texts precisely because they can be handed down only when they become autonomous from the author, cultural circumstances of their creation, and the original audience of their reception. He explains, “[A] value becomes valuable beyond the historical-cultural circumstances of its birth. We are exposed to the effects of its history to the degree that it is uprooted from the causal chain which engendered it in time. At the same time, the freeing itself with regard to its initial audience, it is open to a whole series of reinterpretations which reactualize it each time in a new situation.”

**Distanciation and Participation**

Ricoeur explains that the recognition that values can be reactivated within new contexts presents a weakness with some of the foundational principles and insights of critical theory. He thinks that the introduction of an analysis of interests does move the creation of values beyond a purely abstract rationalism like that of the Enlightenment. But this analysis of interests, especially in regard to the interest of emancipation, does bring in to play a certain kind of abstract idealism. Ricoeur argues that this is the case, because critical theory is founded upon a hierarchical principle. He says, “The distinction between an instrumental interest, a practical interest, and an interest in emancipation outlines a system of preferences, which, in turn, appeals to a discernment of the rank of values which can hardly be conceived of as a creation, but which may be conceived of as the recognition of an order…. In brief, I do not see how anyone can construct a theory of interest and interests without the help of an anthropology and an
In other words, the categorization of interests into different kinds demonstrates a prior ordering principle that is outside or beyond the categorization of interests. There must be a table of values that precedes the differentiation of interests and their relative status. Ricoeur does accept that critical theory does provide an important corrective for hermeneutics. He says that critical theory can inform hermeneutics with the insight that “…linguisticality should be subordinated to historical experience and to aesthetic experience, [such that] language is only the locus for the articulation of an experience which supports it, and that everything, consequently, does not arrive in language, but only comes to language.”

But Ricoeur’s main critique of critical theory has to do with the interest in emancipation and its status relative to the other interests that Habermas identifies. Ricoeur questions how it is that Habermas arrives at the determination that the interest in emancipation is the highest of the interests that govern human activity. Ricoeur proposes that the status of an interest in emancipation might be tied to its epistemological function, i.e., its ability to found the critical social sciences. He posits, though, that this epistemological function does not necessarily apply to the critical social sciences. It could be possible to have such a science that is purely descriptive and explanatory. According to Ricoeur, “The explicit epistemological function seems to be derived from an implicit axiological position…. A circular relation is thereby established between the axiological position and the epistemological function.” In other words, the primary status of an interest in emancipation is founded upon the epistemological function that such an interest performs in the manipulation and creation of knowledge. But Ricoeur explains that this function itself seems to be founded on a prior determination of values.

In and of itself, this circularity between the axiological position and the epistemological function is not problematic. But Ricoeur wonders if the complementarity of the critical social
sciences and the interest in emancipation exposes a weakness in the opposition that Habermas asserts between the interest in emancipation and the interest in communication. Ricoeur asks, “Can the circle which [the interest in emancipation] constitutes with the critical social sciences really be dissociated from the circle which [the interest in communication] constitutes with the historical-hermeneutical sciences?” He proposes that there must exist a complementarity between the sciences and their associated interests that directs the methods of those sciences.

Ricoeur thinks that the standard opposition between the methodologies of the historical-hermeneutical sciences and those of the critical social sciences, i.e., the opposition between understanding and explanation, respectively, is an opposition that is unsustainable. He proposes, “If the communication of past heritages takes place under the condition of distanciation and objectification, then explanation is a necessary step for understanding. We always explain in order to better understand. A text must be explained in its internal structure before being understood in its relation to the interest it arouses and to which it responds.” In other words, if one hopes to understand a particular cultural phenomenon, i.e., perform a hermeneutic analysis of the phenomenon, a critical analysis of the structures of the interests that govern that cultural phenomenon is necessary. The opposite movement is valid as well, according to Ricoeur. He says, “[E]xplanation is completed in understanding. This rule is just as valid for the explanation of ideologies and the systematic distortions which affect our competence to communicate.” In other words, as significant as a critical analysis of the distortions that occur in communication may be, such an explanation of this distortion is meaningless, “…if it is not meant to re-establish a larger field of consciousness, and to restore this same competence to communicate which had deteriorated.” In other words, a critical analysis and explanation of ideologies is empty, unless such explanation is joined to a hermeneutic discussion that elaborates the meanings of human
discourse. Ricoeur argues, “[T]he two methodologies refer to each other and it therefore seems useless to oppose the problematic of ideology to that of misunderstanding, which hermeneutics sensibly combats.”

Ricoeur explains that the separation and opposition of explanation and understanding, i.e., hermeneutic and critical social sciences, could only occur if there were a non-historical position from which to assess the conflict among ideologies. He says, “We could only completely detach the explanation of ideologies from the movement by which we clarify the preliminary understanding which we have of ourselves if a non-historical place existed, one not situated historically, from where we could consider from a distance and from on high the theater of illusions, the battle field of ideologies. Then it would be possible to explain without understanding.” Such a stance or position would allow for the separation and absolute opposition of the hermeneutic and critical social sciences, but it would make the achievement of the explanation of ideologies empty. Ricoeur says, “[T]his explanation would no longer have anything to do with the restoration of our competence to communicate and therefore with the emancipation of the human species.” In other words, the opposition of explanation and understanding that critical theory posits leads to the undermining of the primary interest that critical theory establishes. The consequence of this insight means that the critical social sciences must expand their analysis beyond a mere study of the interests that govern all human activity. Ricoeur asserts that “…the interest in emancipation would be empty and anemic unless it received a concrete content from our practical interest in communication and, therefore, if it were not confirmed by our capacity to creatively reinterpret our cultural heritages.”

Ricoeur provides a contemporary example of the need for the expansion of the critical social sciences beyond ideological analysis. He points out that the Frankfurt school, Marcuse,
and Ellul have shown that industrialized societies have assumed the scientific and technological precepts necessary for these societies’ ‘progress’ to such an extreme that the precepts have “…assume[d] the ideological function earlier exercised by religion.” Ricœur argues that the justifications of modern technological society can be seen as ideological because these justifications “…conceal the disfunctions [sic.] of our social life in the name of the preservation of the industrial system and its expansion.” Ricœur explains that the identification of these justifications as ideological is quite clear to see; they follow a tendency of all ideologies: “the hierarchy of interests tends to be crushed, to be reduced to the level of a single instrumental interest.”

As obvious as the identification of the ideological characteristics of modern technological society may be, Ricœur asks a very straightforward question that follows this identification, “[H]ow is it possible to combat this reduction to a unidimensionality in the order of interests and values?” In other words, if it is the case that the analysis of modern technological society is correct, then how can we provide a critique of the tendency of the ideology that undergirds that society? Ricœur proposes that “…only the conjunction between the critique of ideologies, animated by our interests in emancipation, and the reinterpretation of the heritages of the past, animated by our interest in communication, may yet give a concrete content to this effort.” Ricœur goes further to explain that if there were no interest in communication, then the desire for emancipation, founded in a notion of the possibility of seamless and unfettered communication, would be fantastical or illogical.

A ‘Practical’ Solution to the Antinomy of Values

From this debate between hermeneutics and critical theory, Ricœur draws some conclusions about the creation and reception of values. First, it is clear that every individual receives values from the cultural and ethical milieu within which she exists. No one can ever
create the ethical world from a clean slate. Ricoeur says, “[W]e are always already preceded by
evaluations beginning from which even our doubt and our contestation become possible.”\textsuperscript{617} It
might be possible to go beyond those values, i.e., “transvaluate” them, but we can never start
from scratch when it comes to values. This means that the ethical individual must look to her
historical heritage in order to interpret and reinterpret what has come before. He says, “The
passage through tradition has no other justification than this antecedence of the ethical world
with regard to every ethical subject.”\textsuperscript{618}

Though it is the case that we are always already within an ethical situation from which
we might receive or question the values of that situation, Ricoeur explains that the reception of
values is not like the reception of an instrumental world or of a world of phenomena. He says,
“It is only under the aegis of our interest in emancipation that we are stirred to transvaluate what
has already been evaluated.”\textsuperscript{619} In other words, the reception of society’s values depends upon a
prior interest. Without this interest there can be no reason for the reception of those values. But
the interest in emancipation, according to Ricoeur, creates what he calls ‘ethical distance’ from
the ethical situation or heritage of which we are always already a part. He says, “Nothing
survives from the past except through a reinterpretation in the present which takes hold of the
objectification and the distanciation which have elevated previously living values to the rank of a
text. Ethical distance thus becomes a productive distance, a positive factor in
reinterpretation.”\textsuperscript{620} In other words, the distance that comes from a critical, objective stance
toward our ethical heritage is not necessarily a stance or distance that leads to a
misunderstanding or dismissal of that heritage. That distance is necessary, if that heritage is to
speak to the present.
Ricoeur succinctly asserts, following upon the previous need for ethical distance united with a ground in an always already present ethical heritage,

There are no other paths, in effect, for carrying out our interest in emancipation than by incarnating it within cultural acquisitions. Freedom only posits itself by transvaluing what has already been evaluated. The ethical life is a perpetual transaction between the project of freedom and its ethical situation outlined by the given world of institutions.  

From the above, it is clear for Ricoeur that critical theory needs to ground the interest in emancipation within an ethical heritage. Without this foundation or grounding, the interest in emancipation will become an empty concept or it will become a constant negation of any kind of mediation. It will become an empty concept because the drive for self-understanding or self-consciousness, which motivates the desymbolization of ideology, has been shown through the analysis of interests to be impossible. The drive for a utopian future outside of ethical heritages merely becomes an empty freedom, according to Ricoeur.

But hermeneutics must also partake of certain aspects of critical theory. Without the “regulative idea of emancipation,” i.e., without a notion of a directionality or motive for understanding of cultural texts, hermeneutics becomes mere discussion of the past in order to re-establish or restore it. He says, “Nostalgia for the past would drive [philosophy] unpityingly toward the positions of Romanticism which it had started out to surpass.”

Ricoeur concludes that the interplay between hermeneutics and critical theory can help overcome the antinomy of axiology. He says, “The exchanges which we have tried to describe between explanation and understanding, between a critique of ideologies and the extension of
communication, between the projection of freedom and the reinterpretation of the heritages of the past, outline the concrete mediation which axiology demands.”623
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Ricoeur and Gadamer share significant philosophical foundations and insights. They draw upon Heidegger’s ontological study of Dasein to demonstrate the need for a hermeneutical approach to the meaning of Being. But they both argue that Heidegger’s assessment of the manner by which to philosophy is to achieve the retrieval of the meaning of Being is misdirected. They both see Heidegger’s privileging of the ontological question to have overlooked the important role of interpretation in giving meaning to the question of Being for Dasein. Both thinkers, like Heidegger, turn to Aristotle and other ancient thinkers to elaborate alternative approaches to the determination of the meaning of consciousness and self-consciousness. These alternatives highlight a different foundation for the determination of truth. These alternatives thereby provide another possibility to the hegemony of the model of the natural sciences for the human sciences to explore human understanding and knowledge. They both see a dialectical aspect to understanding. They both recognize that language is an interchange between two parties in an attempt to re-present something to another in a manner that the presentation is seen in the guise of something similar, yet with the recognition of the difference of that thing from that similar something. This dialectic between the similarity and difference is what motivates interpretation and allows understanding to occur. Both Ricoeur and Gadamer think that understanding cannot be guided by a pre-determined ideality or meaning that is outside the exchange between the two parties of language or discourse. For all their agreement about the resources of hermeneutics to overcome and fragment the limits and dominance of positivism in the methodologies and approach of the natural and human sciences, Ricoeur and Gadamer have a significant difference in their hermeneutical theories.
Gadamer’s hermeneutic theory rests upon a wariness toward any inclusion of the insights of the human sciences that are founded upon a claim or foundation to understand human experience and expression under the guise of a singular viewpoint or methodology. Gadamer argues that the inclusion of these methodologies within hermeneutics serves to open up hermeneutics to the very methodologies of control and dominance against which hermeneutics ought to be a corrective. The inclusion of these methodologies or the attempt to show a unity between them and hermeneutics would occur under the conditions for the determination of truth set up by those methodologies.

Another significant difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur has to do with the role of tradition or the past in understanding. Gadamer is adamant that tradition is the viewpoint from which and within which the interpreter of human phenomena must take her position to interpret that phenomena. Gadamer insists that the view of tradition, i.e., dogma, in interpretation cannot be founded upon a notion that interpretation must be emancipated from dogma. Such a view would serve to undermine interpretation. Gadamer recognizes that dogma can be false, and he would not defend a false interpretation founded upon a dogmatic viewpoint. But Gadamer maintains that the compulsion to interpret a text derives from dogma itself, i.e., tradition. Gadamer argues that our suspicion of dogma arises from our interest in forcing a particular interpretation upon the text. He maintains that the role of dogma, whether we like it or not, is necessary in interpretation. Without dogma, there is no possibility of integration between the viewpoint of the interpreter and that of the dogmatic text. If we cannot engage with the truth claim of the dogmatic text, then interpretation founders. Interpretation founders without the inclusion of dogma, i.e., tradition, because if we separate interpretation from dogma, we will not be able to text dogma for falsity. The dogma of the past will not be able to be integrated with our
present conception of the truth. Also, a separation of interpretation from dogma will result in the separation of the truth of interpretation from that which interprets. In essence, if we separate dogma from interpretation, we close off the possibility of the past to speak to us. In other words, an interpretation that does not incorporate the past, i.e., tradition, within it, will effect an interpretation that already knows what the truth is. Such an interpretation mirrors, if not accepts, the very positivism that Gadamer finds so dangerous in philosophy.

As significant and perceptive as Gadamer’s notions of the role of tradition within interpretation may be, his explanation of the dangers of the separation of tradition from interpretation does not adequately address Lawlor’s challenge to hermeneutics. Gadamer does explain that understanding must occur between two individuals and it must not be predetermined by some prior viewpoint outside the exchange between the two parties, but he cannot provide resources within hermeneutics, as he presents it, to address Lawlor’s question.

Ricoeur, on the other hand, demonstrates a keen interest to incorporate the insights of the human sciences within philosophical hermeneutics. Ricoeur argues that this inclusion is necessary, among other reasons, because otherwise hermeneutics becomes irrelevant to philosophical reflection. This irrelevance would arise from the incapacity of hermeneutics to adequately address the challenge of these human sciences to claim an interpretation that effectively explains human action and understanding. In other words, if hermeneutics does not incorporate the critiques achieved by the human sciences within its ambit, hermeneutics will become just another interpretive viewpoint from which to understand human experience.

Ricoeur grounds his hermeneutics upon the insight that discourse occurs when one person tries to say something about something to someone else. The insights of the human sciences, though, have demonstrated that the immediate and complete communication of understanding is
dubious and fraught with difficulty. Ricoeur welcomes this critique. He recognizes that interpretation and self-consciousness cannot achieve its end directly; rather, there must be a detour through interpretation. Interpretation must achieve its end by incorporating the distancing that these methodologies accomplish.

Ricoeur does recognize the necessary role that tradition, or a prior context, plays in interpretation. His elucidation of the three moments of narrative demonstrates this. The role of this pre-understanding in the understanding and creation of a text aligns Ricoeur with Gadamer. The role of tradition within the creation of a text serves to ground the text within an ethical purview. Without this foundation, Ricoeur argues, the text is pure art, i.e., it has no connection to human experience and expression; it is senseless. This pre-understanding also provides the context, rules, and paradigms within which the author achieves his art. But the artist is not limited to those rules. Rather, argues Ricoeur, the novelty of the text lies in its capacity to creatively elaborate and extend the limits and uses of those paradigms, rules, and contexts to more effectively say something about something and not merely repeat what has been said before. The author/artist, through the work of art or text, negotiates between the demands of strict adherence to tradition and a complete break with it that moves the artist outside the realm of whatever genre she may be engaging. Ricoeur shows us that human discourse functions within these two poles. But the reception of the text is part of the meaning of the text. The post-understanding is one of the moments of narrative in discourse. In this moment, the audience makes ‘sense’ of the work by actively engaging the possibilities for action that the work holds out. The audience incorporates the work within its ethical understanding of itself. But it could not do this if the work was not always already making reference to that ethical realm.
Ricoeur’s inclusion of distanciation within the very heart of understanding, i.e., the incorporation of something new within the similar while also expand what has come before, provides hermeneutics with the resources to address Lawlor’s challenge. The human sciences have accomplished the de-centering consciousness and self-consciousness. Ricoeur proposes that these methodologies are necessary for understanding. The retrieval of the human self must progress through these techniques that provide explanations of deviant, errant, or deceptive language or viewpoints. These explanations will only serve to achieve a deeper understanding of the text, which is ourselves. An archeology of meaning along with a teleology of the same will serve to address the question of how to approach dogma with a critical eye without disconnecting us from the past.
Notes

Introduction
1 Joel C. Weinsheimer, Gadamer's Hermeneutics: a Reading of 'Truth and Method' (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr, 1985) 1.

Chapter 1
2 Piercey, p. 260.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid. 83.
8 Aylesworth, 63.
9 Ibid. 64.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid. 65.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. 66.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid. 66-67.
21 Ibid. 68.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid. 69
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. 70
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. 71.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Ibid.

Chapter 2

3 Ibid. 1-2.
4 Ibid. 4.
5 Ibid. 5.
6 Ibid. 6.
7 Ibid.
8 Gadamer, xvi.
9 Weinsheimer, 7.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid. 8.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid. 8.
15 Gadamer, 412, quoted in Weinsheimer, 8.
16 Ibid. 9.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid. 10.
21 Ibid. 10-11.
22 Ibid. 11.
23 Gadamer, 269.
24 Ibid. 211.
25 Weinsheimer, 12.
26 Ibid. 13.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. 14.
33 Ibid.
34 Gadamer, 336.
35 Weinsheimer, 14.
36 Ibid. 15.
37 Ibid. 34.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Gadamer, 6.
41 Weinsheimer, 35.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid. 59.
47 Ibid. 80.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid. 81.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid. 82.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid. 83.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid. 84.
64 Gadamer, 46.
65 Weinsheimer, 91.
66 Ibid. 92.
67 Gadamer, 76.
68 Weinsheimer, 93.
69 Ibid. 94.
71 Ibid. 94.
72 Gadamer, 82.
73 Weinsheimer, 95.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid. 96.
76 Ibid. 131.
77 Ibid.
78 Gadamer, 147-148.
79 Ibid. 148.
Weinsheimer, 131.
Gadamer, 149.
Weinsheimer, 131.
Gadamer, 149.
Ibid. 150.
Ibid.
Weinsheimer, 132.
Ibid.
Ibid. 133-134.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid. 135.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid. 136.
Ibid.
Gadamer, 163.
Weinsheimer, 137.
Gadamer, 164.
Ibid. 158.
Weinsheimer, 138-139.
Gadamer, 165.
Ibid.
Weinsheimer, 140-141.
Gadamer, 172.
Ibid. 169.
Weinsheimer, 141.
Gadamer, 164.
Ibid.
Ibid. 167.
Ibid. 169.
Ibid. 170.
Weinsheimer, 142.
Gadamer, 173.
Ibid.
Weinsheimer, 143.
Gadamer, 173.
Ibid. 174.
Ibid.
Ibid. 175.
Ibid. 176.
Ibid. 185-186.
Ibid. 185.
169  Ibid.
170  Ibid.
171  Ibid. 208-209.
172  Weinsheimer, 153.
173  Gadamer, 209.
174  Weinsheimer, 154.
176  Ibid. 210-211.
177  Ibid. 211.
178  Ibid. 212.
179  Ibid.
180  Ibid.
181  Ibid.
182  Ibid. 213.
183  Ibid.
184  Weinsheimer, 155.
185  Gadamer, 213.
186  Ibid. 214.
189  Gadamer, 215.
190  Ibid.
191  Ibid.
192  Ibid. 216.
193  Weinsheimer, 156.
194  Gadamer, 216.
195  Ibid.
196  Ibid.
197  Ibid. 217.
198  Ibid.
199  Ibid. 218.
200  Ibid.
201  Ibid.
202  Ibid.
203  Weinsheimer, 158.
204  Ibid.
205  Ibid.
206  Gadamer, 219.
207  Ibid.
208  Ibid. 221.
209  Ibid.
210  Ibid.
211  Ibid.
212  Weinsheimer, 158.
213  Gadamer, 225.
Gadamer argues that Heidegger’s critique of the metaphysical tradition followed in Nietzsche’s footsteps. Gadamer thinks that the goals of *Being and Time* elevated the critique that Nietzsche made of Platonism to the philosophical tradition as a whole and thereby “…confront[ed] Western metaphysics on its own level, and recognize[d] the transcendental position as a consequence of modern subjectivism, and so [overcame] it,” (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 228).

Weinsheimer adds that this view of Dasein is one with which Ricoeur agrees. Ricoeur says, “The subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the *cogito*; rather, he is a being who discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that he is placed in being before he places and possesses himself. In this way, hermeneutics would discover a manner of existing which would remain from start to finish a being-interpreted.” (*Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 11, quoted in Weinsheimer, 163, note 21).
Chapter 3

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid. 237.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Joel C. Weinsheimer, Gadamer's Hermeneutics: a Reading of 'Truth and Method' (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr, 1985) 166.
12 Ibid. 238.
13 Weinsheimer, 167.
14 Gadamer, 238.
15 Weinsheimer, 167.
16 Gadamer, 238.
17 Ibid. 239.
18 Ibid. 240.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Weinsheimer, 168.
23 Gadamer, 240.
24 Weinsheimer, 169.
25 Gadamer, 243.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid. 244.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. 245.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. 246.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
At the same time that Gadamer addresses this issue of the Romantic antithesis of tradition and reason, he also makes an interesting statement about the handing down of tradition. He points out that the understanding that the Romanticists had of tradition was not one “…in which what has been handed down is preserved unaffected by doubt and criticism” (Truth and Method, 250). He says that the Romanticist understanding of tradition is, rather, a renewal of the truth of tradition. He calls such an approach traditionalism.
Weinsheimer argues that, though Gadamer proposes a reunification of these three elements of understanding, he does not thereby consider the three elements to be subsumable into one—understanding. Weinsheimer says, “Gadamer is not concerned to rigidify this threefold division; quite the contrary. Yet he affirms that there are in fact three elements in hermeneutics.” (184)
Gadamer reminds us that his hermeneutical analysis has shown that “understanding is not so much a method by means of which the enquiring mind approaches some selected object and turns it into objective knowledge, as something of which a prior condition is its being situated within a process of tradition. Understanding itself proved to be an event, and the task of hermeneutics, seen philosophically, consists in asking what kind of understanding, what kind of science it is, that is itself changed by historical change.” (276)

Gadamer takes issue with the traditional understanding of the role of natural law in Aristotle. Gadamer argues that Aristotle’s ideas do not support the notion of an unchanging human natural law. Gadamer thinks that Aristotle sees two kinds of human law: those based on human convention and those guided by the “nature of the thing” from which the law follows. Gadamer says, “Thus it is quite legitimate to call such things ‘natural law’. In that the nature of the thing still allows an area of mobility, this natural law is still changeable” (Truth and Method, 285). Gadamer adds that for Aristotle the role of natural law is only a critical one. That is, natural law only comes into play one there is a difference between one human law and another. But this does not mean that natural law is unchangeable, like that law that applies to the gods.

Gadamer, 286.
It is important to point out here that Ricoeur is both in agreement and disagreement with Gadamer. Ricoeur would agree that legal and theological hermeneutics both have much to offer to hermeneutics as a whole, but he would take issue with Gadamer’s insistence upon a hermeneutics that takes on tradition unquestioningly. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics has two branches that are both necessary—a hermeneutics of hope and of suspicion.
Ibid. 305.
191 { Weinsheimer, 198.
192 Ibid.
193 Gadamer, 305.
194 Ibid.
195 Weinsheimer, 199.
196 Gadamer, 305.
197 Ibid. 306.
198 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid. 307.
201 Ibid.
202 Ibid. 308.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid. 309.
206 Ibid.
207 Weinsheimer, 200.
208 Ibid. 201.
209 Gadamer, 310-311.
210 Ibid. 311.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid. 311-312.
213 Ibid. 312.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid. 313.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid. 314.
222 Ibid.
223 Ibid. 315.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid. 316.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 Ibid. 317.
231 Ibid.
232 Weinsheimer, 203.
233 Gadamer, 317.
234 Ibid. 318.
Ibid. 319.
Ibid.
Weinsheimer, 204.
Gadamer, 319.
Ibid. 320.
Ibid. 321.
Weinsheimer, 205.
Gadamer, 321.
Weinsheimer, 205.
Gadamer, 321.
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Weinsheimer, 206.
Gadamer, 325.
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Gadamer, 326.
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Ibid. 327.
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Weinsheimer, 207.
Gadamer, 327.
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Weinsheimer, 207.
Gadamer, 328.
Ibid. 329.
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Ibid. 330.


Ibid.
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Ibid. 331.
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Weinsheimer, 209.
Gadamer, 331.
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Gadamer, 331.
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Weinsheimer, 209.
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Gadamer, 332.
Ibid. 331.
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Ibid. 341.
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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid. 17.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. 28.
8 Ibid. 29.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid. 30.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid. 31.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid. 32.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid. 33.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid. 33-34.
24 Ibid. 35.
25 Ibid. 36-37.
26 Ibid. 37.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid. 38.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. 39.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid. Note 11.
34 Ibid. 40
35 Ibid. 41.
36 Ibid. 42.
37 Ibid. 45.
38 Ibid. 46.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. 47
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid. 47-48.
Ibid. 48.
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535 Ibid.
536 Ibid. 80.
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539 Ibid. 81.
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541 Ibid. 82.
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545 Ibid. 83.
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548 Ibid. 84.
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551 Ibid. 84-85.
552 Ibid. 85.
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554 Ibid. 85-86.
555 Ibid. 86.
556 Ibid.
557 Ibid.
559 Ibid.
560 Ibid. 154.
561 Ibid.
562 Ibid.
563 Ibid.
564 Ibid.
565 Ibid. 154-155.
566 Ibid. 155.
567 Ibid.
568 Ibid.
569 Ibid.
570 Ibid.
571 Ibid.
572 Ibid.
573 Ibid. 155-156.
574 Ibid. 156.
575 Ibid.
576 Ibid.
577 Ibid. 157
578 Ibid. 156.