

LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION VERSUS UNDERSTANDING

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It is a common wisdom that linguistic communication is different from linguistic understanding. However, the distinction between communication and understanding is not as clear as it seems to be. Presumably, the relationship between linguistic communication and understanding depends upon the notions of understanding and communication involved. Thinking along the line of propositional understanding and informative communication, communication can be reduced to mutual understanding. In contrast, operating along the line of hermeneutic understanding and dialogical communication, the process of understanding is in essence a process of communication.

INTRODUCTION

It is a common wisdom that linguistic communication is different from understanding. Apparently, there are two sides to any process of linguistic communication: the speaker's side and the hearer's side. Accordingly, the process of linguistic communication seems to consist of two separate stages: the act of communicating—the speaker transmitting a message to the hearer, and the act of understanding—the hearer comprehending the message transmitted.

However, such a common wisdom is just that—*common* wisdom lacking philosophical justification. Philosophically, the distinction between linguistic communication and understanding is not as clear as it seems to be. This is why there is a strong tendency among many of reducing linguistic communication to *mutual* understanding or vice versa. For some, especially many analytical philosophers, linguistic communication is nothing but back-and-forth mutual understanding. Because people are interested in communication, they believe, people are interested in mutual understanding. On the other hand, for continental philosophers like Hans-Georg Gadamer, the process of understanding is essentially a process of linguistic communication.

Of course, as anyone can guess, those analytical philosophers and continental philosophers operate on different notions of linguistic understanding and communication: for many analytical philosophers, both understanding and communication are propositional by nature while for many continental philosophers they are hermeneutic. This is why a clear line between linguistic understanding and communication is virtually non-existent in related literature; most writers use the two concepts interchangeably. Worse still, many are contented with vague and pragmatic pronouncements on the notions of understanding and communication. Consequently, it is often felt that the distinction between linguistic understanding and communication is as elusive as a line on the sand. Therefore, to clarify the relationship between linguistic understanding and communication, the different concepts of understanding and communication—especially the propositional sense and the hermeneutic sense—must be identified.

PROPOSITIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION

Propositional Understanding

German psychologist Karl Bühler (1934, 35) puts forward a tripartite schema of language functions, which places the linguistic expression in relation to the speaker, the world, and the hearer: the speaker comes to an understanding with the hearer about some states of affairs in the world. A linguistic expression functions simultaneously as symbol (correlated with states of affairs), as symptom (depending upon the speaker's intention), and as signal (its appeal to the hearer). Jürgen Habermas (1992, 57), following K. Bühler, J. L. Austin, and John Searle, identifies those three aspects of linguistic expressions as the three structural components of the meaning of an utterance: one is its propositional content, namely, what is said literally and explicitly with a linguistic expression, which is supposed to represent states of affairs; second, is its expressive content, i.e., what is *intended* with a linguistic expression by the speaker; and third, is its illocutionary content, namely, what is *used* in a speech act to enter into a relationship with the hearer.

A complete understanding of a sentence could mean, besides to grasp its propositional content, to capture the illocutionary force that the sentence induces on the hearer, the speaker's particular intention in uttering the sentence on a particular occasion, or the speaker's propositional attitude associated with the utterance. However, since the propositional content of a sentence is the semantic foundation upon which the other dimensions of its meaning depends, to understand a sentence could mean to comprehend its propositional content or the thought expressed. I call this essential dimension of linguistic understanding propositional understanding, which constitutes the central core of any notion of understanding (see Wang 2003, 55).

Among many accounts of propositional understanding, the truth-conditional account of understanding is by far the most appealing (see Davidson 1984, 17-36). According to it, the Tarskian semantic notion of truth plays the most essential role in linguistic understanding: to understand a sentence, it is necessary and sufficient to know its truth-conditions; to understand a language is to know the truth-conditions of any sentence of the language. Propositional understanding is founded on the monologue model of meaning, according to which the meaning of a text is determined by the author's intention alone, along with the necessary linguistic conventions of the author's language. The text is self-enclosed and its meaning is self-contained—simply there to be discovered—independent of the interpreter. The aim of understanding is comprehension, namely, to grasp the original meaning of a text. Hence, to understand a text is to recapture the author's intention through decoding the meaning of the text. To do so, one has to purify one's own prejudices and immerse oneself in the original context.

Informative Communication

As other notions hailed as unmixed goods, the notion of communication suffers from the misfortune of conceptual confusion. Nevertheless, we can still identify two dominant models of communication. One has to do with the transmission of information—either as psychological entities (such as ideas) or as linguistic entities (such as propositional contents, literal meanings)—which is commonly referred to as the *transmission* model of communication. The transmission process could be one-way, from the sender to the receiver without any feedback from the receiver, not necessarily a bilateral process of exchange and interaction between the sender and the receiver. If this linear transmission model is folded up to connect its one end with the other so as to make it a two-way, bilateral process of exchange between the sender and the receiver, the result is another model of communication, i.e., the *exchange* model, which is supposed to involve interchange, mutuality, reciprocity, and engagement, such as the exchange of ideas in dialogue, psychosemantic sharing, even fusion of consciousness (see Peters 1999, 8).

It is John Locke, more than anyone else, who provides articulate defense of the two doctrines foundational to the classical transmission model: the private mind filled with ideas and linguistic signs as empty vessels to be filled with ideational contents. For Locke, language is “the great instrument” that makes the inner life of ideas publicly accessible and transports ideas from one speaker to another. When we communicate with others, we trust our private ideas to public symbol proxies by virtue of encoding them as linguistic signs. An act of communication is successful if the hearer can replicate the speaker's ideas without distortion in terms of decoding the linguistic signs (see Radford 2005, 16-24).

Locke's notion of private ideas and his commitment to the individual as sovereign in meaning-making make linguistic communication both necessary and impossible. It is fundamentally impossible to communicate accurately the ideas in the mind of one person to stimulate the same ideas in the mind of another, unless we can read each other's minds. Therefore, for Locke, all communication, both intra- and inter-language communication, is inherently imperfect. Communication breakdowns loom large in Locke's scenario.

To remove its mentalistic elements but preserve its basic spirit, that is, linguistic communication as the process of transferring messages from one speaker to another by means of language, let us substitute thoughts expressed by declarative sentences for Lockean private ideas. The notion of thought used here is *extensional*, not as the *intensional content* of the mind, such as Lockean ideas or other propositional attitudes, which characteristically differ from one individual to another, but rather as the propositional contents asserted by sentences. What distinguishes (objective) thoughts from (purely subjective) mental contents is that thoughts can be, or at least are capable of being true or false while mental contents cannot. Thoughts are publicly accessible to all the competent speakers of a language and communicable among them. So construed, linguistic communication becomes transmission of thoughts from one speaker to another in terms of a language. I will refer to this model of communication as informative communication. It is the most prevalent conception of communication in industrialized cultures and becomes the standard model of linguistic communication adopted by most analytical philosophers since the linguistic turn in the middle of the twentieth century.

INFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION AS MUTUAL PROPOSITIONAL UNDERSTANDING

Informative communication is apparently different from propositional understanding since the process of informative communication consists of the act of communicating (a thought is put forward from the speaker to the interpreter) and the act of understanding (the thought put forward by the speaker is taken in by the interpreter). Thus, propositional understanding seems to be necessary, but not sufficient for informative communication.

Nevertheless, although informative communication cannot be reduced to one-way propositional understanding, it could very well amount to, in essence, mutual propositional understanding. First of all, informative communication is obviously propositional in essence. Like propositional understanding, the transmission model premises on the monologue model of meaning. The model reduces the act of communication, which is supposed to be an "alive," interactive, dialectic process to a "dead," static, monological propositional understanding: there is a fixed, self-sufficient

thought in the mind of the speaker; she conveys the thought to the interpreter in terms of a sentence. The sentence is self-closed; its meaning is self-contained, independent of the interpreter, and simply there to be comprehended. For communication to be successful, the interpreter has to recapture the speaker's intention and to understand the sentence as the speaker intends and expects it to be understood.

Second, both the act of communicating and the act of understanding are in essence a one-way linear transmission of message. There is, in fact, a strong tendency in the related literature of identifying communication with mutual understanding. For many analytical philosophers, linguistic communication is nothing but back-and-forth propositional understanding between two speakers. Such a reading of communication as mutual understanding is logically implied and widely promoted by the transmission model of communication. The goal of communication, according to the model, is simply transmission of thoughts from one side to the other. The purpose of transmitting thoughts from the speaker to the interpreter is to have the interpreter understand them. As long as the interpreter comprehends the thoughts transmitted, the goal of communication is obtained. Hence, the act of communicating could be reduced to the act of understanding; the former is only the means to the latter. Simply reversing the above process from the interpreter to the speaker, we have the act of mutual understanding. Communication is thus reduced to mutual understanding.

To think beyond communication as mutual understanding, we should ask ourselves such a question: What do we want to get from communication, especially from cross-language communication? To understand each other, of course, one may answer. But why do we care whether or not we understand one another? What is the purpose of understanding anyway? Or, more precisely: What does understanding one another enable us to do? The answer cannot be that we want to understand simply for the sake of understanding. We have at least as much interest in learning from one another and coordinating our actions in a social setting through understanding. For those and other purposes, we need to hammer out disagreement and reach consensus. To do so, only passively understanding one another by passing on information is not good enough; it requires critical engagement between two sides: to respond effectively to the other side's requests, to exchange thoughts effectively, and to engage in constructive dialogue and argumentation with one another. Unfortunately, this crucial aspect of genuine communication is missing from the above standard model of communication and understanding. We need to go beyond informative communication and propositional understanding.

Lawrence Grossberg (1997, 27) points out that "we were living in an organization of discursive and ideological power that could be described as 'the regime of communication'." What Grossberg has in mind is the transmission model of communication. By calling it "the regime of

communication,” Grossberg does not intend to treat the transmission model as a legitimate description of a process or a phenomenon; rather, he treats it as a certain way of thinking and talking about communication, a particular conceptual framework which Michael Reddy calls the “conduit metaphor.” Using Michel Foucault’s terminology, it is only a particular *discourse* about communication. As a dominant discourse, the transmission model does have a tremendous hold over us. We are trapped in the reality created by this way of talking, which has sedimented in our use of everyday English language. The best strategy to escape the tight grip of the regime of communication created by the discourse of the transmission model is, I think, to deploy a different set of discursive resources for the articulation of communication: the hermeneutic discourse of communication that uses dialogue, rather than transmission, as the central metaphor. For this, we had better turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

HERMENEUTIC UNDERSTANDING

Propositional understanding may proceed without much trouble in normal discourse in which understanding occurs among the speakers of the same language or of two different, but fairly closely related languages. In contrast, propositional understanding in abnormal discourse may turn out to be problematic. By “abnormal discourse,” I mean the discourse using two substantially distinct languages, especially two incommensurable theoretical languages, such as the Aristotelian language and the Newtonian language of mechanics. In abnormal discourse, a sentence that clearly expresses a proposition when considered within the context of one language may lack any propositional content when considered within the context of another incommensurable language. In the following quotation, Gadamer (1986, 226) drives home the point that propositional understanding is doomed to failure in abnormal discourse:

There are no propositions that can be understood exclusively with respect to the content that they present, if one wants to understand them in their truth....Every proposition has presuppositions that it does not express. Only those who think with these presuppositions can really assess the truth of a proposition. I maintain, then, that the ultimate logical form of the presuppositions that motivate every proposition is the *question*.

The task of hermeneutics in general is to render intelligible a text that was previously considered alien in abnormal discourse. The best alternative in this situation is to work out the basic presuppositions of an alien language by engaging in a dialogue to ask questions, to hypothesize the alien’s way of thinking, and to make comparison between one’s own

language and the alien's. To do this, the interpreter inevitably becomes involved in the hermeneutic circle between his or her own language and the alien's. It is when propositional understanding in abnormal discourse fails that hermeneutic understanding takes over.

In contrast with the monologue model of meaning underlying propositional understanding, Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic understanding subscribes to what I will call the dialogue model of meaning. According to it, meaning is neither in the author's head nor inherent in a text. Instead, the meaning of a text can only be determined and contextualized through a dynamic interaction and transaction between the text and the reader's participation through the process of understanding. Understanding must be conceived as a part of the process of *the coming into being of meaning*. Understanding of what a speaker is saying thus becomes an activity of participation, engagement, assimilation, and dialogue: the interpreter's participation in the reformation and enrichment of its meaning, the engagement between the speaker's and the interpreter's languages, assimilating what is said to the point that it becomes the interpreter's own, and ultimately a dialogue between the interpreter and the speaker. "For language is by nature the language of conversation; it fully realizes itself only in the process of coming to an understanding" (Gadamer 1989, 446). In a dialogue, there are no fixed propositions, only questions and answers that call forth new questions in turn.

In fact, such a dynamic notion of understanding is best conveyed by the German term for "understanding," *Verstehen*. To use "*Verstehen*," Gadamer intends to stress its close affinity to *Verständigung*, "coming-to-an-understanding" or "reaching-an-understanding" *with someone about something*. Since meaning is always coming into being through the "happening" of understanding and understanding always happens within certain contexts, hermeneutic understanding is an open-ended process, which can never (ontologically) achieve finality; it is always open and anticipatory.

Gadamer's dialogue model of meaning/understanding has a direct impact on the role of the interpreter's own prejudgments or tradition in understanding: Theoretically, when one tries to understand a language from an alien tradition, one cannot simply replace one's own tradition by the alien's. It is neither possible nor desirable. Genuine otherness can be revealed to one only against the background of one's *oneness*; thus, one can experience the genuine *otherness* only by placing *oneself* in the other's tradition while still situated within one's own tradition. Based on the dialogue model of meaning/understanding, if one's participation in understanding is part of the making of meaning, it is an illusion to think that one can eliminate one's anticipatory prejudgments or prejudices, somehow abstract oneself from one's own historical context or cultural/intellectual tradition in order to leap out of one's situation and jump into the other's mind. When one initially approaches an alien text, one always understands it through the lens of one's own fore-meanings and other

prejudices conditioned by one's tradition, which makes one's initial understanding possible. But one's projection of meanings often hinders one's understanding of the other. This is especially the case when one attempts to understand texts belonging to other traditions that are significantly distinct from one's own. Therefore, "we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of the other" (Gadamer 1989, 268).

It is here that Gadamer formulates his own version of the hermeneutic circle. For Gadamer, hermeneutic understanding is the dialectical interplay between the interpreter's fore-structures and the text to be understood, not just between part and whole of a text. On the one hand, although the interpreter has to rely on his or her fore-structures and prejudices in any understanding, he or she must be "on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought" which lead to misunderstanding (Gadamer 1989, 266). The interpreter must be open-minded, to listen to, to share, to participate with the text so it can "speak to" him or her. On the other hand, openness and receptiveness to the text are possible only because of the fore-structures and prejudices that are constitutive of the interpreter's being and only in terms of "*justified* prejudices" which open and guide him or her to the other's language. This requires that the interpreter be able to identify unjustified prejudices, revise them, and replace them with "more suitable ones." Therefore, hermeneutic understanding involves constant movement from less suitable prejudices to more suitable ones. Thus, coming-to-an-understanding is a dynamic process, involving the dialectical interaction between the prejudices conditioned by one's tradition and what is to be understood.

DIALOGICAL COMMUNICATION

Since Martin Heidegger announced his distaste for any notion of communication as mental sharing through transmitting information, no one in the Heideggerian heritage has any taste for communication as information exchange or thought transmission as described by the transmission model. For Gadamer, the concept of communication no longer refers to a linear one-way transmission of some self-contained units of meanings—no matter which are ideas, thoughts, or propositional contents—from one person to another, from one language to another, or from one time or place to another, as if meanings could travel intact. Nothing "moves" in hermeneutics. Since the term "communication" has been so heavily associated with the transmission model—always appearing alongside terms such as "sender," "receiver," "encode," "decode," and "transmission"—Gadamer prefers to discuss communication in the context of a much different set of terms such as "understanding," "interpretation," and "conversation."

In all his works, Gadamer had been drawn to what we can learn from Plato about Socratic dialogue, which is, to Gadamer, the clue to reveal

the nature of substantive hermeneutic understanding. It is Plato who made us realize the hermeneutic priority of questioning in all experience, all knowledge, and discourse. Especially, there is a close relation between questioning and understanding which is "what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension" (Gadamer 1989, 374). With R. G. Collingwood, Gadamer contends that, just as all knowledge starts from questions, all understanding begins with questions. We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer.

Thus, a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it. (Gadamer 1989, 370)

The real and fundamental nature of questioning is its openness. Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing to be understood. This is the reason why understanding is always more than merely re-creating the author's intention or the text's original meaning. One's questioning of a thing to be understood opens up possibilities of its meaning. What is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject in the context of one's own horizon. The fullness of meaning is constantly in the process of being redefined and can be realized only during the dialectic interplay of question and answer.

Such a dialectic interplay of question and answer, which leads to genuine understanding, is actually a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation or dialogue. As such, genuine understanding turns out to be a process of *reaching* or *coming to* an understanding through conversation. A conversation partner does not receive completed meanings from another partner. Meanings are co-created and refined as both interlocutors immerse and engage in an alive conversation through questioning and answering. In contrast to the traditional binary mode of understanding—*one person* understands something *unilaterally* since the person who performs understanding has no part in meaning creation and what is to be understood cannot speak back—Gadamer in essence pushes toward a tripartite model of understanding: *one person* comes to an understanding with *another person* about *a subject matter* through conversation, the dialectic interplay of questioning and answering.

If to understand means to come to an understanding with each other through conversation, then the further question is: What is the primary purpose of conversation? What does conversation enable us to achieve?

For Gadamer, it is to reach agreement with one another on some subject matter. "Understanding is, primarily agreement.... In general one attempts to reach a *substantive agreement*—not just *sympathetic understanding* of the other person—and this in such a way that again one proceeds via the subject matter (Gadamer 1989, 180; emphases added). In fact, the German term *Einverständnis*, which is closely associated with the term *Verstehen* (understanding) means "understanding, agreement, consent." "Coming to an understanding with someone on something" means "coming to an agreement with someone on something."

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. (Gadamer 1989, 385)

In order to reach substantive agreement with each other about some *subject matters* through conversation, one cannot either impose one's own point of view or tradition onto the other (the projective understanding) or place oneself into the other's horizon¹ with the sole purpose of knowing "objectively" the other's horizon (the adoptive, "sympathetic" understanding). Genuine conversation is not assimilation by making the other like oneself or making oneself like the other. In both cases, one has stopped trying to reach a genuine agreement with one another. In the first case, one induces the other to absorb one's own horizon and tradition, thereby concealing the other's otherness; thus, one cannot reach agreement with the other; in the second case, one unnecessarily allows the other's horizon and tradition to engulf one's own which makes one who he or she is, thereby making one's own standpoint "safely unattainable." Again, no genuine agreement can be reached between one and the other. In contrast, to reach genuine agreement through authentic conversation, "both partners are trying to recognize the full values of what is alien and opposed to them. If this happens mutually, and each of the partners, *while simultaneously holding on to his own arguments*, weighs the counterarguments, it is possible to achieve...a common diction and a common dictum" (Gadamer 1989, 387; emphasis added). The process of reaching such an agreement is what Gadamer calls the process of fusing horizons: a fusion between the horizons of two parties through conversation, whereby one party's horizon is enlarged and enriched in terms of the engagement with the horizon of the other's, *not replaced* by the other's.

In his *Truth and method*, Gadamer rarely uses the term “communication” in discussing conversation for the reason mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, it should be clear that through his hermeneutic discourse of understanding, he not only presents a concept of understanding different from the notion of propositional understanding, but also opens up a new discourse of communication that has “conversation” or “dialogue,” instead of “transmission,” as its central metaphor.

What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purpose and seeing each other’s point—performs *the communication of meaning* that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (Gadamer 1989, 368; italics mine)

For Gadamer, the process of substantive hermeneutic understanding—the process of “coming-to-an-understanding” and “coming-to-an-agreement” through genuine conversation—is, in essence, communication. To distinguish it from the dominant standard discourse of communication as transmission (informative communication), I will call Gadamer’s new discourse about communication *dialogical* communication. According to it, communication is a process of mutual creation of meanings in the flow of a living genuine conversation between two dialogists. The act of communication is co-created by both interlocutors acting and reacting to each other’s utterances, with each utterance creating the conditions for the next one to follow.

In fact, it is not exactly accurate to call Gadamer’s dialogue model of communication a *new* discourse. Historically, the transmission model came much later than the dialogue model of communication. The standard transmission model was framed by Locke’s empiricist philosophy of knowledge in the seventeenth century, further supported by the invocation of unconsciousness (Eduard von Hartmann, Frederick Myers, William James, and Sigmund Freud) during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, enhanced by the computer metaphor of an information processing paradigm dominant within the field of modern experimental, cognitive psychology since the middle of the twentieth century, and established as a dominant, legitimate scientific model of communication by the information theory (Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, and Norbert Wiener) around the 1950s. The notion of communication theory, founded on the transmission model, is no older than the 1940s.

However, the dialogue model can be traced back to as early as the ancient Greek philosophy, especially Plato's discourse on the primacy of dialectic dialogue—the art of question and answer, objection and rebuttal, argumentation and persuasion—in seeking truth and knowledge. Plato's discourse on dialogue started the exchange model of communication, according to which communication is supposed to involve interchange, mutuality, reciprocity, and engagement. Based on this Platonic tradition, a colloquial sense of communication calls for open and frank dialogue. It is not simply talk; it refers to a special kind of talk distinguished by disclosure and reconciliation: disclosing one's oneness to the other and the other's otherness to oneself (knowing oneself through knowing the other and knowing the other through knowing oneself), and reconciling oneself and the other.

In the 1920s, we saw the revival and rehabilitation of the Platonic dialogue model in Martin Heidegger's metaphysics and John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy. Heidegger's notion of communication is neither semantic (meaning exchange), nor pragmatic (action coordination), but ontological (world disclosing and otherness' openness). Communication is, for Heidegger, the interpretive articulation of our "thrownness" into a world together with people to whom we want to open ourselves to hear their otherness. With Heidegger, Dewey views language as precondition of thought and dismisses a semantic view of language as interpersonal plumbing, carrying thought and meaning as a pipe carries water, which is the semantic foundation of the transmission model of linguistic communication. Unlike Heidegger, Dewey's notion of communication is more pragmatically orientated: communication as partaking, namely, taking part in a collective world, not simply sharing the secret of consciousness or transferring meanings. Gadamer's conversation model is a further development of this trend. It is in the hands of Gadamer that the dialogue discourse of communication reaches its maturity and universality.

We have seen that the relationship between propositional understanding and informative communication is asymmetric since propositional understanding is necessary, but not sufficient for informative communication. Nevertheless, informative communication amounts to, in essence, mutual propositional understanding since both the act of communicating and the act of understanding are by nature a one-way linear transmission of message. In contrast, the relationship between Gadamer's hermeneutic understanding and dialogical communication is symmetric: the process of hermeneutic understanding (*Verstehen*)—the process of "coming-to-an-understanding" and "coming-to-an-agreement"—is essentially conversation or communication (*Mitteilung*). On the one hand, we can reach understanding only through conversation or communication; on the other hand, to communicate is to understand through conversation. We can say, to a certain extent, that

while communication is, in the transmission model, reduced to mutual understanding, understanding is, in Gadamer's hands, elevated to communication.

CONCLUSION

We have shown that the relationship between communication and understanding depends upon the notions of understanding and communication involved. Thinking along the line of propositional understanding and informative communication, communication can be reduced to mutual understanding. Operating along the line of hermeneutic understanding and dialogical communication, the process of understanding is, in essence, a process of communication. That is why many philosophers intuitively use the two notions interchangeably although many of them have never made a case of why it is justifiable to do so.

However, dialogical communication should not be confused with (mutual) propositional understanding. Based on the dialogue model of communication, the goal of communication is not merely comprehension—mutual understanding through transmission of information. Instead, communication aims at cooperation based on agreement. Besides, genuine communication is not monological, passing on fixed, "dead" meanings from one language to the other. Rather, it is dialogical, a process of mutual creation of meanings in the flow of a living genuine dialogue. Conversely, hermeneutic understanding should not be confused with informative communication either. The former is dialogical by nature while the latter is monological.

NOTE

1. One's particular horizon or viewpoint is formed by one's particular tradition, culture, language, historical past, and situation, which embrace not just immediate context of fore-meanings that one is currently engaged with, but the broader context that conditions them.

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