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HERMENEUTICS

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Originally, Hermeneutics was concerned with the interpretation of texts whose meaning is confused, incomplete, fragmentary or unclear. Although as a philosophy it has broadened its interests, it still retains much of its early philological character. During the nineteenth century, the discipline of linguistics began to emerge as an independent branch of knowledge separate from philosophy, literature and the humanities. To begin with, its aims were largely historical, tracing the connections between the Indo-European languages, especially Sanskrit, Greek and Latin among others. This interest was also encouraged by the prominence at the time, especially in Germany, of studies of classical literature and philosophy as well as biblical and Talmudic scholarship.

The material which these scholars had to deal with presented two kinds of problem. First, because of their age, the texts were often incomplete and fragmentary. In addition, the texts, or the portions of them that had survived, were often the work of more than one author. To complicate matters even more, they were also sometimes translations of even earlier texts which had not survived. Unwrapping and recovering the 'original meaning' of the text became a delicate process. Second, such texts were also historical documents in their own right. They reflected societies and cultures which were very different to those of the scholars who sought to understand them. Any attempt to penetrate to the meaning of the text and get some kind of 'objective' understanding of it would have to overcome the linguistic problems of translation and language change, the revisions and reconstructions by successions of authors, as well as grappling with the fact that the texts were part of ways of life no longer directly accessible to us except through other texts and similar 'archaeological' remains.

The complexity of these problems is easily appreciated if we look at a case such as that of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts. These were discovered in 1945 by two Egyptian farmers. Altogether thirteen papyrus books were found, a few of which were destroyed soon after discovery. Those remaining, after disappearing for a few years, eventually found their way to the Coptic Museum in Cairo. It was subsequently revealed that the books contained 52 texts from the

early days of the Christian era, including a collection of previously unknown gospels. The texts proved to be translations of Greek materials written 150 years or so earlier. The texts presented a very different picture of the Christian church to that usually given. They showed it to be deeply divided doctrinally and organisationally. They also reported very different facts about Jesus' life to the traditional account. So, making semantic, archaeological and historical sense of these texts involved not only linguistic matters, important though these were, but also required them to be related to the wider social context in which they were originally produced. Who wrote them? For what readership? Why were they concealed? Could their meaning be taken at face value, or were other issues at stake? These are just some of the questions that had to be answered. For our purposes all it is important to notice is that making sense of the materials requires a union of philology and history. It was this that provided Hermeneutics with its central question. How could we gain an understanding of the past through its texts and other remains?

As we mentioned at the beginning, it was largely in nineteenth-century Germany that this fusion of interests took place, in the context of a long running and often bitter debate over the nature and methods of history, historiography and the human sciences. We saw in the Introduction to this Section that one of the features of Enlightenment thought was an attempt to extend the natural science model of knowledge to the study of human life, society and history. The claim made by Kantian philosophy that it had provided a means of avoiding scepticism and empiricism to provide an independent view of the order of the universe lent weight to this tendency. Natural science did provide 'objective knowledges' of Nature. Its models and methods would provide the way, if suitably modified, to gain 'objective knowledges' of history and the nature of social life. At the beginning of Chapter 2 we described one line of resistance to this, that of Hegelian philosophy, and suggested that it was part of a general rejection of this whole attitude. There we called this rejection 'Romanticism.' What the Romantics objected to was that the use of the natural science model of knowledge, with its 'empiricist' and 'positivist' overtones, left no room for the idea that history and social life were *human creations*, and that the essence of all social forms was that they expressed human creativity. In their eyes, the study of human history had to be based on the fact that humans are free, intentional and purposive *creators* whose lives are bounded by a reality which has meaning for them. They act towards the world and

each other on the basis of these meanings. The duality of subjectivity and objectivity was inescapable. What this meant for historiography was that the pattern of history did not reduce simply to the succession of events which were connected only by time. Because the essence of man was his subjectivity, his spirituality as they saw it, and because history was the expression of that subjectivity, then history was of prime philosophical importance. Social institutions, law, literature, forms of government, values, family life, art, all reflected the characteristic spirituality of particular cultures. The historian's task was to penetrate beneath the surface appearances to the deeper reality, the guiding mentality and its place in mankind's spiritual progress.

Given the emphasis upon subjectivity, it seemed clear that historical inquiries could not merely take over and adapt the methods of the natural sciences. What was required was a wholly different but equally well grounded kind of method as that of the natural sciences. This method had to be appropriate to the distinctive nature of history's topic matter. Understanding the actions, events and artifacts that are the expression of human spirituality and creativity requires grasping the place, the significance that they have *within* human life. This task is very different to the observation of an *external* reality felt to be typical of science. The general line that was adopted to provide such a method was to treat human action and its artifacts as analogous to texts. Deciphering the meaning of history was similar to deciphering the meaning of a long lost text. In this way, Hermeneutics came to refer not just to the study of historical texts and the problems of translation, comprehension and contextualising associated with them, but to a broader endeavour: that of discovering or uncovering the meanings of all human artifacts and actions. The way that these meanings were grasped was through a process of interpretation through which the action, event, artifact or text was located as the expression of a deeper, underlying, unifying spirituality.

Hermeneutics was, then, determined to show that the generalising of the natural science model of knowledge to all spheres of knowledge was unacceptable. To do this it had to show that alternative methods — those which it advocated — were as systematic and controlled as those of the natural sciences and, furthermore, uniquely suited to the study of the nature of human life. To achieve this it had to demonstrate two things: first, it had to show that there was a field of objects, a proper body of items for study, about which one could say that their *essential* quality was that they were meaningful and

expressed spirituality and that it was this that gave them their coherence and sense. Hermeneutics sought to achieve this aspiration by defining all human action and artifacts as text-analogues. Second, it had to be possible to demonstrate that the distinction between meaning and its expression was not illusory or fallacious. This distinction lay at the heart of the suggestion that the same meaning, the same underlying reality, could take very different forms or expressions. Without it, it would make little sense to say that Hermeneutics was the interpretation of underlying meaning. In addition to these two, invoking the idea that human social life and artifacts can be seen as text-analogues invites us to see such phenomena as having meanings for particular subjects — that is interpreters, be they individuals, groups or the Universal Subject, mentioned in general. Meaning does not exist independently of subjects who use it, attribute and respond to it. Nor does it exist separate from other meanings. It is caught up with them and interconnected to them. The phrases that recur again and again are 'a web of meaning' and 'a field of meaning'. As we shall see, it was this idea that gave so much importance in the early days of Hermeneutics to imaginative reconstruction and empathy in elucidating meaning and its life context.

It is clear, then, that the efforts of hermeneutic philosophy to create a systematic discipline were a reaction to and hence dominated by the paragon status accorded the natural sciences. There seemed to be two alternatives. Either interpretive understanding had to be able to match, point for point, the standard adopted by the natural sciences, or it had to be shown that such standards were wholly inappropriate to the understanding of human history and social life. The first course would take the comparison seriously; the second course would reject any attempt at comparison. By and large, hermeneutic philosophy chose the latter. It resisted the comparison. The problems faced by the disciplines engaged in interpretive understanding were wholly distinct from those of the natural sciences, and hence their methods would be wholly different too.

What was being rejected was the appropriateness of a particular image of science as philosophy saw it in the nineteenth century. This image was one of a body of cumulating, objective knowledge obtained by the use of particular techniques and methods governed by agreed rules of procedure. Although scientists might disagree about particular findings, it was held they did not disagree on how one determined what was to count as a finding. The interpretation of meaning could not be predicated upon such communally agreed rules

which would operate impersonally to determine which interpretation of a text or text-analogue was the correct one. The empirical method adopted by science was held to guarantee the certainty of its knowledge. Scientific knowledge was objective knowledge. This was because the validation of such knowledge was independent of particular individuals, but based upon formal manipulations and replicability. Interpretive understanding could not use these methods nor make these claims. If the sciences were 'objective' then by comparison the interpretive disciplines must be regarded as 'subjective'. The Enlightenment categories were reintroduced and reworked to justify the contrast. This subjectivity was no more apparent than when choices had to be made over differing interpretations. A successful interpretation is one which brings out the sense, the rationale, the meaning which on the surface appears confused and fragmentary. But how do we know that any interpretation is the correct one? Not only can we not validate interpretations, but any attempt to find a way to choose between competitors simply raises the problem of interpretation to the next level, and thus interpretations proliferate. This arises because the weight that we give interpretations depends upon *our* understandings. We accept an interpretation when we can use it to see just how fully what was puzzling to the interpreter is clarified by the interpretation. If we cannot see what was puzzling nor how it is resolved, all the interpreter can do is to call up more and more interpretations to show what is at issue. Establishing a particular interpretation means grounding it in other interpretations. There is no way out of the interpretive circle through a reference to an independent non-interpretive 'reality'. If we accept the rules of science, all of which are based upon the supposition that reality is outside any scheme of interpretation, then we can say that its results follow independently of what individual scientists might hope, fear or wish. Even when historians have settled upon an agreed interpretation, there is no guarantee of correctness, truth or universality. The interpretation which the historians accept now is *their* interpretation, to be understood through the social and historical circumstances of *their* times. As we will see when we talk about the philosophy of science in Section Three, the rather comfortable view of the 'objective' and 'non-interpretive' nature of science is today very much in retreat, or at least being rethought. The generalising strategy, in fact, is going the other way. To philosophers such as Feyerabend, the way to understand science is to see it as an historically contexted phenomenon.

In the period of which we are speaking, though, the distinction between the 'objectivity' of science and the 'subjectivity' of history was a fixed and rigid one for the most part. Hermeneutic philosophy accepted that meaning and interpretation were historically located and so denied that comparison with the natural sciences was appropriate. The consensus of interpretations that might be on view at any time could only be seen as the common participation of historians in a historically and culturally defined frame of understanding. But, given the importance that was attached to the subjective essence of human life, this was not taken as a disadvantage. Indeed, that the interpretive sciences would be subjective followed from the essential character of their object of study. It was here that its distinctive contribution was to be found. From the first, hermeneutic philosophy tried to show which methods would be appropriate for the interpretive sciences.

Schleiermacher and Dilthey: the Constitution of Hermeneutic Sciences

It was Schleiermacher who more than any one else was responsible for drawing Hermeneutics away from its home in philology and applying it to the problem of historical knowledge. This problem he took to be the question of how we are to grasp the sense of the past from the standpoint of the present. Since all history was to be seen as the expression of human meaning, then we could not treat history and historical events and artifacts as if they were 'objective' and merely causally determined. To understand the past, the historian had to identify with it. What Schleiermacher developed was a method for achieving that identification.

The historian's task, according to Schleiermacher, is to place himself in the position of the person, the subject, who created the original meaning, the text, artifact or whatever. In doing this, the historian will submerge himself in the totality of life that gave them meaning. This 'psychological interpretation' is a coming to share the background against which interpretation takes place. It is because we do not have this background that we find texts, events, movements and artifacts puzzling. We cannot contextualise them. The special method that was required to contextualise the puzzling element within the totality from which it had been extracted, involved two kinds of interpretation; the grammatical and the psychological. The grammatical

addresses the need to situate a text by reference to the language shared by the author and the original public. The second tries to show how the thoughts and meaning expressed, emerged in the course of the author's life. This is achieved by attempting to grasp what the author was struggling to convey. This literally means that the interpreter has to identify with the author or social actor. The interpreter has to submerge his own identity in that of the author. If this were possible, the act of interpretation would allow a gradual movement out toward the understanding of the totality. The meaning of the part is determined from its place in the whole, and that of the whole from the way that it contextualises the parts. The movement back and forth, from parts to whole, is one way of characterising what is often described as the 'hermeneutic circle'. By complementing grammatical interpretation with psychological identification, Schleiermacher introduced Hermeneutics into the study of human activities other than linguistic communication through texts and so indicated something of the possibilities and limitations of interpretive understanding.

It was Dilthey who built upon Schleiermacher's beginnings and argued not just that Hermeneutics offered one way of grasping the character of human life but that it was essential for any understanding of human life. Hermeneutics was to be the key human science. In other words, Dilthey takes the argument over method right into his opponents' camp and challenges the paradigmatic status of scientific knowledge. Since the essence of human nature is the creation of meaning, the world which they have created — that is, their social institutions and practices — 'objectifies' their subjectivity and can only be understood by other subjective beings, other people. Our knowledge of human life can only be gained through a hermeneutical interpretive procedure based upon the possibility of 'imaginatively recreating' the experience of others. It is this imaginative recreation that Dilthey takes over from Schleiermacher. We know the nature of other subjective natures by analogy with our own. We can come to understand the cultural and social complexes of meaning of other historical eras by immersing ourselves in the interpretive study of the 'objectifications' of meaning complexes, the actual historical artifacts, texts and so on. Dilthey recognised that all such interpretations must take account of both the point of view of the creator of the artifact as well as the interpreter. We cannot achieve a proper understanding of figures such as Plato or Luther by treating them entirely as figures of their own times, entirely alien to us, nor by assuming them to be

contemporaries of ours. Interpretive understanding is not an attempt to recover what it was like to be Plato or Luther and what they were doing, but to understand them in relation to our concerns. Accordingly, because interpretation involves our experiences as well as those of others, imaginatively reconstructed, such knowledge can never be independent of a point of view. As we saw in the Introduction to this Section, Kant argued that it was possible to obtain, and therefore science could be based upon, an independent view of reality from within our experience. For the human sciences, at least, Dilthey doubts this. Interpretive understanding is essential to grasping the meaning of human life. At the same time, it remains inescapably historical and culturally delimited because our experiences are integral to the process.

Dilthey's argument, then, is that it is a misunderstanding of the nature of the cultural sciences to try to compare them directly with the natural ones. His justification for this stance is a reintroduction of the strict distinction between subjectivity and objectivity as topics of investigation. Human life is the expression of subjectivity and cannot be treated simply as the consequence of causally determined objects. The goal of the human sciences ought to be understanding and not causal explanation. Such understanding recaptures the meaning of social objects and actions. The methods of the natural sciences do not allow them to achieve such understanding. It follows that the cultural sciences are not inferior but simply different.

One of the consequences of holding to this view was that Dilthey was able to make a virtue out of what his opponents held to be a drawback of the methods of the cultural sciences. The relativity of interpretation was not just something that historians and others would have to accept. It was a condition of interpretive understanding and gave it its distinctive value. What the cultural scientists provides is a way for us to understand *their* way of life. It is clear, though, that to some this would look like a commitment to a form of knowledge that would be prey to the sceptic's argument that there could be no certain knowledge, no certain morality or truth. Dilthey blocked this by appealing to an idea which he derived from Schleiermacher and which has recently been given extra force in the work of Habermas (cf. below). This is the notion of 'a community of life unities'. Although the aim of interpretation is to understand objects and events as manifestations of the lives of individuals, some of us are *just* individuals. We share in a collective life and so are 'collective individuals' so to speak. Against the tendency in 'positivist' social

science to treat individuals as aggregated into collectivities, Hermeneutics rejects the rigidity of the distinction between the collectivity and the individual. In this way, Dilthey could say that we all share in the 'life community' and through it may be able to disentangle our essential community from the historical and cultural specifics of particular societies. This provides the possibility of a firm foundation for the hermeneutic method. As subjective beings sharing in a collective life, we can understand what other similar beings have created. We are all united in our creativity, for that is our essence. Penetrating to this essence, though, is no straightforward or easy matter.

What Schleiermacher and Dilthey began was a long running 'struggle over method' in the cultural and human sciences, particularly in Germany. The rejection of the natural science model required them to formulate their alternative. Since then attempts have been made to bridge the disjunction by showing that interpretive understanding could be combined with causal explanation — in the case of Weber's sociology and Habermas' social philosophy — or how the circle of relative interpretations could be broken by linking such knowledge to its 'real underpinnings' as in the case of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. Both of these themes are essentially continuations and modifications of Schleiermacher and Dilthey's methodological interest in Hermeneutics. Recently, though, Gadamer has tried to rethink the original philosophical concern of Hermeneutics in the nature of existence by treating interpretive understanding as the fundamental feature of what he calls 'being-in-the-world'.

Gadamer and the Authority of Traditions

Gadamer advocates a return to the problem of understanding in general. This, he says, has been supplanted by the overriding interest in the hermeneutic constitution of the social sciences. In turning away from such methodological matters, Gadamer wants to illuminate the human context in which understanding occurs, for understanding and interpretation are, as has been repeatedly said, the essential features of human nature. Gadamer is going back, then, to the ontological and metaphysical questions that the Romantic movement raised in its rejection of Enlightenment thought. In dealing with Gadamer, it might be as well to distinguish between 'Hermeneutics' as a philosophical method and 'hermeneutics' as a feature of human existence. Clearly Gadamer's interest is primarily in the latter. In his view, Hermeneutics

is concerned with 'breaches of subjectivity', that is those situations where we encounter meanings that we cannot grasp or which require considerable effort to understand. Hermeneutic understanding, both as a philosophical method and in ordinary life, has to bridge the gap between the familiar and taken-for-granted world we are all immersed in and the strange and unfamiliar meanings that we find resist easy assimilation and understanding. Clearly, then, interpretation not only encompasses that which we strive to understand but also that which we already do understand. This is an important observation which, in Gadamer's view, was not noticed by Dilthey and Schleiermacher.

Gadamer's argument is, in essence, that Dilthey and Schleiermacher had not freed themselves from the idea of knowledge being obtained by 'pure reason' which, as we saw, had dominated the Enlightenment. The 'pure reasoner' was the scholar who had detached himself from his social and cultural context by the adoption of methodologically secured sets of rules of enquiry. Dilthey and Schleiermacher seemed not to have rejected this view because they held that the historical and cultural distance between the historian, say, and the society being studied, was an impediment to the acquisition of valid knowledge and had to be overcome by the hermeneutic method. In this sense, our social and cultural location in history is an accidental and potentially disturbing feature of understanding. Gadamer rejects this. Our 'historicity', as he terms it, is an ontological condition of understanding. It is because of our historical and cultural location that we can engage in interpretive understanding. It is our present understandings, our conceptions of life, that open up the past to us so that we can have knowledge of it. These conceptions are the grounds of the judgements that we make about other societies on the basis of our understandings. In talking about such judgements or 'prejudices', Gadamer reintroduces the Kantian theme of the necessity of knowledge being obtained through a cognitive framework, although there is the clear difference that in Gadamer's view this framework is what we as historically and culturally located beings know and understand about the world and not the Kantian innate structures of the mind. Prejudices, then, enable us to experience and understand other societies through their texts, artifacts and so on. Our historical position can never be entirely held at a distance and left out of account. It is the 'given' which shapes our experience. But our historical position is itself shaped by the past, so the past has a considerable power over our understanding. The past provides the tradition, which defines the ground on which the interpreter stands. In discussing the role of the past in the

present, Gadamer follows many of the ideas which are associated with Heidegger and which we dealt with in Chapter 4.

What we have here is an attempt to expand interpretive understanding beyond the range of historiography and the social sciences to the concern with the essence of human life in history. In Gadamer's view, and it echoes that of Heidegger, most of European philosophy since the Enlightenment has been 'subjectivist' in that it has concentrated on the features of pure reasoning and the rules that the pure reasoner would follow — that is, the development of Logic and logical languages. Such philosophy is alienating because it ignores our location in history as human beings and interpreters. Gadamer's own conception of interpretive understanding is not that of reconstructing the past in the present but of mediating the past for the present.

The work of mediation involves attention to the continuity of heritage and tradition. The past already influences the present by shaping the interpreter's horizons and understandings. The prejudices and interests that we bring to understanding are located in history. This should also be forward as well as backward looking. Our interpretations will make a contribution to all those that follow. There is a continual mediation of past and present in which our interpretation marks just a moment. Into this continuity, Gadamer introduces the idea of a plurality of possible meanings. The past is an active force providing an inexhaustible supply of possibilities and not passive, inert, merely an object of contemplation. Texts, events and so on come to acquire different meanings as they become part of new hermeneutical situations; as the interpreter's horizons change with the understandings which he acquires so he reconsiders and reviews the texts, etc., and what they mean *for him*. This movement beck and forth Gadamer talks of as a dialogue which begins with the interpreter genuinely opening himself to a text and allowing it to speak no matter how challenging its viewpoint. This opening up throws the interpreter's prejudices into relief by raising them for critical appraisal. This 'collision of horizons', the shock of contact between our own and some entirely alien viewpoint, reveals our own deep-seated assumptions and our historicity. Genuine understanding requires imagination in situations like this; the ability to see what is questionable and what is questioned, to be carried along by it and immersed in its flow. In this rendering, the hermeneutic circle of interpretation becomes a process of hypothesis and revision as understandings develops. As we come to grasp a part we conjecture a sense of the whole. This conjecture is

then revised as our knowledge progresses. The 'unity of sense' toward which interpretation strives is the integration of all of the parts in a meaningful whole.

All Hermeneutics is tradition bound, and therefore historical. These traditions are integral to understanding and cannot be set to one side. Gadamer makes the connection to the central problems of philosophy, as he sees them at least, by arguing that Hermeneutics is not just a method or an ideal; it is the original form of 'being-in-the-world'. Since it is fundamental to our existence, our being-in-the-world, it is the universal principle of human thought. His argument here has several closely related steps. First there is the rejection that hermeneutics can be the recapitulation of some actor or agent's intended meaning. To define it thus would be to suppose that there was just one, fixed meaning to be attained. This would make unintelligible the host of differing interpretations that are to be found in history and which make up the tradition we bring to interpretation. These interpretations cannot be treated as *misunderstandings* as Gadamer felt Schleiermacher did but as varying understandings. This variety gives us an 'excess of meaning' in the tradition which we bring to bear in our understanding well beyond that of any particular author or agent's intentions. What a text means is a growing, changing, live matter not a manifested intention. The ways in which such developments are shown, found, and presented, how meaning 'discloses' itself as he puts it, is its being. In this way, Gadamer circumvents objections premised upon a requirement that knowledge be objective. There can be no standards of objectivity independent of the intersubjective fusion of horizons reached by partners in the dialogue of interpretation. This fusion is brought about through the interpreter's willingness to review his prejudices in the light of those brought by the author of the text in question.

Underpinning the possibility of a fusion of horizons is our possession of language. Our concepts and meanings are expressed in our language. Without language we could not understand for we would have no way of expressing our concepts. The crucial metaphysical question, of course, concerns the relation of our concepts given in language to the world. Gadamer argues that our possession of language is not merely an accidental feature of our existence, akin to the fact that we have two legs, breathe air and have stereoscopic vision. We possess the world through language because we experience the world mediated through our concepts. Language is a precondition of any truth and understanding. It follows since we

cannot experience the world independently of our concepts that language sets limits upon the world for us. This, remember, was exactly the same conclusion Kant drew from his deduction of the a priori categories, namely there are limits to what we can know and understand. The limits that Gadamer is pointing to are not those imposed by innate structures of the mind, but the sediments of history laid down in tradition and expressed in our language and concepts.

By its very nature language is communal. This offers the possibility of escape from the relativist treadmill. Knowing a language means knowing how to make oneself understood in it; language has, as Gadamer puts it, 'disclosive power'. What is spoken of in language, what is captured in our concepts, is the common world in which we live; as we noted above, our language constitutes the world in which we live. Language is, therefore, the universal medium of understanding. Just as prejudices are not bars to our understanding but its starting point, so to know a language is to be open to participation with others in dialogue that can transform and broaden the horizons from which we begin. Language discloses realities and assimilates them within itself. Since there can be no experience of the world outside of that given in a language, the question of the relativity of language does not arise. There is nowhere else to view the world from, nowhere that is fixed and independent of language. Just as we cannot escape from language, so we cannot escape from prejudice, although interpretation allows us to transcend particular prejudices. What Gadamer is reminding us of here is the essential creativity of language and interpretation. Meanings that are disclosed through the dialogue of interpretation pose further questions and puzzles for us. The spiral of understanding and interpretation is a creative process which constantly fuses and enlarges the horizons provided by the interpreter and the interpreted. The linguistic nature of interpretation is the way that tradition is able to communicate with us. At each point in the spiral, tradition, interpretation and horizons are encountered and transcended at a more universal level. There can be no end to this transcendence.

Gadamer takes Hermeneutics back to philosophy and thereby rejects the need for a special hermeneutic method to overcome historical and cultural relativism. His is an even more radical interpretation of hermeneutics than that of Dilthey and Schleiermacher. Tradition and language form the context for interpretation; there can be no understanding outside of language and history, and so there is nothing for our understanding of a text or artifact to be relative to. In

the Introduction to this Section we said that time and space constituted the axes of experience for Kant; history and language constitute the axes of understanding and hence of experience for Gadamer. We cannot escape from history and tradition. In our interpretations we contribute to history and the sedimentation of tradition.

Habermas and Depth Hermeneutics

In Chapter 2, in our discussion of Hegel and Marx, we indicated that one of the central features of Marx's philosophical anthropology was the idea of 'alienated consciousness'. In outlining Marcuse's interpretation of this theme, we suggested that Critical Theory attacked contemporary philosophy for failing to recognize and confront the possibility of alienated consciousness. This is precisely the charge which Habermas lays against Gadamer. In stressing the community of language and tradition, its consensus, Gadamer fails to point out that language can be deceiving and distorting as well as disclosing. The traditions which we take over from the past can be ideological in form, masking the oppression and exploitation that determines our being-in-the-world. Hermeneutics as a philosophy cannot ignore this possibility; it must confront it and so become critical of the conditions which give rise to alienated consciousness.

What Habermas is bringing to Hermeneutics is the theory of praxis, and with it a rejection of abstracted reason. All knowledge is gained in the pursuit of cognitive interests; these can be 'hermeneutic', 'technical' or 'emancipatory'. The familiar dichotomy between nature and reason reappears here in that the natural sciences, what are termed 'the empirical-analytic sciences', seek a technical mastery over nature. The 'hermeneutic disciplines' seek to further understanding of intersubjective, rational beings by interpretation of the purposes, motives and intentions of actors as these are displayed in action. The third cognitive interest is concerned with the securing of freedom from constraint; especially that imposed by the distorted communication of ideology. In this way, Habermas hopes to give Hermeneutics a critical edge by introducing into it the concerns of Hegelian Marxists. It is aimed at a critique of ideology which would uncover the power relationships embodied in the communicative process and tradition. What Gadamer had failed to take cognizance of was Marx's discovery that forms of communication and tradition both shape and are shaped by the material conditions of life. His

philosophy, therefore, succumbs to the 'idealism of linguisticity', whereas for Habermas the framework for understanding social action is that provided by language, labour and domination. In elevating the hermeneutic process to constitute the character of our being-in-the-world, Gadamer ignored the economic and political factors which 'limit' our horizons. In making the connections in this way, Habermas has to recall the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity of knowledge. He has to do this in order to say that Gadamer's Hermeneutics does not go deep enough. It does not penetrate beneath the historically contextual traditions to the real determinations of our knowledge and understanding, those socio-historical processes which restrict the ways that our needs and wants are defined and the means we have for satisfying them. Although human history does express our subjectivity, it is still constrained by the objective character of domination, repression and ideology. Emancipation from domination, repression and ideology can only occur when the spiral of interpretive understanding that Gadamer described is linked to a critical evaluation of the constraints on knowledge and all cognitive processes; when hermeneutics is revitalised by praxis. Such a revitalisation will be a 'depth hermeneutics'.

The recalling of the distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' meanings presents Habermas with a problem. Gadamer had dismissed the duality by arguing that all interpretations were formed from within a community of life interests. There was no way outside to an independent point from which to take an 'objective' view. If Habermas wishes to argue that the expressions of our subjectivity are determined by forces which we can know 'objectively' — and he must say this if he wants to make a distinction between ideological and non-ideological knowledge, between distorted and non-distorted communication — then he has got to show how this 'objective' viewpoint is arrived at. He cannot fall back upon an invocation of the rules and procedures of the natural sciences because they are predicated upon the universality of objectivity. Hermeneutics is predicated upon subjectivity. Habermas looks for a synthesis. He seeks a unified framework within which the natural and the hermeneutic sciences can be accommodated. The exemplar of a critical theory which displays this synthesis, for Habermas, is Freudian psychoanalysis.

The general strategy that Habermas adopts is to show how Freudian theory extends and complements that of Marx, to give a fuller account of the nature of distorted communication than is to be found in the theory of ideology alone. Habermas sets the argument up

in the following way. In his view, Freud saw strong similarities between the development of the individual and that of the species, particularly since the survival of both involves the repression of needs and wants. This repression results in patterns of distorted communication. In the individual, these appear as neurotic symptoms; in societies, as ideologies. Marx's account of alienation, emphasizing as it does production and labour, is unsatisfactory even though it does reveal the power of ideologies to conceal the facts of domination and oppression. What Freud showed was that unsuspected patterns of distorted communication can be seen even in the speech patterns of ordinary life. By focusing on the development of socially repressed needs and wants, Freud saw that the power of social norms resides in their ability, albeit unconscious, to provide substitutes or 'displaced' gratifications. These repressed socially unacceptable motives and channelled them into acceptable forms of expression. This repression, in the Freudian theory, comes about through fear and domination and is expressed in the demands for conformity expressed in the superego. Habermas suggests that such demands could account for the 'false consciousness' of groups within a class society. If this is so, then emancipation from the constraints which dominate and shape human life can only be achieved through an interpretation of both the development of the personality and human society; an interpretation which would allow us to identify those points at which development became arrested and so produced distorted communication. In this way, the therapy of self-understanding and analysis which is integral to Freud's method becomes the task of critical hermeneutics; guided self-reflection will enable us to overcome distorted communication.

Habermas is attracted to psychoanalysis not because it has all the trappings of a bona fide science — which it is not — but because it is essentially hermeneutic in character. It involves the systematic and methodical interpretation of behaviour, speech, dreams and so on. At the same time, it admits causal processes into its accounts of neurosis and other pathologies. By bringing out, from the pattern of behaviour, the latent significance of that part of the patient's life history which had been repressed, it penetrates beneath the surface to the 'underlying' forces generating the surface meanings. Psychoanalysis is a unity of hermeneutic method and science. By reconstructing his own childhood traumas, the patient is able to give these repressed areas of his life a new significance. Depth hermeneutics will apply the same 'therapy' to communication and behaviour in social life. Here the level of conscious intentionality — what we think we want and

strive for — will be linked to our unconscious, repressed needs and wants. The meaning of what we do and say, our surface interpretations, can only be fully understood by causally relating them to the unacknowledged and unrecognised determining factors of power and domination. In this way, depth hermeneutics will raise for analysis the very character of language itself, the distorted forms which we use to communicate. In so doing it will go beyond the limits of language and experience and show what brings about our language and experience. Rather than the 'ordered view from within' language and experience sought by Kant, Habermas seeks to break through to that which determines our experience.

Part of therapy in psychoanalysis is the stage at which the patient comes to accept the analytic interpretation of the neurotic or other symptomatic behaviour. The patient can understand his behaviour when he comes to see how it is to be explained by the causal factors which produced it. Once the explanation is accepted, the patient's distorted understanding of his actions (what he thought he was doing) and the self-conscious realisation of his condition are mediated. Therapy can only succeed when self-understanding and explanation unite. Such acceptance is not simply an agreement, a consensus in interpretation. It is the patient's own reconstruction of his life history. The neurosis is overcome only when the patient cures himself.

Psychoanalysis, then, is the prototype of depth hermeneutics. Through the self-reflection it requires, the patient can overcome distorted communication. Habermas now brings that proposal to historical materialism. If it were to be reconstituted as a depth hermeneutics it would become a realisable critique of ideology. The combination of hermeneutics and the theory of praxis would create the possibility of social emancipation in the same way that the patient in psychoanalysis ultimately cures himself. Such a depth hermeneutics would be a new social philosophy of liberation. Guided by this social philosophy, the human and social sciences would have a diagnostic and therapeutic role.

Following the hermeneutic method, this philosophy begins with an object, say a social process, whose meaning is in doubt. As in traditional hermeneutics, dialogue is employed to disclose the interpretive possibilities. To move beyond these and remove the distortions in communication, explanations involving causality must be developed. Once we have a theory of societal evolution which accounts for the emergence of class societies to hand, it should be possible to reveal the fundamental distortions which, at present, limit

our self-understanding. Such a theory could be 'tested' through the reconstruction of the case in question to see the extent to which distorted communication is disclosed. The final verification for the whole process depends, as it does in psychoanalysis, upon its practical success. Does it reveal the barriers to self-understanding and aid in their demolition? In capitalism, social existence consists in class domination, a fact which is distorted in ideologies of one sort or another. These ideologies encourage the subjugated mass to subordinate their interests to those of a social order whose injustice remains hidden and repressed. Capitalism hides its contradictions behind a veil of pseudo-scientific explanations and emotive appeals to the common good, the nation, the needs of economic growth, and such like. The ascent by the subjugated to their subjugation amounts to a positive but repressed acceptance of a 'false reality'. Awareness of this false consensus should lead to the questioning of this tradition of assumptions which has been inherited from our history and so, like the patient's self-understanding, be the crucial step to overcoming them.

The critical edge to depth hermeneutics is provided by the theory of distorted communication. However, this itself is premised upon the possibility of non-distorted communication, a possibility which is sketched out in the theory of communicative competence. Historical materialism has indicated the overall nature and origins of ideology. Depth hermeneutics will show how it is to be comprehended and overcome. But to hold a distinction between true and false consciousness, Habermas has to show that non-distorting communication is possible and, furthermore, how we could recognise it. Habermas does not appeal to a simplistic notion of 'truth' to help him out here since he realises that the possibility that any procedures for ascertaining such truth would be open to the allegation of distortion remains. Instead, he takes the route of appealing to the notion of a rational community in which interests are fully acknowledged and all positions open to critical inspection. In this idealised, rational speech community, false consciousness could be detected and brought to light because we know the preconditions which give rise to it. Our sensitivity to these preconditions would alert us to the possibility of distorted communication; that our arguments might be ideological.

The point of Habermas' critical hermeneutics is to argue to the possibility of the idealised speech community and so contribute to the transformation of the conditions of human life. Whereas traditional Hermeneutics was concerned with the achievement of a unity of

interpretation — be that as a methodological problem for the social and historical sciences, as with Dilthey or Schleiermacher, or as the ontological prerequisite for human existence or being-in-the-world as in Gadamer — Habermas wishes to transcend the illusory unity imposed by ideology through tradition and language and so liberate mankind from the forces of domination and oppression that require these ideologies. Such liberation will be achieved with the attainment of the rational, free society built upon critical self-understanding. In so doing, Habermas has sought not simply to move beyond Gadamer's philosophy and Dilthey and Schleiermacher's methodology but to synthesise the duality, the distinction, between the scientific and the hermeneutic disciplines. The synthesis in depth hermeneutics will be a social philosophy that marries the philosophical anthropology of Marx with the hermeneutic method.

Recommended Reading

Dilthey's works are voluminous. H.A. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey, An Introduction* (Routledge, 1944) contains some fifty pages of translations. Similarly H.P. Richman, *Meaning in History* (Allen and Unwin, 1961) provides a full discussion of Dilthey's philosophy of history along with selected passages. Z. Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science* (Hutchinson, 1978) offers an extensive and accessible discussion of the hermeneutic strain in the social sciences. J. Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Routledge, 1980) contains selections from a discussion, sometimes difficult, of more contemporary hermeneutic thinkers. The fullest statement of Gadamer's views, though it is long, is his *Truth and Method* (Sheed and Ward, 1975). Habermas' critique of Gadamer's views, 'A review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*', is to be found in F.R. Dallmyr and T.A. McCarthy (eds.), *Understanding and Social Inquiry*. (Notre Dame Press, 1977). Habermas' own corpus is, like Dilthey's, enormous and growing, though his *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Heinemann 1971) is, perhaps, the best treatment of his response to hermeneutics. D. Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory* (Hutchinson, 1980) and T.A. McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Hutchinson, 1978) are both excellent, and readable, detailed expositions and commentaries on Habermas' thought and its development. A more than usefully clear essay setting out the logic of Hermeneutics and its implications for social analysis, using examples

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from political science, is C. Taylor's excellent essay, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of man', in R. Beahler and A.R. Dringson (eds.), *The Philosophy of Society* (Methuen, 1978), pp. 156-200.