

الملخص

تحاول هذه الدراسة أن توضح أولاً منظور غادامر الهيرمنيوطيقي والمبني على البعد الأنطولوجي لـ "النص"؛ ثانياً تحليل السمة الحوارية لـ "اللغة" والتي تشكل الأساس الترانسندنتالي لإمكانية التفسير الحقيقي للنص؛ وثالثاً الاعتراضات التي وجهت إلى منظور غادامر. وسأحاول أن أبين كيف أن الخصائص الأنطولوجية لمعنى النص، وفقاً لغادامر، هي التي تشكل الأساس في البحث عن الحقيقة في التأويل.

Hermeneutic understanding is primarily a way of recovering the meaning of utterances and performances of historical agents . However, what distinguishes it from other modes of inquiry is that the historical nature of it's claim about the historically of human existence and the plurality of historical wolds. As an awareness of the historicity of being , the hermeneutic understanding represents what happens when we understand any objects –natural or social. In other words, it is not a method that seeks to provide insight into an object " in itself", an object, the meaning of which is independent of its interpretation. The meaning of object is rather only constituted in the history of it's interpretation; it is the product of the interaction between historically interpreted object and a historically situated object of knowledge. In this way Gadamer argues that while the historicity of existence must be acknowledged by all disciplines and modes of inquiry, a " Fusion of Horizons" of the subject and object can be envisaged only in Geisteswissenschaften .This paper attempts to explore ^(a) Gadamer's hermeneutic perspective as it is grounded in the ontological features of the subject-matter of the text; ^(b) the

dialogical character of language as providing a transcendental ground for the possibility of giving a true interpretation of text; (c) the objections which are raised against Gadamer's perspective. I shall attempt to articulate how the ontological characteristics of textual meaning can, as Gadamer argues, provide a basis for truthfulness in interpretation.

INTRODUCTION:

Under the somewhat ironic title "Truth and Method", Hans-George Gadamer has published the most substantial treatise on hermeneutic theory that has come from Germany in this century. In the preface to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer states explicitly that 'hermeneutics' no longer to be identified with the narrow methodological interests of the human sciences as it had been during most of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the 20th century. The importance of Gadamer's work for the current discussions of the methodology of the human sciences lies in suggesting that the problems that arise within these discussions are a consequence of a false characterization of their projects. Despite their differences, positivist and classical German hermeneutic approaches to the human sciences share a common presumption, viz., that the purpose of the philosophy of the human sciences is to uncover the conditions of the possibility of their objectivity. Thus logical empiricists demand that social scientific explanations be modeled after natural scientific, and argue that the objectivity of such explanations depends upon the possibility of deductions from empirically established general laws. The classical hermeneutic tradition attempted to found the objectivity of the human sciences on various models of textual understanding in which the comprehension of the meaning of the whole informs the understanding of the parts and the understanding of the parts informs the comprehension of the whole. Hermeneutic tradition of the nineteenth century attempted also to view the logic of the social sciences in terms of the model of schleiermachiian hermeneutics which involves (a) defining the object of social and historical studies as providing access to the original intention of the author of a text; (b) comprehending the possibility of understanding in a transposition out of one's own historical epoch and a suspension of its categories and commitments.

Gadamer's program is aimed at establishing the possibility of objectivity valid understanding (*verstehen*) in the human sciences in a way which opposes any reductionistic attempt to ground this so-called "operation" in the method of the natural sciences. The purpose of reflection upon the human sciences cannot, according to Gadamer's

view, be formulated as an attempt to uncover the conditions of their objectivity for, strictly speaking, they are not objective. The human sciences do not provide insight into an object "in itself", an object, the meaning of which is independent of its interpretation. The meaning of the object is rather only constituted in the history of its interpretation. In this way, Gadamer opens the meaning of social - historical phenomena to the movement history. The meaning of an action or historical event cannot be identified with its agents' or participants' intentions. Neither can the social and historical sciences be viewed as means of providing access to these intentions. The meaning of actions and texts is rather the product of the interaction between historically interpreted object and a historically situated object of knowledge (Attar, 1998).

To this extent, there is no definite object in the human sciences and no definite knowledge of it. Every generation must interpret its heritage differently, in as much as it perceives it from a different vantagepoint subjects it to different questions and relates it to different concerns. As Gadamer puts this point:

"True historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. 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. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship in which exist both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (Gadamer, 1981, P.267).

This is the decisive point for Gadamer. It entails that a proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the affectivity of history within understanding itself. This means that hermeneutic understanding will be a process of working out the implications of the interaction between the subject and the object of knowledge; it will be process of elaborating an historically produced meaning by mediating it with the historical situation from which it is understood.

This endeavor is closely tied to a particular conception of the impact of "tradition" on human understanding and behavior.

In the judgement of Gadamer, tradition, including sociolinguistic injustice conceptions, literary and aesthetic works, and all culturally transmitted symbolic creations, is the *ursprung* of those value orientations that condition social life and it must be taken into account as an epistemological and sociological factor of the highest order. The significance of this view is augmented by the fact that it contravenes the bifurcation of knowledge and evaluation implicit in the epistemological presuppositions of current strains of neo-positivist philosophy of science. For Gadamer, the connection between knowledge, evaluation, and cultural bias is an epistemological pre-condition for the very possibility of textual understanding and sociological understanding - an interdependence which does not be obtained in normal research practice of the natural sciences. In spite of this structural dependence upon cultural presuppositions and evaluation, the task of understanding and interpretation, Gadamer contend, is not removed from considerations of objective validity. Objectively valid interpretation must invoke a critical reflection, which exposes and overcomes both the incomprehensible idiosyncrasies of the semantic object and the distorting prejudices of the interpreter. The aim of interpretation, then, is to reach a sort of agreement between the interpreter and his object while at the same time preserving their differences(Ibid.,.PP.349-50).

Gadamer's view of interpretation has been objected by so many writers. Emilio Betti's "Hermeneutics as the general methodology of the *Geistwissenschaften*"(1980) Constitutes the basic critique of *Truth & Method*. He raises two basic objections. Firstly, that Gadamer confounds empirically different modes of interpretation, treating them indiscriminately as one activity. Secondly, that Gadamer fails to provide normative criteria for distinguishing correct from mistaken interpretation. In one form or another these objections have become the standard critical approach to T & M. (For details see E.D. Hirsch (1967), & K.O. Apel (1973), & Habermas(1978).

This paper attempts to explore (1) Gadamer's hermeneutic perspective as it is grounded in the ontological features of the subject-matter of the text; (2) the dialogical character of language as providing a transcendental ground for the possibility of giving a true interpretation of text; (3) the objections which are raised against Gadamer's perspective. I shall attempt to articulate how the ontological characteristics of textual meaning can, as Gadamer argues, provide a basis for truthfulness in interpretation.

1- The Problem of Interpretation

Gadamer's controversial critique of scientific method in *Truth & Method* became something of a cause celebre in the early sixties among German intellectuals of both radical and conservative bent who were united in their opposition to positivism. What these intellectuals particularly found objectionable about positivism was its nihilistic separation of knowledge and evaluation (truth and practical decision). It was precisely this denial of practical truth which led Gadamer to attempt to restrict the use of scientific method as a conduit of truth by appealing to a different, practical kind of knowledge, which he maintained was hermeneutical in character and provides a philosophical basis for objective interpretation.

The issue of truth and interpretation assumes paramount importance in *Truth and Method*, where it is framed within the context of a polemical reaction to the Enlightenment ethos of rational autonomy and self-determination, unrestrained critical reflection, and methodological regimentation of and control over moral conduct as exemplified in Kant's philosophy.

This polemic is introduced in conjunction with what appears to be a fairly academic treatment of the problem of obtaining objectively valid interpretation in the human sciences. Gadamer approaches this problem from a meta-hermeneutical perspective. In order to determine the methodological procedures appropriate for guiding objective interpretation, Gadamer undertakes a prior investigation of the conditions underlying the possibility of human understanding in general. The results of this investigation prove that human

understanding is rooted in a process of cultural transmission that limits the extent to which the interpreter can gain objectivity through the controlled use of scientific method. It not only attempts to show that the use of scientific method fails to promote the acquisition of objective understanding in the human sciences and is even detrimental to achieving this end, but more important it attempts to show that the activity of critical interpretation is not independent of a pre-critical reliance on tradition and is subordinated to its authority. The upshot of this analysis is that critical interpretation, far from shattering the authority of tradition, rather preserves and extends it (ibid.,P.267).

The most striking and controversial characteristic of Gadamer's argument is the way it ties the possibility of objectivity valid interpretation and the kind of practical knowledge which it affords to a positive "rehabilitation" of cultural prejudice and tradition as a source of insight. Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice is undertaken in conjunction with a critique of a predominant tendency in the humanities which define objective understanding in terms of a methodological securing of a disinterested attitude on the part of the interpreter. The major assumption underlying this view is that the interpreter is capable of suspending the inherited of deeply engrained, culturally inherited values which pre-critically condition his understanding, thereby guaranteeing the objectivity of his knowledge. This method which is the hallmark of disinterested knowing in the natural sciences, was adopted as archetypal for interpretation in contemporary hermeneutic theory.

Prior to the emergence of Romanticism, hermeneutics was primarily delegated the task of biblical criticism. In the early period of biblical hermeneutics, the problem of identifying the canonical meaning of the scriptures was that of deciphering the kerygmatic message of the text with church dogma. With the advent of the Enlightenment and the Protestant reformation this effort was redirected against the dogmatic tradition of the church. With the rise of Romanticism in the nineteenth century and its supreme estimation of individuality, hermeneutics became a thoroughly historical discipline. Since Schleiermacher, this tendency has transferred the

focus of interpretation away from its original concern with the message of the text and re-oriented it toward the spiritual life of people as a whole. For Schleiermacher, the task of interpretation is to reproduce the "novelty of genius", the creative process underlying artistic thought, even if this means understanding the author's intentions better than he himself did. This psychological approach to interpretation directly subordinates the communicated message of the text to whatever value it might have as a historical document. In conjunction with the data provided by the narrative of the text, the individual thought processes are reconstructed against the background of concentric circles of non-textual information, including the author's own biographical history and the cultural history of the community to which he belonged. Schleiermacher divides hermeneutic interpretation into two areas of concern, which mutually complement one another. Grammatical interpretation considers the meaning of a text or discourse in terms of its language alone, that is, in terms of the semantic and syntactic structure of the composition. However real understanding is only achieved in psychological interpretation, where the individuality of the author is understood against the background of his biographical history and the culture of his society (Schleiermacher, 1986, PP.74-75). This conception of understanding was carried over into the Historical School of Droysen and Ranke, who maintained that historical understanding should be a reconstruction of the self-contained life of individual historical communities - a notion which later received its epistemological underpinnings in Dilthey's lebensphilosophie. According to Dilthey, the meaning of all-human creations and expressions is identical to the mental life from which they arose. In his post-psychological period he extends the category of mental life to include the animating spirit of concrete historical communities which reflects a general world-outlook shared by all members of a given society. Dilthey asserts that the proper aim of understanding is ultimately a process of reproduction; it is the empathic re-experience of the original mental content by retracing the creative process of life in a constant advance:

"Understanding as such moves in the reverse order to the sequence of events. But full empathy depends on

understanding moving with the order of events so that it keeps step with the course of life. It is in this way that empathy expands. Re-experiencing follows the line of events. We progress with a history of a period, with an event abroad or with the mental processes of a person close to us. Re-experiencing is perfected when the event has been filtered through the consciousness of a poet, artists or historian and lies before us in a fixed and permanent work"(Dilthy, 1986,P159).

Following Ranke, Dilthey's hermeneutics restricts the scope of meaning to the original intentions of the historical agent and the spirit of his age "as it happened". Because this mental content is not permanent, i.e., does not perdure transhistorically, it essentially belongs to a closed world-horizon which is a lien to that of the interpreter. Consequently, the possibility of reconstructing it accurately rests upon the capacity of the interpreter to detach himself from his own cultural background and transpose himself into an alien world outlook. For Dilthey, detachment can be obtained in the sovereign contemplation of the relativity and continuity of the myriad of historical life-configurations(Dilthy,1962,PP167-8). In Dilthey's judgement, "dogmatic thought" is mistaken when it assumes that the living values of particular cultures are trans-historically valid for all ages. The historical school reproached the Hegelian system for essentially the same reason, namely, for having claimed to have deciphered a universal practical truth (freedom as the essence of spirit) which it claimed was immanent within history itself. The merit of the historical school, as Dilthey points out, lies in the recognition of the autonomy of individual historical eras and hence the criticism of their subsumption under the intellectual history of spirit's return to itself. Gadamer does not contest this rejection of systematic philosophy of history. History cannot reveal a priori practical truth. However, the historical school, with its emphasis upon detached understanding and historical reconstruction, undermined the possibility of transhistorically valid truth of any kind. Here, Gadamer says that Hegel was right in recognizing that a kind of practical truth could emerge through the dialectical continuity of historical

life-process to which the historian himself contributes (Gadamer, 196., PP174-5).

The Romantic hermeneutic tradition, whose major representative figure was Wilhelm Dilthey, assumed that objectivity valid interpretation could be guaranteed only if the interpreter detached himself from the culturally inherited prejudices. For Gadamer, not only is this detachment impossible for ontological reasons, but it militates against and detracts from the proper moral function of the humanistic disciplines as sources of practical knowledge. It detracts from the moral possibilities inherent in transmitted texts by ignoring truth-claims directly communicated in them and reducing textual meaning in general to expressions of life that are relative to self-contained historical communities. According to Gadamer, this method of interpretation betrays an uncritical reliance upon an epistemological assumption of the natural sciences which reflects the residual influence of Cartesianism, namely, the assumption that there is an ontological gulf separating the knowing subject from the known object (Ibid., P210 ff). For Romantic hermeneutics, the being of cultural products, i.e., the spirit of historical people, is regarded as alien to the spiritual being of the interpreter in much the same way that the scientist regards his own subjectivity as alien to extended substance (nature). Gadamer believes that by segregating cultural life into discrete organic units, the Romantic hermeneutics all too complacently embraces an ethical relativism. Furthermore, the epistemological strategies which follow from this dualism are regarded by him as exacerbating this tendency. In order to penetrate the allegedly alien semantic content of other culture, the Romantic hermeneutics attempts to transcend his own limited cultural horizon and empathetically re-experience the other from within. However, this internal reconstruction of alien life contents by - passes directly communicated textual meaning (the moral content of the text) in favor of a deeper "Lived-meaning". This is accomplished by viewing the problematic symbolic content as historical datum to be collated alongside political, social and biographical data for use in shedding light

on the inner spiritual life of the author and the community to which he belonged. In this way Romantic Hermeneutics saw as its primary task the historical reconstruction of archaic lifeworlds rather than the revitalization of tradition as such.

Against this view, Truth & Method can be seen as an attempt to retrieve the original focus of hermeneutics and its concern with truth. The central idea informing Gadamer's theory of truth is an ontological notion of human understanding. Gadamer writes:

"Understanding is not to be thought of as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused. This is what must be expressed in hermeneutical theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a process, a method"(Ibid.,P258).

Far from being a subjective, voluntary act, understanding is an event in which the interpreter participates and to which he contributes without, however, controlling. It is primarily an interplay of forces which are set in motion quite independently of the conscious will of the interpreter. Hence, it is characterized by an ineluctable momentum and autonomous "being" all its own to which the interpreter's train of thought submits. The major premise of Gadamer's argument is the Heideggerian claim that the interpreter and his tradition are ontologically constitutive of one another - a claim which amounts to a denial of the subject / object dichotomy at the basis of scientific methodology(Heidegger,1962,P191). Human understanding, according to Gadamer, is propelled forward by an a priori sedimentation of cultural values which taken together comprise the self-identity (or being) of the interpreter. These pre-reflective assumptions delimit a range of possible meaning which undergoes further determination in the course of interpretation. The interpreter re-interprets and thereby alters the meaning (or being) of the tradition which constitutes his own self - identity by extending its meaning to cover new contexts. The sense in which the interpreter can be said to stand in an active relationship to tradition is, of course, limited insofar as the

possibilities for interpretation are pre-determined by his own cultural horizon and the "given" possibilities of the concrete situation (the possibilities of meaning determined by the interpreter's cultural background are themselves elicited by narrative fragments which further limit the scope of interpretation.

2- Text and Truth

Gadamer contends that understanding, like ordinary communication, is primarily oriented toward a message conveyed in a symbolic medium. This message must be accorded certain rights as a possible bearer of truth. This is especially so in the case of tradition, the truth-claim of which have a validity and authority that accrue to them in the course of repeated transmission from generation to generation. The right of tradition to recognition dictates the true aim of interpretation, which is the disclosure of truth in its significance for the present age, a process, which Gadamer calls application. The historical hermeneutics, Gadamer says, "also has a task of application to perform, because it too serves the validity of meaning, in that it explicitly and consciously bridge the gap in time that separates the interpreter from the text and overcomes the alienation of meaning that the text undergo"(Gadamer,1981,P.278). In order to accomplish this task, the message which was originally framed in (and partially obscured by) the language and parochial values of an archaic or otherwise alien civilization, must be critically dislodged from its original vestment, restated in the vernacular of the interpreter's own social milieu, and be made relevant to the latter's specific concerns. The interpreter's pre-critical involvement in the practical life of his own community and his understanding of this life in term of that culture's linguistic conventions and social norms, is the basis of those preliminary reference points which guide and condition the extracting of meaning. So construed, objectivity is not attained by methodologically suspending one's cultural prejudices. Rather it is only by spontaneously projecting one's prejudice with the aim

of "risking" them in a critical encounter with the potentially antithetical normative horizon of the text that the parochial, or linguistic background, and anachronistic biases of the interpreter and text are first made explicit. Genuine understanding is regarded by Gadamer as a sort of agreement between two interlocutors (the interpreter and the text) which stand in distinct traditions and, as it were, involuntarily put forth normative claims that are submitted to mutual dialogical questioning. The dialogical reflection of the interpreter is only a conscientious extension of the pre-methodological process of reflection that occurs in ordinary understanding and communication wherever something new is assimilated to our familiar universe of discourse. Reflection remains within a dialogue in which traditions confront one another on their own terms and it does not seek to extricate itself from this tradition-bound encounter by evaluating it in terms that are alien to the dialogue itself (Ibid., P.258). This is a point which misled Gadamer's critics. In his recent writings, Habermas tends to present Gadamer as agreeing to a general version of consensus theory. This reading of Gadamer is misleading. According to Gadamer truth is the result of agreement but agreement is not the result of truth (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994, PP.188-90).

According to Gadamer, understanding has the same structure as communication, a view shared by the later Schleiermacher as well. Schleiermacher concluded that the aim of ordinary communicative understanding, like that of textual interpretation is to reproduce the individuality of the "thou". Gadamer objects to this description of understanding because it elides the fundamental intentional focus of communicating interlocutors, who directly attend to the spoken utterance. When communicating beings understand one another, they do not transcend their own subjectivity in an effort to transpose themselves into the alien subjectivity of the other. The process of psychological and historical reconstruction is not genuine understanding at all for it does not seek to grasp what is symbolic in the normal sense of the term, e.g., some message

or narrative. The mere psychological reconstruction of creative process does not itself convey or uncover such a content. Instead, this activity is more akin to giving a description and explanation of certain facts (Gadamer., PP. 158-59). In contrast, the activity involved in understanding a symbolic content is very much like a conversation. We "pay attention" on what is addressed to us directly and treat the vehicle of meaning as a dialogical partner rather than as a mere fact to be described and explained. Here the meaning that gets understood is no doubt grasped by each interlocutor in terms of his own subjective reference points, but insofar as it is shared, it has a certain independence and objectivity which transcends the particular intentions of the speaker. Understanding, then, aims at getting the meaning of the other straight in terms of one's own unique horizon of experience - a process which culminates in agreement based upon the reciprocal revision of one's own sense of what is understood vis - a - vis the utterances of the other.

As a particular kind of understanding, textual interpretation is primarily oriented toward the message of the text rather than toward the spiritual life of people as a whole. This message is addressed to our individual epoch in much the same way that an utterance is addressed to an individual speaker, viz., the message conveyed is addressed to us as something which has living relevance for us as well as for the author and his original audience. Thus cultural boundaries notwithstanding, the classical tragedies of an Aeschylus or Shakespeare affects us today as strongly as they affected the audiences who originally saw them performed. There is truth in what they have to say about human character and the human condition in general. This truth is no doubt understood differently by different people at different times- this is a necessary condition for having a living significance which is directly relevant to parochial concerns - but it retains the character of an authority which finds valid application for all epochs. Consequently, like the spoken utterances, textual meaning has certain independent existence which transcends the particular world outlook of

discrete historical communities and opens up possibilities of transhistorical agreement.

According to Gadamer, all forms of literature and symbolic representation assert a truth - claim of some kind. The difference between a literary work of art and any other literary text is, as Gadamer points out, "not so fundamental ... all literary works have a profound community in that the linguistic form makes effective the significance of the contents to be expressed. In this light the understanding of texts by say a historian, is not so very different from the experience of art" (Ibid., P.145). By including the historian's and, presumably, the social scientist's research within the purview of symbolic understanding, Gadamer implies that history as well as textual narrative is intrinsically meaningful in a way which transcends the intentions of historical actors and authors. The literary critic, for example, is capable of discovering "new" meaning in the text which the original author may not have intended. The same applies to the historian's research though somewhat differently.

Gadamer agrees that the historian and literary critic approach textual sources in radical divergent ways. Whereas the latter approaches the text as a work of art which has a truth to convey, the historian, like the Romantic hermeneutics, approaches the text as if it were only an expression of historical life, either the life of a people or the life of a particular historical agent. In any event, the message of the text is passed over by the historian in favor of what the text as one empirical artifact among other artifacts indirectly attests to, e.g., an underlying motive of action (Ibid., P.301).

Gadamer does not deny the validity of deploying objectifying methods of scientific research in the historical and social sciences for purposes of gathering data. More important, however, is his claim that the historian is involuntarily thrust out of the role of empirical scientist and into the role of literary critic insofar as he is enjoined to offer something more than mere chronicle of events. The bare facts (individual texts as expressions of subjective motivation and intention) are not the real object of historical inquiry. Rather, it is the meanings

which ties them together into a coherent narrative; it is what the facts or "the text did not at all intend to say, but which we find expressed in it" (ibid., P.304). Thus, historical narrative, like literary criticism, evaluates its subject - matter and advances truth - claims about the possibilities and limitations inherent in human life.

"Thus we too acknowledge that there is an inner unity between criticism and historical studies, but we do not see it in the universality of the historical method, nor in the objecting replacement of the interpreter by the original reader, nor in the historical critique of tradition as such, but, on the contrary, in the fact that both perform a work of application that is different only in degree. If the critic understands ... himself in the text .. the historian also .. understand himself in this great text .. Both find their true ground in effective historical consciousness (ibid., P.305).

Although all literature advances some truth claims, Gadamer observes that the normative content of world literature, history, philosophy and art is what sets them apart from other forms of literature. Compared to (scientific) theoretical knowledge, the human sciences, as Gadamer points out, stand close to moral knowledge, i.e., practical truth. For Gadamer, the true aim of hermeneutic interpretation is the disclosure of truth, the practical truth, in its significance for the present age, a process which Gadamer calls "application". The hermeneutic notion of application designates a process whereby something universal and indeterminate is made concretely valid and meaningful for a particular situation. According to Gadamer, application occurs whenever a tradition is handed down and made valid for new generation. This holds true for the naive, uncritical assimilation of tradition which spontaneously occurs within the ongoing life of historical communities as well as for the conscious, critical interpretation of texts by skilled hermeneutics. Generally, application is required whenever an effort must be made to understand, viz., whenever an expression is both familiar enough to be made comprehensible and yet sufficiently alien to merit special interpretive attention. "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 a part of tradition. The true home of hermeneutics is this intermediate area"(Ibid.,P262). Thus, hermeneutic application involves an effort to again an understanding, which is not simply given in the same way that everyday communication and reading unproblematically register a transparent meaning. To recapitulate, the problem of hermeneutical application concerns the task of retranslating the message, or truth - claim of the text, into the historically unique vernacular of one's own familiar universe of discourse without leveling its provocative content through untoward assimilation. In other words, when we recognize that a text addresses us directly and that the words and expressions convey a certain meaning immediately, we need , as Gurpreet Mahajan puts it, "to be conscious of appropriating the text within the horizons of our Weltanschauung"(Mahajan,1997,P.62). This requires the overcoming of two obstacles. First the universal content of the text must be capable of being discerned amidst the archaic forms it assumes in the textual narrative. Second , the pre-reflective prejudices of the interpreter which obscure and distort the meaning of the text must be made explicit. According to Gadamer, this dual process of reflection cannot be adequately achieved by means of methodological detachment. In order for prejudices on the part of the interpreter to be made conscious and anachronisms in the text to be filtered out, a non-methodological distance must be established in the very act of understanding. Gadamer maintains that the possibility for attaining hermeneutic objectivity,i.e. the meta-hermeneutic basis for separating unproductive prejudices and anachronisms from the objective content of the text is temporal distance.

"The temporal distance which performs the filtering process is not closed circumscription, but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension .. It not only lets those prejudices that are of a particular and limited nature die away, but causes those that bring about genuine understanding to emerge clearly as such "

Contrary to the historicist belief that "temporal distance" is an obstacle to be overcome through empathetic re-living,

Gadamer argues that it rather provides the critical distance necessary for extracting the true meaning of the text. By bringing his own conception to bear on the text, the interpreter, as Gadamer insists does not aim at producing it in its original sense. Not only does the text, at every stage, represent more than the author's intended; it is also read differently in a different circumstances and this is 'why understanding is not merely reproductive but always a productive attitude as well'(Ibid.,P.264). The temporal distance between the interpreter and the text might offer a best result; it might let "the true meaning of the object emerge fully". For this to happen one must be prepared to face his own prejudices, his expectation of meanings, to face the risk of their being exposed as groundless. We do in interpreting a text want to identify our own prejudices. But "it is impossible to make ourselves aware of it while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so the speak, stimulated. The encounter with a text from the past provide this stimulus"(Ibid.,P.266). If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance of our hermeneutic situation, Gadamer remarks, "we are always subject to the effects of effective history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation"(Ibid., pp.267-8). Of course, temporal distance is not the only condition under which interpretation can occur, but it is the primary one. The interpretation of alien cultures, it would seem can also achieve the same separation even though they may be contemporaneous with our own culture. However, the possibility of successful transcultural interpretation presupposes some common cultural ground uniting the interpreter and the tradition he is studying. In the case of historical interpretation, especially philology, this common ground is often guaranteed simply by etymological inclusion of the interpreter's vernacular idiom within the linguistic horizon of the text.

According to Gadamer, the interpreter has the structure of a game. (Gadamer, 1977, PP.188-9 & Gadamer, 1986, chapter

8).in which each participant responds to the other without controlling in advance the ebb and flow of the play. The ontological thrust of this metaphor is that the interpreter is primarily concerned with the emergence of objective meaning, which transpires as an event. Just as the participants in a game are not directly aware of themselves but are totally observed in the play, so, too, the interpreter loses himself in the event of understanding and concentrates his attention solely on the text's message. The event of understanding confronts of the interpreter as a sort of fact because his own hermeneutic train of thought is ineluctably drawn along by the narrative of the text.

Elsewhere Gadamer talks about interpretation as a game of conversation. In conversation the direction of the dialogue and the ebb and flow of questions and answers has a sort of autonomy all of its own which eludes the conscious intentions of the interlocutors. Similarly, in the course of interpretation, the interpreter surrenders himself to the spontaneous impulses of his own effective history which are aroused by the objective content of the narrative. The questions he addressed to the text, which reflects the values of his own community, occur naturally and pre-reflectively. As in any conversation, what is asked and said is "put at risk" insofar as it may not elicit the appropriate response from the other interlocutor. Actual conversations may vary according to the degree to which the interlocutors strive to understand each other. However, conversation can elevate itself to the level of true dialogue if the interlocutors refrain from imposing their pre-conceived assumptions on what gets said. The primary consideration in this endeavor is to maintain oneself in a receptive attitude of openness toward the other. Gadamer argues that every possibility of communication rests upon a mutual assumption of openness on the part of the interlocutors, even though the extent to which this assumption is redeemed may vary empirically from case to case. Dialogical openness is essentially characterized by mutual recognition(Gadamer,1981,P.305). The notion of mutual recognition is further elaborated by Gadamer in terms of the concepts of right and self limitation.

The experience of the "thou" as Gadamer remarks, throws light on the idea of effective historical experience. It also manifests the paradoxical element that something standing over against me "asserts its own rights and requires absolute recognition and in that very process is understood" (Ibid., P. 320). Gadamer also mentions the positive acceptance of the potential rationality of what is asserted by the other as a necessary condition for true understanding. To take seriously one's task of understanding the other implies that the latter's claim be regarded as if it were meaningful in a rational sense. But this further implies that, contrary to the customary beliefs of the interpreter, what the other says as true.

"..... the openness to tradition possessed by effective historical consciousness... has a real correspondence with the experience of the 'Thou'. In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the 'thou' as a 'thou', i.e., not to overcome his claim to what he has to say to us. To this end, openness is necessary. Without this kind of openness to one another there is no human relationship... when two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person understands the other, in the sense of surveying him. Similarly, to hear and obey someone does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires.. openness to the other includes the acknowledgement that I must accept something that are of the myself .. I must allow the validity of the claim made by tradition, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me" (Ibid., P. 324).

The openness, characteristic of conscientious textual interpretation comes with the gradual attainment of what Gadamer calls effective historical consciousness. It is essentially an awareness of one's historical finitude (the omnipresence of effective history in

one's understanding) and of the temporal distances which separates one from the object of one's study. This consciousness involves the "attainment of higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity, but also that of the other".

"If we place ourselves in the situation of someone else, for example, then we shall understand him, i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person by placing ourselves in his position. This placing .. is not the empathy of one individual for another nor is it the application to another person of our own criteria, but it always involve a higher universality, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other"(Ibid.,P.272).

The awareness of one's essential historical finitude, a factor which already distinguishes Gadamer's notion of historical consciousness from Dilthey's, is accompanied by an awareness of the authoritative truth accumulated in tradition (the substantiality underlying all subjectivity) which transcends one's own horizon and that of the text.

The interpreter, then seeks to come to terms with the text through a process of mutual dialogical questioning. Here "agreement" connotes the "fusion of horizons which define objective understanding and disclosure of truth. By attaining a common ground where the interpreter's familiar universe of discourse meets the strange and potentially critical horizon of the text without assimilating it onesidely to the present or retaining it as a dead anachronism, the validity of the text's truth-claim is both preserved and extended. Of course, the interpreter must speak for the text and consequently, there is a sense in which his own parochial horizon necessarily functions as the universal medium and consensual basis for dialogue. Although it is true that the questions which the interpreter ask the text reflect the parochial concerns of his socio-political horizon, the aim of true understanding, nonetheless, is to find just those questions which open up the original meaning of the text. These questions should coincide with the question to

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