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*A Propaedeutic to Dialogue*

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**On The Oneness Of The Hermeneutical Horizon(s)**

SAULIUS GENIUSAS

**&**

**On The Importance Of Getting Things Straight**

GARY BRENT MADISON

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# On The Oneness Of The Hermeneutical Horizon(s)

SAULIUS GENIUSAS

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From the very first page of *Truth and Method* onwards, Gadamer speaks of the *phenomenon of understanding as the hermeneutical problem*, while in one of its best-known definitions, understanding is said to be "the fusion of the horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (*Truth* 306). It is therefore hard to overestimate the significance of the fusion of the horizons for Gadamer's hermeneutics, since it provides an answer to "the heart of the hermeneutical problem" (312) – the question concerning the relationship between the particular and the universal. While the *application* of the universal to the particular is said to be *the central hermeneutical problem*, understanding is characterized as "a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation" (312). Although Gadamer repeatedly tells us that application is never to be taken in a technical and hegemonic sense, that it is essentially dialogical and open-ended, his hermeneutical analysis of universality and particularity has led to a number of misunderstandings and misplaced criticisms.

Gadamer's hermeneutics is often characterized as hegemonic and often criticized for being incapable of accounting for genuine alterity. It is often claimed that the sublation of the other, which the fusion of the horizons achieves, does not preserve but rather eradicates otherness; that in the context of contemporary social concerns the

hermeneutic model is not capable of hearing what the other actually says. Thus, Robert Bernasconi criticizes Gadamer for not being able to offer an account of a common experience, which can be summarized in the following phrase: "You cannot be yourself and understand me." This is what women say to men, the poor to the rich, the victim to the oppressor, the target of racism to the racist. TAccording to Bernasconi, this is the sociopolitical framework that Gadamer prefers to ignore. Moreover, these are the obstacles that cannot be overcome by Gadamer's hermeneutical strategy.

But on what basis is one to claim that the often-encountered indifference to the other (and to the self) reveals a *conceptual impossibility* of genuine contact between ipseity and alterity? Who is this "I myself," devoid of any *possible* change and any genuine contact with others? Who is this "you yourself," who *by definition* can never understand me? Are the implied conceptions of selfhood and otherness by Bernasconi not, as Gadamer would argue, a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream (see *Truth* 304)? To distance the other from the self by abolishing any contact between them – does this path lead us to an accurate understanding of "genuine otherness?"

"You cannot be yourself and understand me" – contra Bernasconi, it is precisely within this context that one experiences the full significance of Gadamer's hermeneutics. One cannot rest content with the common sociopolitical experiences of not being heard, of ignoring the other's claim, or of overpowering the other under the pretext of openness. Gadamer's unveiling of the presuppositions which underlie the incommensurabilist stance and the normative force of his emphasis on openness in our contact with the other gain

their full force in these and similar experiences. Hence the necessity to discover the self in the other and the other in the self, which the fusion of the horizons aims to achieve.

Gadamer's fusion of the horizons reveals a distinct stance in regard to the relation between ipseity and alterity. However, the very fact that this fusion is described in such an ambiguous manner – as the fusion of horizons *supposedly existing by themselves* – has made it easy to miss the crucial features of his position. Why does Gadamer simultaneously speak of the oneness and the multiplicity of horizons? Why is he reluctant to tell us whether there are many horizons or just one? And if the latter is the case, are we still justified in calling his hermeneutics dialogical?

With these questions in mind, I want to address Richard Kearney's critique of Gadamer, which he unfolds while accentuating the specificity of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Making *Truth and Method* vulnerable to those dangers that Kearney sees present in Gadamer's discussion of the fusion of the horizons will constitute the detour and the confrontation through which I aim to unfold the relevance and the limits of the oneness of the hermeneutical horizon(s).

## I.

In "Between Oneself and Another: Paul Ricoeur's Diacritical Hermeneutics," Richard Kearney presents the relation between self and other as the central hermeneutical problem. According to Kearney, there are three paradigmatic ways for the relation between ipseity and alterity to be dealt with and therefore hermeneutics itself can be divided into three types: *romantic*, *radical*, and *diacritical*. Schleiermacher, Dilthey, and,

surprisingly, Gadamer are said to be the main representatives of romantic hermeneutics, characteristic of which is the attempt to unite the self and the other in the event of appropriation. At the other extreme, Caputo's radical hermeneutics rejects the model of appropriation and addresses the unmediated and "sublime" nature of alterity, invoking an irreducible dissymmetry between self and other. In between these positions lies diacritical hermeneutics, inspired by Ricoeur, which "obviates both the congenial communion of fused horizons and the apocalyptic rupture of non-communion" (Kearney 155), while exploring the inter-communion of distinct but not incomparable selves.

Within this typology, one encounters the specificity of Ricoeur's hermeneutics in how it deals with what Kearney terms "today's challenge" – that of acknowledging a difference between self and other while avoiding a schismatic division which would not allow any relation between them. In contrast to the mainstream metaphysical tradition which largely ignores the question of the Other, and in contrast to some postmodern thinkers who externalize alterity to the point that there can be no communication between self and other, the central task of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is that of "building paths between the worlds of *autos* and *heteros*," of "charting a course between the extremes of tautology and heterology" (Kearney 150). Diacritical hermeneutics discovers the other in the self and the self in the other; it supplements the critique of the self with the critique of the other; its task is that of making the foreign more familiar and the familiar more foreign. It distinguishes between different kinds of selves and others ("Not all 'selves' are evil and not all 'others' are angelic" [150]), while refusing to accept the excesses of mainstream metaphysics and postmodernism. Thus, Ricoeur's works are not

representative of "modern" philosophical reflection, which has been centered on the subject; nor does it share the "postmodern" fixation on Otherness. Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers new ways of interpreting oneself in terms of otherness.

No matter how sketchy Kearney's critique of Gadamer is, let us attend to it in more detail. Gadamer is grouped together with Schleiermacher and Dilthey because the purpose of all three is "to unite the consciousness of one subject with that of the other" (154-55). Kearney labels this approach "hermeneutics of appropriation" while emphasizing the meaning of the German *Aneignung* – "becoming one with." Since becoming one presupposes a more original difference, Kearney is critical of this style of hermeneutics because, supposedly, it eliminates what it presupposes – the otherness of the other – as it recovers "some lost original consciousness by way of rendering what is past contemporaneous with the present" (155). This is how Kearney interprets Gadamer's reconciliation of our own understanding and that of strangers in the fusion of the horizons.

My analysis of this critique will follow three steps. First, I shall show how distant Kearney's dissatisfaction with Gadamer is from Gadamer's hermeneutics. However, even though this distance is apparent to anyone who has listened to what Gadamer actually had to say, the true challenge of Kearney's critique lies in the fact that it finds textual support. Thus, secondly, I will bring to light the textual basis of Kearney's position and in this way point to certain ambiguities present in *Truth and Method*. Finally, I will address these ambiguities directly, showing how Gadamer's text is capable of overcoming them.

Neither Kearney's claim that Gadamer is a proponent of romantic hermeneutics, nor the way he presents Gadamer's position as a "hermeneutics of appropriation" fits Gadamer's texts. The claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics is a romantic project ignores two central features which distance Gadamer from both Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Gadamer's hermeneutics springs out of the rejection of two distinctive elements of romantic hermeneutics – of a certain *psychologism* and *objectivism*, which Gadamer finds present in both Schleiermacher and Dilthey. *Psychologism* can be characterized by two interrelated claims: 1. the goal of interpretation is to trace the path from the textual expression to that originary experience which can characterize the inner life of the author; 2. the meaning of the text is fixed by the intention of the author. *Objectivism* can be characterized by two interrelated claims as well: 1. the intention of the author provides the text with a *fixed* object which serves as a condition of possibility of interpretation's *objectivity*; 2. interpretation must follow certain rules so that it can be rigorously methodological, and therefore objective. Gadamer embraces two themes which were of central significance to both Schleiermacher and Dilthey – the universality of the hermeneutic problem and the hermeneutic circle. However, he does not accept these themes blindly, but rather offers their reinterpretation.<sup>1</sup> Thus, even though Gadamer's rejection of psychologism and objectivism does not mean a single-handed rejection of the principles and concerns of romantic hermeneutics, it does signify a crucial distance between Gadamer and the Romantics, which directly contradicts and challenges Kearney's assertions.

Kearney's description of Gadamer's hermeneutics as a "hermeneutics of appropriation" is surprising in respect to *Truth and Method*, since this accusation directly echoes Gadamer's critique of Hegel. Being fully aware that Hegel's concerns overlap with those of hermeneutics – both are concerned with the fusion of the present and history – Gadamer distances himself from Hegel by claiming that the basis of hermeneutics is not an absolute mediation of history and truth; that the fusion of the horizons is not a fusion of the whole past in the present; that understanding is not an abolition of finiteness in the infinity of knowledge. Contra Kearney, Gadamer's hermeneutics does not signify the abolition of otherness in the fusion of the horizons, for even though Gadamer acknowledges Hegel's logical superiority over his critics, "the arguments of reflective philosophy cannot ultimately obscure the fact that there is some truth in the critique of speculative thought based on the standpoint of finite human consciousness" (*Truth* 344). The ultimate truth of the critics of speculative thought lies in the realization that otherness is never abolished in the hermeneutic fusion of the horizons: As Gadamer provocatively tells us, we understand *only* if we understand differently. The worry about the abolition of otherness is just as significant to Gadamer as it is to Kearney. Thus Gadamer writes that there "constantly arises the danger of 'appropriating' the other person in one's own understanding and thereby failing to recognize his or her otherness" (299n); "It is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning" (305). In short, Kearney's labeling of Gadamer's hermeneutics as "hermeneutics of appropriation" is just as unjustified in the face of Gadamer's work as is his claim that Gadamer's hermeneutics is a Romantic project.



Moreover, Kearney's typology of hermeneutic styles, by introducing a lacuna between Gadamer and Ricoeur, is hardly justified not only in regard to Gadamer's, but also in regard to Ricoeur's works. In his conclusion to *Interpretation Theory*, Ricoeur addresses some misconceptions of what he terms "hermeneutic appropriation," chief among which are the assertions that 1. appropriation is a return to the Romanticist claim to a "congenial" coincidence with the "genius" of the author, and 2. the hermeneutic task is the understanding of the original addressee of the text. Ricoeur turns for support to Gadamer while addressing these misconceptions. Ricoeur claims that Gadamer has already shown why the second misconception is flawed: "the letters of Paul are no less addressed to me than to the Romans, the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Ephesians" (93). Ricoeur's repudiation of the first misconception is more significant in the present context:

[A]ppropriation has nothing to do with any kind of person to person appeal. It is instead close to what Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons: the world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer. And the ideality of the text is the mediating link in this process of horizon fusing (93).

Kearney's critique of Gadamer does not account for how Ricoeur's hermeneutics is related to Gadamer's. But more importantly, this critique violates *Truth and Method* so strongly, that it is hard to see the reasons that motivate Kearney's accusations. However, only if these reasons are reconstructed can Kearney's text constitute a true challenge and provoke one to revisit some tensions in *Truth and Method*.

## II.

Kearney's position seems less surprising in the face of the following passage from *Truth and Method*:

Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own. On the other hand, it is itself ... only something superimposed upon continuing tradition, and hence it immediately recombines with what it has foregrounded itself from in order to become one with itself again in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires (306).

This account or, as will soon become apparent, this *aspect* of the fusions of the horizons strengthens Kearney's accusations. If the otherness of the other is projected only so that it can be immediately reconquered in the unity of the horizon, are we dealing with true otherness? As Gadamer goes on to tell us, "In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded" (307). If otherness appears only so that it can be superseded, i.e., *abolished*, and moreover, if *Truth and Method* invites us to acknowledge that this abolition should be *immediate*, is one justified in calling Gadamer's hermeneutics the "hermeneutics of openness?" It seems that the very moment one acquires the conditions for the appearance of otherness, Gadamer eradicates them in "the true fusion of the horizons." But if this is the case, what at the outset seemed to be a philosophy of openness, now manifests itself as a hermeneutics of violence. Or so Kearney's critique of Gadamer seems to suggest.

These are the implications of Kearney's critique: What at the outset appears to be a fusion of sameness and otherness, in truth is a projection of sameness; what at the

outset appears to be openness to the other, in truth is a suppression of otherness. Kearney's accusations directed at Gadamer echo in the context of today's widespread and rapidly growing concern that social and political interactions only hide behind the rhetoric of openness the suppression and even abolition of otherness. Kearney's accusations, if correct, would render Gadamer's hermeneutics impotent in the context of today's social and political dangers. But do the problems that accompany the unprecedented interaction on a global scale point to the powerlessness of Gadamer's hermeneutics, or do they, on the contrary, reveal the strength of his stance?

Let us ask: What enables Gadamer to speak of overtaking the past consciousness in the present horizon of understanding (307), of immediately recombining with otherness (306), and of superseding the projected historical horizon (307)? The reconciliation that the fusion of the horizons brings forth presupposes the *oneness and unity of the horizon* as the possibility of the hermeneutic interaction. Although it might seem that the fusion of the horizons presupposes an original difference between them, Gadamer repeatedly insists that a non-dialectical understanding of difference does not do justice to the hermeneutic phenomenon. He writes: "When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within" (304). "Understanding is always the fusion of the horizons supposedly existing by themselves (306).

This is the ultimate provocation that Kearney offers: we are to account for the oneness of the horizon. Kearney's challenge boils down to two interrelated questions: 1.

Why does Gadamer speak of the oneness of the horizon? 2. How is this oneness to be understood in the context of *Truth and Method*?

### III.

Two interrelated qualifications render Kearney's critique questionable: 1. in Gadamer, the meaning of the oneness of the horizons is essentially *negative*; 2. Gadamer's account of oneness is *dialectical*. If nothing linked the horizons of ipseity and alterity, understanding would involve an empathetic transposition from the self to the other. Moverover, a suspension of all presuppositions and an abandonment of all truths and beliefs would be a necessary requirement for understanding otherness. This, however, is exactly the position which is relentlessly criticized by Gadamer. As he repeatedly tells us, "transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (305). *There are no closed horizons* – such is the minimal requirement of Gadamer's account of understanding. The oneness of the horizon is the expression Gadamer chooses to make this requirement explicit. Therefore, Gadamer's account of the oneness of the horizon is essentially *negative*, since all it says about the relation between self and other is that they are never so distant that they cannot enter into dialogue with each other. In short, no self and no other is in principle beyond dialogue, beyond understanding.

This negative qualification is closely linked to Gadamer's *dialectical* account of the oneness of the horizon. Gadamer describes understanding as the fusion of horizons which *supposedly exist by themselves*. He is reluctant to tell us whether there is one or many horizons, since it is one of the leading ambitions of his hermeneutics to overcome what he sees as a false opposition between oneness and multiplicity. Gadamer's interpretation of the fusion of the horizons is dialectical through and through, for it aims to show that the one is ultimately multiple, and that multiplicity is ultimately one. This is the Hegelian background of Gadamer's fusions of the horizons.

Hegel's dialectical account of identity and difference mocks the proponents of pure identity: if someone promises to teach me what God is, he wrote, but only informs me that God is God, my expectations are cheated. In Hegel's time, the overcoming of abstract identity was, arguably, more significant than the abandonment of pure difference, or so the critics of modernity's obsession with the subject persistently suggest. Our age seems to suffer from the other extreme: It is obsessed with schismatically separating the other from the self, with, as Kearney has it, externalizing "the category of alterity to the point that any contact with the self smacks of betrayal or contamination" (149). Following in the footsteps of Hegel, Gadamer's hermeneutics reveals the fictionality of the incommensurable difference:

Are there such things as closed horizons? ... Or is this a romantic refraction, a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream of historical enlightenment, the fiction of an unattainable island, as artificial as Crusoe himself? Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction (*Truth* 304).

A dialectic of oneness and difference is one of the central hermeneutic preconditions, since it reveals the meaning of the hermeneutic "belonging," of the commonality of the enabling prejudices. Hermeneutics starts from the presupposition that a bond links the interpreter to the interpreted. This presupposition does not signify the abolition of the other. On the contrary, it is the condition of possibility for the appearance of otherness. Thus hermeneutics "is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness ... [The tension] is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us ... *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between*" (Truth 295).

Such, then, is the meaning of Gadamer's negative and dialectical account of the oneness of the horizon: No horizons are incommensurable, since dialogue, in principle, has no limitations. Although each and every dialogue runs the risk of not reaching out to the other and beyond the rhetoric of openness merely subordinating otherness to the interpreter's claim, it is always possible to recognize these limitations. Gadamer's open-ended dialectic is concerned with making these limitations explicit, as his critique of Hegel shows. Moreover, the very fact that, while being critical of Hegel, Gadamer does not share the anti-Hegelian sentiment and does not distance otherness from the self to the point that there is no communication between them, indicates not the weakness, but the strength of his hermeneutics in the context of the present social concerns. For if Kearney is right in characterizing today's challenge as that of respecting the specificity of the other while not schismatically dividing the other from the self, Gadamer's hermeneutics, as the next section will show, offers the necessary resources to address this challenge seriously.

#### IV.

Gadamer's hermeneutics overcomes the shortcomings of the incommensurabilist stance, seen often as the only tolerant and respectful attitude in regard to the Other. By not acknowledging any bond between different cultures, languages, or subjectivities, no matter how nameless this bond can be, this stance, Gadamer's hermeneutics suggests, hides behind the surface an *indifference* to otherness. Only if there is a bond between the other and the self, only if the fusion of the horizons presupposes a certain unity, can the other make a claim upon me. The oneness of the horizon does not mean a suppression of otherness, but rather points to the fact that, as James Risser has it, "Gadamer's hermeneutics is concerned with the opening of shared life in which one is able to hear the voice of the other" (167). The very fact that Gadamer is most cautious in not providing this bond with much content is revealing: It indicates his concern that this link remain only a condition for hearing the other and does not overpower and ignore her uniqueness. Thus in "The Limitation of the Expert" Gadamer writes: "What we truly have in common and what unites us remains ... without a voice. Probably we are harvesting the fruits of a long training in the perception of differences and in the sensibility demanded by it" (192).

In the face of today's social and political challenges, it is simply not sufficient to claim that the only way to retain otherness is to grant it such a distant status that any contact with the self would smack of betrayal. As Gary Madison suggests, here one encounters one of the greatest merits of Gadamer's hermeneutics:

The overriding question today is, as Bassam Tibi formulates it: "[H]ow can we combine the need for common rules and norms in international society with the reality of enormous cultural diversity?" One thing that is clear is that any viable

global ethic capable of providing an alternative to a global clash of civilizations must provide for "common rules and norms," i.e., values that are themselves global. Nothing like this is to be expected from the cultural incommensurabilists (139).

Tibi's concern is so closely linked to what Kearney calls "today's challenge" that they both can be seen as two formulations of the same problem. Gadamer's hermeneutics answers them both in showing that the relation between the universal and the particular is not that of logical subsumption, but rather of co-determination. Since for Gadamer the relation between universality and particularity is not vertical or hierarchical, but rather lateral and circular, his universalism is nonessentialist and nonhegemonic, yet of a normative kind, allowing for the possibility of a philosophical critique of existing practices (Madison 140). The oneness of the horizon renders this circularity non-technical and therefore non-violent, for it reveals that the universal is not to be imposed on the particular, but rather that the particular finds its way to the universal on its own. But even this language is misleading, for it carries the connotation of a universal which is "set in stone," of the universal "in-itself," as if all that remained for us to do was to apply it to different cultures and individuals in a mechanical way. Gadamer's appropriation and reinterpretation of *phronesis* shows that principles can be adopted only in a context-sensitive way, that, as Madison has it, there is "no universal formula for the implementation of universal values" (141). Adoption of universal principles and laws always involves a creative adaptation of them. The hermeneutical co-determination of the universal and the particular means that, as the particular approaches the universal, it is both changed by and itself changes the universal. Precisely therefore it does not make sense to ask whether the self overpowers the other or the other overpowers the self in the



fusion of the horizons, for a crucial aim of Gadamer's hermeneutics is to unfold a certain oneness, a certain medium, or "the shared life," within which both the self and the other constantly gain new meanings and determinations. Here we find an implied respect for particularity of the other which is for Gadamer of a potentially decisive nature:

We may perhaps survive as a humanity if we would be able to learn that we may not simply exploit our means of power and effective possibilities, but must learn to ... respect the other as an other, whether it is nature or the grown cultures of peoples and nations, and if we would be able to learn to experience the other and the others, as the other of our self, in order to participate with one another" ("Reflections" 41).

The ethical implications of the oneness of the horizon clearly show that for Gadamer the oneness is both a *presupposition* and an *achievement*, that Gadamer uses the term both *descriptively*, to reveal the conditions of understanding, and that the term carries a *normative force*, since it is a task and a goal to be achieved in the face of social and political dangers. In both cases, oneness is accompanied by otherness. In case of oneness as a presupposition of understanding, otherness manifests itself as the condition of interpretation's objectivity: without otherness, no object of interpretation would be possible, for each and every interpretation would be merely of a narcissistic nature. But oneness is also an achievement: The task of interpretation is, while being guided by the text, to reveal its continuing significance, to bring it out of the past into the living present. This is achieved not by overcoming the temporal distance that separates us from the original text, but rather by revealing distance itself as a positive and a productive condition which enables understanding (*Truth* 297). Here lies the reason why to understand is always to understand differently: Temporal distance does not separate us

from the meaning of the text, but rather links us to it in a genuine way, revealing the significance of the hermeneutical belonging.

Here one encounters an answer to Kearney's claim that Gadamer's fusion of horizons abolishes otherness in the event of appropriation. Gadamer retains a difference between understanding and otherness, be it that of a text, a culture, or an individual. As is most clearly manifested in Gadamer's account of play, each and every work transcends itself as an original creation in the event of interpretation: A piece of music becomes actual when being performed; a novel achieves its actualization in the activity of reading. The meaning of a text or a text-analog cannot be reduced either to the intentions of the author, or to any particular interpretation of it. But if no single interpretation has the means of exhausting the interpreted object, Kearney's critique loses its basis. Since the hermeneutical reconquering, or as Gadamer sometimes even says, of reconstruction, is not to be understood in a psychological sense, the task of Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be seen as the abolition of otherness in the event of understanding, because that would ignore a clear separation not only between the individuality of the text's author and the text's meaning, but also between the particularity of a single interpretation and the overflow of the text's capabilities. Hence, the normative character of the oneness of the horizon shows why Kearney's critique of Gadamer is misplaced. On the one hand, otherness is not exhausted in appropriation. On the other hand, the act of appropriation is not to be understood as the subjection of the other to the self, but as the rising of the other and of the self to a higher universality.

## V.

The significance of the oneness of the horizon manifests itself in the context of Gadamer's reinterpretation of understanding as a *hermeneutic circle* and in the context of his reinterpretation of the *history of the effect*. According to Gadamer, Heidegger's superiority over Schleiermacher lies in the abandonment of formalism and psychologism as the characteristic traits of the romantic interpretation of the hermeneutic circle. The circle is neither subjective nor objective, because the anticipation of meaning which governs the understanding of a text "is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition (*Truth* 293). Since for Gadamer, it is not ourselves as closed subjectivities but rather the tradition itself which is the ultimate origin of the anticipation of meaning, the circle is not psychological but is, rather, ontological. Precisely because our anticipatory prejudices have an ontological status, understanding possesses an ontological structure. Thus in this context, the oneness of the horizon – i.e., the commonality, anticipation, tradition – plays the role of the necessary condition which justifies the ontological account of the hermeneutic circle. But how is this ontology of understanding to be understood? How is one to account for the anticipation as the bond with tradition? Can one speak of the "ideology" of fundamental questioning into which we inevitably fall? I shall return to these questions in the following section.

In a similar way, the oneness of the horizon is implied in Gadamer's description of the history of effect. "In all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work" (*Truth* 301). The effect of history does not depend on being recognized, nor is it a supplement to historical inquiry; it is, rather, an intrinsic

element in all understanding. While it is incumbent upon us to become aware of it, since on this awareness our knowledge of the subject matter and of ourselves largely rests, the explicit awareness of the history of effect is "as hybrid a statement as when Hegel speaks of absolute knowledge" (301). The very fact that we can never explicitly know the full effect of history shows how significant the oneness of the horizon is for Gadamer. Being an element of understanding, it is effectual already "in finding the right questions to ask" (301).

The hermeneutic circle and the history of effect, as far as they are explications of the oneness of the horizon, are so closely tied together, that one can even say that they are two formulations of the same phenomenon. While the account of the hermeneutic circle unfolds the subjective side of the oneness of the horizon (that of our enabling prejudices), the history of effect reveals the objective side of the same phenomenon (that of history and tradition). Moreover, while unfolding the significance of the oneness of the horizon, both themes lead directly to Gadamer's analysis of the question/answer dialectic (*Truth* 369-381). Their true significance, Gadamer tells us, is to be witnessed in *finding the right questions to ask*. But if this is the ultimate meaning of the oneness of the horizon, is one justified in speaking of a merely negative role that this oneness plays? In place of a conclusion, I want to address the following possibility: What if the problematic character of Gadamer's hermeneutics lies not in overlooking the other, as Kearney suggests, but rather in overlooking the self, for does not the equation between the question of the

interpreter and the question of the tradition lead one to the quasi-Heideggerian hermeneutics of the Fundamental Question thereby implying the disappearance of the subject?<sup>2</sup>

## VI.

One is tempted to argue: Gadamer's hermeneutics overlooks the question of the self, for it equates the question of the interpreter with the question of the tradition, thereby abolishing the individuality of the self. The self in Gadamer loses its originality and its freedom, for it becomes merely a tool in the hands of some anonymous power which determines the questions that the interpreter asks. Why not say then, contra Kearney, that the weakness of Gadamer's hermeneutics lies not in the subjection of the other to the self, but rather in the subjection of both the other and the self to the vagaries of Fundamental Questioning? Why not say that the hermeneutics of belonging is the abandonment of both the self and the other to the oneness of the horizon?

A detailed analysis would certainly show that Gadamer's question/answer logic does not lend itself to such a reading. It is, however, not my purpose to undertake such an analysis. Suffice it to mention that Gadamer's hermeneutics is most suspicious of "permanent problems," or the history of problems: "History of problems would truly be history only if it acknowledged that the identity of the problem is an empty abstraction and permitted itself to be transformed into questioning" (*Truth* 375). Only if one acknowledges that every "fundamental question" is to be asked differently each time can one speak of fundamental questions in the context of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer's

question/answer logic does not lead to a certain set of fundamental questions which underlie a multiplicity of texts, but rather to a multiplicity of questions which one and the same text can address to us. The question/answer logic is an account of the hermeneutical fact that one and the same text cannot be reduced to a collection of specific statements, that a text has the potential of revealing a different significance in different times and places. The question/answer logic develops the oneness of the horizon not in the direction of the abolishment of the difference between the past and the present, but rather in the direction of the acknowledgment that the past still speaks and that it speaks differently from how it spoke before.

Thus the oneness of the horizon(s) is not a recovery of some lost original consciousness by rendering the past contemporaneous with the present. Having taken the detour of question and answer, the fusion of horizons appears as a notion which explodes the subject/object dichotomy by rendering the question "who thinks whom" meaningless. The interpreter alters the text, the text changes the interpreter and it does not make sense to ask who thinks whom, for each is simultaneously in play. The fusion of horizons seems inevitably linked to the confusion of voices in which the interpreter and the text are so closely linked that no clear-cut distinction between them is possible. This, however, does not mean that the fusion of horizons abolishes the individuality of the self, but that Gadamer's hermeneutics unfolds a non-foundational conception of subjectivity.

The question/answer logic reveals that the self in Gadamer is not a primary principle or an unalterable presence. The bond between the interpreter and the interpreted is not based on the self and the other as pre-existing entities. Rather, we always already

find ourselves within this bond and our identities are continuously enriched by it. The text addresses questions to the reader and only in response to these questions the reader starts questioning the text. What could this mean if not that the subject is never the ultimate origin of meaning, but that s/he responds to the proposals of meaning made possible by the oneness of the hermeneutical horizon(s)? The oneness of the horizon both liberates the text from its alienation by bringing it into the living present and constitutes the identity of the interpreter, for it is by approaching the text, by letting oneself be questioned by it, that the interpreter's prejudices are tested.<sup>3</sup>

Insofar as this oneness is a necessary presupposition of interpretation, it does not merely secure the grounds of interpretation's objectivity; it is not merely a word which, by overcoming the shortcomings of psychologism, accounts for the referential character of interpretation. Being always already there, the oneness of the horizon is that which renders the text plurivocal: What the text says is revealed in the interplay of questions and answers that unfold in the dialogue between the interpreter and the text. While the bond that links the interpreter to the interpreted is to be acknowledged, at the same time it is to remain nameless, for by linking the text to anyone who "complies with the text's injunction," the oneness of the horizon extends in a plurality of directions, thereby remaining fuzzy and vague, indeterminate and open-ended. Hence the oneness of the horizon is essentially dialectical: the meaning of the *oneness* lies in the elucidation and encouragement of a *plurality* of fusions of horizons.

Within the oneness of the horizon, interpretation cannot be approached as something added to the original text, as if the latter were a set of fixed statements, but

rather manifests itself in uncovering the implicit meaning *of the text itself*. This, however, does not exhaust the presuppositional character of the oneness of the horizon. Just as the oneness of the horizon reveals the shortcomings of the incommensurabilist stance by showing the abstractness of non-dialogical difference, so likewise the question/answer logic simultaneously reveals the abstractness of the non-dialogical self. The self-understanding of the interpreter is constituted within the oneness of the horizon; the self is a partner in dialogue and is invited to respond to the proposals of meaning stemming from the text in such a way as to reach a better understanding of him- or herself. Hence the self in Gadamer's hermeneutics does not play a merely passive role and the oneness of the horizon is not, therefore, merely a presupposition but also an achievement. The meaning of the text and the self-understanding of the interpreter are constituted in the interplay of questions and answers provided by both the reader and the text. The question/answer logic renders the encounter with the text truly dialogical. It is not enough merely to hear the questions of the text. It is necessary to respond, to "constitute" the text's meaning, thereby achieving a more thorough understanding of oneself.

The question/answer logic, as the culmination of Gadamer's account of the oneness of the horizon, shows that the oneness, no matter how indeterminate it is, is nothing less than the "conversation that we ourselves are" (*Truth* 378). The oneness of the horizon reveals the correlative nature of ipseity and alterity: Gadamer's account of the self and the other goes hand-in-hand with his account of the other in the self and the self in the other. Just as there is no text without interpretation, so also there is no interpretation without the text. By extension, just as there is no self without the other, so



also there is no other without the self. And yet, the very fact that Gadamer's dialectic is open-ended – that human understanding is essentially finite – means that there are new others to be discovered and new forms of self-understanding to be reached. Thus the open-ended oneness of the horizon liberates both the other and the self from their anonymity by re-turning them to the infinity of dialogue.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an elegant overview of those themes that link the twentieth-century hermeneutics to the romantic hermeneutics and those elements which distance them from each other, see Westphal.

<sup>2</sup> In its original version, this article was divided into two parts. In the first part I addressed Kearney's critique of Gadamer, while the second part confronted Olivier Abel's "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics: From Critique to Poetics." While Kearney approaches Gadamer as a romantic, Abel labels Gadamer's position "hermeneutics of belonging" and in this way distinguishes it from romantic hermeneutics – the "hermeneutics of distance." Abel is critical of Gadamer's hermeneutics because from the very beginning it stresses belonging and ignores the historic and linguistic distance introduced by time and contextual differences. Both Abel and Kearney agree that Gadamer's hermeneutics does not sufficiently address the question of alterity. It simply cannot address this issue seriously, Abel suggests, since that requires the hermeneutics of "the long route" which chooses the longest detours, the most diverse methods, in this way marking out the diversity of distances and of alterities. While Kearney sees the superiority of Ricoeur's hermeneutics as being grounded in its opposition to Gadamer, Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Abel sees Ricoeur as a master of the dialectic, who managed to incorporate both hermeneutic styles in his work. But the full significance of Abel's critique lies in the following: Since Gadamer does not mark out the diversity of alterities, his hermeneutics not only ignores the question of the other, but it also overlooks the question of the self. This seems to be inevitably implicated in Abel, since, following Ricoeur, he is willing to state that the self is born out of the dialectic between the ego and the text, i.e., between the ego and the other. Thus, contra Kearney, the weakness of Gadamer's hermeneutics lies not in the subjection of the other to the self, but rather in the subjection of both the other and the self to the vagaries of fundamental questioning. In short, the hermeneutics

of belonging is the abandonment of both the self and the other to the oneness of the horizon. But despite these important differences between Kearney's and Abel's readings of Gadamer, I was drawn to the conclusion that they do not require separate analyses. I am indebted to Richard J. Bernstein, who pointed out to me that the critique of Gadamer which claims that his hermeneutics overlooks the question of the self is only a variation of that position, according to which Gadamer's hermeneutics is not capable of accounting for genuine alterity.

<sup>3</sup> "All understanding is ultimately self understanding" (*Truth* 260); "It is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself, projecting himself upon his possibilities" (260).

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# On The Importance Of Getting Things Straight

GARY BRENT MADISON

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It is surely rather curious that phenomenological (or philosophical) hermeneutics, which is a systematic theory of human understanding in all its various forms, has been, and continues to be, so widely misunderstood. Perhaps, though, this is not such a surprising phenomenon after all, since, as phenomenology has shown, human understanding is of such a nature that it invariably tends to misunderstand itself. It is nevertheless somewhat odd – but perhaps also revealing – that the two chief ways in which hermeneutics is commonly misunderstood are themselves diametrically opposed to one another.

The main charge that philosophers of a traditionalist ("modernist") sort generally level against hermeneutics is that, by rejecting modern epistemologism and its notion of truth as the correspondence of subjective states of mind to an "objective," in-itself reality (the mind as a "mirror of nature" – what elsewhere I have referred to as referentialist-representationalism), hermeneutics leads directly (or by means of a "slippery slope") to an all-out, truth-denying *relativism*. In calling into question the traditional notion of truth (and thus also the traditional notion of reality as something "univocal" in itself), hermeneutics, it is claimed, embraces a form of irrationalism that undermines any and all claims to universally valid knowledge. It is in this regard yet another instance of the post-

Nietzschean nihilism so prevalent in postmodern thought (see Madison, "Hermeneutical Integrity").

On the other side of the ledger, critics of a "postmodern" sort, who are often themselves avowed relativists fully prepared to sacrifice philosophy's traditional claim to knowledge (the "end of philosophy"), tend to be equally dismissive of hermeneutics – but for an altogether different reason. For them, hermeneutics, far from having broken with traditional metaphysics, is nothing more than the old "essentialism" (the "metaphysics of presence") dressed up in new (and perhaps more seductive) garb. Jacques Derrida once sought to portray Gadamer as (as Gadamer summed it up) "a lost sheep in the dried up pastures of metaphysics." And one of Derrida's leading spokespersons, John D. Caputo, flatly accused Gadamer of being "a closet essentialist."<sup>1</sup>

Simple logic dictates that these two mutually exclusive charges leveled against hermeneutics cannot both be right. Either one is true and the other is false – or perhaps neither is true. Logic alone cannot of course decide the issue; before one can properly assess any particular ideational position, it is first necessary to determine (as Plato would say) the "kind" of position it is, i.e., the conceptual category into which it falls. Now, as hermeneuticists themselves view the matter, hermeneutics is fully a form of postmodern thought – but one that differs in highly significant ways from other forms of postmodernism. Although many people still fail to appreciate the fact, phenomenological hermeneutics incorporates a genuinely deconstructive strategy inasmuch as it conscientiously rejects the modernistic objectivism of pre-phenomenological, Romantic

hermeneutics. According to Richard E. Palmer, it is important to see "the unfolding of the hermeneutical problematic in terms of the philosophical critique of the metaphysics of modernity," and he has pointed out how such a critique generates the need for a deconstructive strategy very much akin in a number of ways to Derridian deconstruction (323). Hermeneutics is decidedly postmodern in that, like classical phenomenology of which it is a logical extension, it seeks deliberately to set aside the guiding prejudices of modern philosophy (see Madison, "The Interpretive Turn").

To be sure, hermeneutics is not "postmodern" in the negative sense in which most critics of postmodernism understand the term. Unlike other forms of postmodern thought (which could perhaps be grouped together under the heading "post-structuralist," for want of a better term), hermeneutics does not seek to undermine the traditional notions of "truth," "reality," and "knowledge" in such a way as to leave nothing in their place (this is indeed nihilism). Hermeneutical deconstruction is in fact eminently reconstructive in that it seeks to work out a genuinely nonfoundationalist and nonessentialist understanding of these traditional, core concepts of philosophy. This is, as one might say, "the difference that makes a difference." Unlike other forms of postmodernism, hermeneutics is not merely *anti*-metaphysical; it is genuinely *post*-metaphysical (see Madison, "Coping with Nietzsche").

All of this is something that Saulius Geniusas fully appreciates. In his paper, "On the Oneness of the Hermeneutical Horizons(s)," Geniusas seeks to set the record straight by showing how hermeneutics escapes the age-old metaphysical opposition between *essentialism* and *relativism*, which is to say, between *universalism* and *particularism*.

Hermeneutics is, quite simply, *neither* essentialist *nor* relativist; unlike other forms of postmodernism which tend merely to substitute the latter term of the opposition (relativism, particularism) for the former (essentialism, universalism), hermeneutics is a thoroughgoing attempt to move beyond, as Richard Bernstein would say, both objectivism and relativism. As Geniusas. points out, the relation between the universal and the particular is in fact "the heart of the hermeneutical problem," and the pivotal issue in this connection is Gadamer's notion of "application," since for Gadamer all understanding comes down to a matter of "applying something universal to a particular situation." There could be no philosophical understanding of anything without an appeal to universals (*individuum ineffabile est*), but universals, as Gadamer has shown, do not exist fully defined in their own right or in any metaphysical sense of the term; they exist only in their application to particular situations. The relation between the "universal" (e.g., the meaning of a text or an ethical norm) and the "particular" (e.g., various interpretations of the text's meaning or applications of the norm to particular situations) is not a vertical or hierarchical relation of logical subsumption but a lateral or circular one of co-determination. Understanding (grasping the universal) is always of a particularizing or "applicational" and context-sensitive nature; it is not a matter of logical deduction but, as in jurisprudence, a matter of practical reasoning or *phronesis*. In other words, understanding is inseparable from interpretation. As Geniusas says speaking of the notion of "appropriation" (i.e., "application"): "The task of interpretation is, while being guided

by the text, to reveal its continuing significance, to bring it out of the past into the living present."

While Gadamer's notion of "application" and his understanding of the relation between the universal and the particular is anything but simplistic, it is really not all that difficult to comprehend by anyone who takes the time to do so. However, as Geniusas rightly observes, Gadamer's views on this matter have been subject to a number of misunderstandings and misplaced criticisms. In addressing some of these misguided criticisms Geniusas wants to show how Gadamer's hermeneutics not only makes perfectly good sense but how it is also supremely positioned for dealing with the challenge confronting humanity in today's rapidly globalizing world. This is an issue to which I shall return in my final remarks; Geniusas himself approaches it via the detour of a critique of Richard Kearney's misportrayal of Gadamer's hermeneutics.

As illustrative of the way Gadamer's work can be grossly misread, this is a particularly well chosen example, although I must confess that I was shocked to see that Kearney, who in his various presentations of contemporary Continental philosophy has shown himself to be an excellent hermeneut, should nevertheless have so profoundly misconstrued Gadamer's position. Kearney maintains that the relation between self and other is the central hermeneutical problem – and he is absolutely right to do so. In opposition to, as Geniusas points out, both "the mainstream metaphysical tradition which largely ignores the question of the Other" as well as "some postmodern thinkers who externalize alterity to the point that there can be no communication between self and other," Kearney advocates a "diacritical hermeneutics" which "discovers the other in the



self and the self in the other." For Kearney (a former student of Paul Ricoeur), Ricoeur's hermeneutics is a prime instance of such a "diacritical" approach. This is all well and good, but where Kearney goes seriously wrong is in claiming that this does not describe Gadamer's own treatment of the relation between self and other. I, for my part as a former student of both Ricoeur and Gadamer, have no hesitation whatsoever in asserting that on this score there is no significant difference between the two, however much Kearney may go out of his way to find one. Indeed, Geniusas shows very nicely how, in attempting to elaborate a "nonhegemonic" notion of appropriation, Ricoeur actually appeals to Gadamer's writings on the subject in the course of working out his own position.

Ricoeur does, of course, have his differences with Gadamer, but these are of a secondary nature. While Ricoeur was always sympathetic to Gadamer's attempt to work out a fundamental ontology of human understanding, he also felt that, because of Gadamer's focus on the ontological question, he did not pay sufficient attention to properly methodological issues and to the relationship between hermeneutics and the other human sciences. Ricoeur thus viewed the specificity of his own endeavors as consisting in the elaboration of a "methodological" hermeneutics that would serve as a complement to Gadamer's "ontological" hermeneutics. This was not, however, a difference over fundamentals (Ricoeur always viewed ontology as the "promised land" of hermeneutics). As students of classical phenomenology, both Gadamer and Ricoeur were in fact, as hermeneuticists, engaged in a common endeavor, and the basic strategies they pursued in this regard were strikingly similar. For both of them, it was always necessary

to do battle simultaneously on two fronts: against, on the one hand, the objectivism of Romantic hermeneutics (and traditional metaphysics more generally) and, on the other hand, the relativism extolled by a number of postmodernists (who assert that since no single interpretation of a text or anything else can – as hermeneutics itself maintains – legitimately claim to be the one and only correct or valid interpretation, a state of glorious, free-wheeling interpretational anarchy must necessarily prevail).

It is thus rather astounding that Kearney should categorize Gadamer's hermeneutics as a form of Romantic hermeneutics and, accordingly, of being a "hermeneutics of appropriation" in the "bad" sense of the term, i.e., one which abolishes otherness by absorbing it into the horizon of the self.<sup>2</sup> However strange such a reading of Gadamer may be to, as Geniusas says, "anyone who has listened to what Gadamer actually had to say," there is nevertheless, he allows, an ambiguity in Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons" that can give rise to such a charge on the part of the unwary. Thus the question Geniusas seeks to confront in his paper is: "Why does Gadamer simultaneously speak of the oneness and the multiplicity of horizons? Why is he reluctant to tell us whether there are many horizons or just one?" In the last analysis there is, of course, only one horizon, just as there is only one all-encompassing lifeworld which is the common home of us all (this world being, as Husserl said, the "horizon of all horizons"). But, as Geniusas rightly argues, this oneness of the hermeneutical horizon is no way diminishes the genuinely *dialogical* character of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and in no way does it subsume, *à la* Hegel, multiplicity into a homogeneous oneness.

To be more specific, there is one horizon not in any absolutist sense (in the sense in which objectivists assert that there is one single, self-identical, "real" world) but only in the sense that, while everyone has his or her own individual horizon (of a personal or socio-cultural sort), there is nothing that in principle prevents any individual from entering into genuine contact with any other individual and penetrating to some degree or another into his or her own world. This is what the notion of a "fusion of horizons" is meant to express: the presence of the other in the self and the self in the other. As Gadamer says in a text quoted by Geniusas: "Understanding is always the fusion of horizons supposedly existing by themselves." Perhaps it would be better in this connection to speak not of a "fusion of horizons" but rather of a "merging of horizons," since the term "fusion" can be easily be misunderstood to imply a kind of oneness of an "essentialist" sort that for Gadamer does not, and could never, exist. However that may be, the phenomenological fact of the matter is that it is meaningless to speak of a fixed or "closed" horizon. Horizons are, *per definitionem*, "open": Horizons move with us when we move, and it is precisely by broadening our own horizons that we are able to enter into contact with what is distant and alien.

One of the great merits of Geniusas' paper is the way in which he manages to show how Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons provides for a genuinely non-oppositional way of conceiving the relation between oneness and multiplicity, between universality and particularity. One thing that Kearney rightly insists upon is that what he refers to as "today's challenge" is, as Geniusas puts it, "that of respecting the specificity

of the other while not schismatically dividing the other from the self." This is precisely where a great deal of present-day thought falls lamentably short, dominated as it is by the currently very fashionable paradigm of cultural incommensurability. As Geniusas pertinently observes in this regard, "Our age ... is obsessed with schismatically separating the other from the self." Any would-be ethics which sets "alterity" in opposition to "ipseity" and which asserts that the relation between self and other is of a non-reciprocal, "asymmetrical" nature (the other, according to this "ethics of the Other," being a non-negotiable demand imposed upon the self and having absolute priority over the self's own concerns) is one which, ignoring as it does the role that self-interest necessarily plays in all human relationships and the need for mutuality in all just dealings with the other, is thoroughly utopian in its impracticality and its irrelevance to the everyday world of social reality (see Madison, "The Moral Self").

The obsession with "alterity" on the part of the "politically correct" testifies to what are undoubtedly praiseworthy motives (a concern to respect the "otherness" of the other), but it is nevertheless both wrong in theory and pernicious in practice. From a theoretical point of view, cultural incommensurabilism rests on an altogether erroneous concept of "culture." The basic assumption of that form of relativism that could be labeled "culturalism" is that cultures are somehow self-contained, internally consistent, self-subsistent "wholes." But this is not really the case at all. Every culture is in actuality a *mélange* of a multitude of beliefs and practices that are often only haphazardly related and are sometimes even inconsistent, and many of which, moreover, are borrowings from other cultures (borrowings which in the normal course of events are rapidly

"indigenized"). Cultures are like languages in that they are immensely porous, and the inter-cultural exchange of ideas (as to what is true or what is of value) is as primordial a human phenomenon as is the exchange of material goods. In the real world, there is, as there always has been, an on-going and never-ending "merging of horizons." This is a basic fact of human life. The norm in human affairs is not cultural "self-identity" but cultural "hybridity."

The incommensurabilist paradigm is also pernicious in practice in that, as Geniusas points out, "by not acknowledging any bond between different cultures, languages, or subjectivities," this stance actually legitimates a sublime *indifference* to otherness. This is a classic instance of what economic theory refers to as the phenomenon of "unintended consequences." Not only that. Since in the real world we often cannot avoid having dealings with others, then – if it is indeed the case as cultural relativists maintain that dialogue in the hermeneutical sense of the term (the presence of the other in the self and the self in the other; the "fusion of horizons supposedly existing by themselves") is not a real possibility that we should strive to put into practice wherever possible – it follows that the only kind of relation that can obtain between the self and the other must be one of domination, or attempted domination, of one over the other.<sup>3</sup> This is something that no tolerant relativist would intentionally endorse, but it is nevertheless the logical consequence of the incommensurabilist stance. It is therefore for both theoretical and practical – which is to say, moral – reasons that hermeneutics rejects those forms of postmodern thought which elevate particularity over universality in such a way as to

make it impossible to conceive of a kind of "oneness" of horizons that is in no way hegemonic.

The key insight in this regard that dominates all of Gadamer's work is that there is, or need be, no contradiction between "openness" to the other and "belongingness" to one's own cultural horizon. This is something that Geniusas recognizes when he asserts that the oneness of the horizon in Gadamer's thought "reveals the *correlative* nature of ipseity and alterity" (emphasis added). And thus, as Geniusas very nicely says, "the open-ended oneness of the horizon liberates both the other and the self from their anonymity by returning them to the infinity of dialogue." It is precisely by means of this infinite dialogue between the self and the other, this "boundless communication" as Karl Jaspers referred to it, that self and other are enabled to achieve self-identity by becoming, each thanks to the other, the unique individuals that they themselves are.

As Geniusas importantly recognizes, Gadamer's nonessentialist and nonhegemonic (i.e., postmetaphysical) way of reconceptualizing universality is of "a normative kind." Gadamer's defense of the oneness of horizons against all forms of cultural relativism has far-ranging ethical implications. The distinctive feature of hermeneutical theory in general is that it is never theory for theory's sake but is essentially and always theory geared to practice and is, in the last analysis, theory that exists only for the sake of practice (see Madison, "The Theory of Practice"). As Gadamer ever insisted, hermeneutics is *scientia practica*. It is therefore altogether appropriate that Geniusas should raise the issue of hermeneutics' relevance to "today's social and political challenges." This is where the importance of getting things straight becomes most clearly

manifest. As I asserted in a tribute to Gadamer shortly after his death: In these globalizing times when a "clash of civilizations" – between, above all, Islam and the Western world – looms on the horizon, Gadamer's "philosophy of dialogue" is of the utmost relevance. It, or something very much like it, is really the only basis on which could ever be conducted what President Khatami of Iran called a "dialogue of civilizations."<sup>4</sup> And in a text that Geniusas cites in his paper, I went on to maintain that the crucial issue of our times is that of working out, by means of dialogue or communicative rationality, a *universal* ethic (based on the notion of universal human rights) that would be capable of reconciling universally binding ethical/political norms with the undeniable fact of cultural diversity (see Madison, "Gadamer's Legacy"). It is my belief that the hermeneutical notion of "application" is such as to provide us with the theoretical framework necessary for a constructing a "new world order" of such a sort.

As the twentieth-century was drawing to a close, Gadamer said of the phenomenon of globalization ("the worldwide interwovenness of economies"): "Isolation from the rest of the world is no longer possible. Humanity today is sitting in a rowboat, as it were, and we must steer this boat in such a way that we do not all crash into the rocks" (81). The supreme effect of globalization is to abolish the distances that have largely prevailed hitherto between the various cultures of the world, between the self and the other. If this seemingly irreversible process is not to result in a world-wide confrontation between different cultures, it is imperative that economic integration and the technological unification of the world be accompanied by the working out of a genuinely

global ethics, and this is a task that Gadamer's hermeneutics is eminently well-placed to address.

With someone like Richard Kearney in mind, it may be noted that Ricoeur has also devoted a good deal of his attention to this issue – which should be enough to dispel the notion that there is any great divide separating these two outstanding thinkers of our times as regards the relation between self and other (see Madison, "Paul Ricoeur"). For both Ricoeur and Gadamer, the supreme task of philosophy in today's world must be that of discovering in each great cultural tradition the prospects for a dialogue in which the cultural identity of each is respected while at the same time each is called upon to reach out to the others in an attempt to discover universal values common to all. The fact that both Gadamer and Ricoeur should view the challenge confronting philosophy in a global age in much the same way is in itself a clear indication that there is a distinctive logic or, as Ricoeur would say, "inner dynamic" to the hermeneutical position that both he and Gadamer have sought to lay out in ways that are not only fully compatible but that together go to make up a well-defined alternative to, on the one hand, an unacceptable, hegemonic sort of "oneness" and, on the other, a ruinous, cultural relativism. Geniusas is to be commended for setting the record straight on this crucial issue.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Michelfelder and Palmer 50, 258-64. Time has a way, fortunately, of correcting many misunderstandings, and both Derrida and Caputo have over the years come to appreciate better the genuinely postmetaphysical significance of hermeneutics; see in this regard Caputo, "Good Will and the Hermeneutics of Friendship: Gadamer, Derrida, and Madison."



<sup>2</sup> For a detailed overview of the main tenets of philosophical hermeneutics (as well as the crucial differences between it and Romantic hermeneutics), see my "Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur." For an analysis of how Gadamer's phenomenological hermeneutics differs in decisive ways from the neo-Romantic hermeneutics of E.D. Hirsch, see my "A Critique of Hirsch's *Validity*."

<sup>3</sup> Of course, one does not seek to engage in dialogue with, for instance, terrorists who *a priori* refuse all dialogue and possible accommodation (who, in other words, want not to negotiate differences but only to blow up the negotiating table). When the other becomes an implacable threat to one's own very existence, the only option is to seek to "contain" or remove the other by whatever means possible. The prerequisite for genuine dialogue is what Gadamer called "good will," i.e., the will and desire to reach a mutually satisfying agreement with the other. Where such a will is lacking on the part of the other, the only rules that apply are those of *Realpolitik*, which is to say, the rules of unflinching self-interest.

<sup>4</sup> See "In Memoriam Hans-Georg Gadamer." For a discussion of Samuel P. Huntington's notion of a coming "clash of civilizations," see my "Globalization: Past, Present, Future."

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