FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER

EDITED BY LORRAINE CODE

FEMINIST
INTERPRETATIONS
OF
HANS-GEORG GADAMER

NANCY TUANA, GENERAL EDITOR

This series consists of edited collections of essays, some original and some previously published, offering feminist re-interpretations of the writings of major figures in the Western philosophical tradition. Devoted to the work of a single philosopher, each volume contains essays covering the full range of the philosopher's thought and representing the diversity of approaches now being used by feminist critics.

Already published:

Nancy Tuana, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (1994)

Margaret Simons, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir* (1995)

Bonnie Honig, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (1995)

Patricia Jagentowicz Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (1996)

Maria J. Falco, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1996)

Susan J. Hekman, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (1996)

Nancy J. Holland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida* (1997)

Robin May Schott, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant* (1997)

Celeine Leon and Sylvia Walsh, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Soren Kierkegaard* (1997)

Cynthia Freeland, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (1998)

Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1998)

Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Chris Matthew Sciabarra, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand* (1999)

Susan Bordo, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes* (1999)

Julien S. Murphy, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre* (1999)

Anne Jaap Jacobson, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of David Hume* (2000)

Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Marilyn Frye, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly* (2000)

Tina Chanter, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (2001)

Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger* (2001)

Charlene Haddock Seigfried, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of John Dewey* (2001)

Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor, eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein* (2002)

Lynda Lange, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (2002)

FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF HANS-GEORG GADAMER

EDITED BY LORRAINE CODE

Contents

Preface

Nancy Tuana

Take into your hands any history of philosophy text. You will find compiled therein the "classics" of modern philosophy. Since these texts are often designed for use in undergraduate classes, the editor is likely to offer an introduction in which the reader is informed that these selections represent the perennial questions of philosophy. The student is to assume that she or he is about to explore the timeless wisdom of the greatest minds of Western philosophy. No one calls attention to the fact that the philosophers are all men.

Although women are omitted from the canons of philosophy, these texts inscribe the nature of woman. Sometimes the philosopher speaks directly about woman, delineating her proper role, her abilities and inabilities, her desires. Other times the message is indirect—a passing remark hinting at women's emotionality, irrationality, unreliability.

This process of definition occurs in far more subtle ways when the central concepts of philosophy—reason and justice, those characteristics that are taken to define us as human—are associated with traits historically identified with masculinity. If the "man" of reason must learn to control or overcome traits identified as feminine—the body, the emotions, the passions—then the realm of rationality will be one reserved primarily for men,[1] with grudging entrance to those few women who are capable of transcending their femininity.

Feminist philosophers have begun to look critically at the canonized texts of philosophy and have concluded that the discourses of philosophy are not gender-neutral. Philosophical narratives do not offer a universal perspective, but rather privilege some experiences and beliefs over

others. These experiences and beliefs permeate all philosophical theories whether they be aesthetic or epistemological, moral or metaphysical. Yet this fact has often been neglected by those studying the traditions of philosophy. Given the history of canon formation in Western philosophy, the perspective most likely to be privileged is that of upper-class white males. Thus, to be fully aware of the impact of gender biases, it is imperative that we re-read the canon with attention to the ways in which philosophers' assumptions concerning gender are embedded within their theories.

This new series, Re-Reading the Canon, is designed to foster this process of reevaluation. Each volume will offer feminist analyses of the theories of a selected philosopher. Since feminist philosophy is not monolithic in method or content, the essays are also selected to illustrate the variety of perspectives within feminist criticism and highlight some of the controversies within feminist scholarship.

In this series, feminist lenses will be focused on the canonical texts of Western philosophy, both those authors who have been part of the traditional canon, as well as those philosophers whose writings have more recently gained attention within the philosophical community. A glance at the list of volumes in the series will reveal an immediate gender bias of the canon: Arendt, Aristotle, de Beauvoir, Derrida, Descartes, Foucault, Hegel, Hume, Kant, Locke, Marx, Mill, Nietzsche, Plato, Rousseau, Wittgenstein, Wollstonecraft. There are all too few women included, and those few who do appear have been added only recently. In creating this series, it is not my intention to rectify the current canon of philosophical thought. What is and is not included within the canon during a particular historical period is a result of many factors. Although no canonization of texts will include all philosophers, no canonization of texts that excludes all but a few women can offer an accurate representation of the history of the discipline, as women have been philosophers since the ancient period.[2]

I share with many feminist philosophers and other philosophers writing from the margins of philosophy the concern that the current canonization of philosophy be transformed. Although I do not accept the position that the current canon has been formed exclusively by power relations, I do believe that this canon represents only a selective history of the tradition. I share the view of Michael Bérubé that "canons are at once the location, the index, and the record of the struggle for cultural representation; like any other hegemonic formation, they must be continually reproduced anew and are continually contested."[3]

The process of canon transformation will require the recovery of "lost" texts and a careful examination of the reasons such voices have been silenced. Along with the process of uncovering women's philosophical history, we must also begin to analyze the impact of gender ideologies upon the process of canonization. This process of recovery and examination must occur in conjunction with careful attention to the concept of a canon of authorized texts. Are we to dispense with the notion of a tradition of excellence embodied in a canon of authorized texts? Or, rather than abandon the whole idea of a canon, do we instead encourage a reconstruction of a canon of those texts that inform a common culture?

This series is designed to contribute to this process of canon transformation by offering a re-reading of the current philosophical canon. Such a re-reading shifts our attention to the ways in which woman and the role of the feminine are constructed within the texts of philosophy. A question we must keep in front of us during this process of re-reading is whether a philosopher's socially inherited prejudices concerning woman's nature and role are independent of her or his larger philosophical framework. In asking this question, attention must be paid to the ways in which the definitions of central philosophical concepts implicitly include or exclude gendered traits.

This type of reading strategy is not limited to the canon, but can be applied to all texts. It is my desire that this series reveal the importance of this type of critical reading. Paying attention to the workings of gender within the texts of philosophy will make visible the complexities of the inscription of gender ideologies.

Notes

1. More properly, it is a realm reserved for a group of privileged males, since the texts also inscribe race and class biases that thereby omit certain males from participation.

2. Mary Ellen Waithe's multivolume series, *A History of Women Philosophers* (Boston: M. Nijoff, 1987), attests to this presence of women.

3. Michael Bérubé, *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 4–5.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Why Feminists Do Not Read Gadamer

Lorraine Code

Gadamer and Feminists: Connections and Conflicts

The title of this essay reads somewhat ironically for the introduction to a volume that offers fifteen astute, provocative, creative-critical feminist rereadings of the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer. It plays on the title of the introduction to the Nietzsche volume in this *Re-Reading the Canon* series: "Why Feminists Read Nietzsche" (Oliver and Pearsall 1998). It attests, also, to the relative sparseness of feminist engagement with Gadamer by contrast with work that addresses, finds resources in, and challenges even so reputedly misogynist a philosopher as Friedrich Nietzsche, who died in 1900, the year of Gadamer's birth. In his intellectual autobiography, which introduces the 1997 volume *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* in the Library of Living Philosophers series, Gadamer testifies to the enormity of Nietzsche's influence during his Marburg years, beginning in 1919, where young philosophers critical of the "methodologism"of the neo-Kantian school were enthusiastic in their response to Husserl's art of phenomenological description. But, Gadamer observes, "it was 'life-philosophy,' above all—behind which stood the European event of Friedrich Nietzsche—that was taking hold of our whole feeling for life": he remarks that "behind all the boldness and riskiness of our existential engagement—as a still scarcely visible threat to the romantic traditionalism of our culture—stood the gigantic form of Friedrich Nietzsche with his ecstatic critique of everything, including all the illusions of self-consciousness" (Gadamer 1997a, 5, 6). My entry into

this discussion through a contrast with Nietzsche, rather than by situating Gadamer in relation to the more frequently cited influences on his philosophy of whom Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger are the most notable, comes out of a sense of how intriguing it is that a philosopher so embedded in tradition, who often betrays a certain conservativism in his respect for it, should claim so early and overwhelming a debt to Nietzsche: the arch-iconoclast, the bitingly polemical, ironic critic of Western philosophical, religious, and moral traditions. The contrast is provocative especially because Nietzsche's iconoclasm has had a certain attraction for feminists committed to displacing and breaking with an intransigently patriarchal philosophical tradition, by comparison with a pervasive—if not seamless—skepticism about whether or how a space could be opened for feminist debate with so tradition-saturated a thinker as Gadamer, and an attendant puzzlement about what he can offer to feminist projects.

In their introduction to the Nietzsche volume the editors observe that feminist readings of Nietzsche have tended to take one of two directions: asking "how to interpret Nietzsche's remarks about women and femininity"—and thus how to contend with his infamously derogatory stereotypes of women—or concentrating on questions about how Nietzsche's philosophy can stand as a resource for feminist thought, on what feminists can gain from him (Oliver and Pearsall 1998, 2). Because images of or references to women, derogatory or otherwise, are so rare in the vast corpus of Gadamer's published work, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no "woman question" for him: hence variations on and modalities of the second set of questions—how to find feminist resources in his philosophy—are more readily available to feminists reading his work. As will indeed be clear from the chapters in this volume, feminists turning to Gadamer often read him "against the grain": past the silences about women and other Others, to discern what they might garner from a Gadamerian approach to language, history, knowledge, politics, or literature; and/or to evaluate the philosophical significance of the consistent maleness of his putative interlocutors and the rarefied academic and social universe he inhabited throughout his life—the masculine milieu that he depicts so clearly in his 1997 intellectual autobiography.

On 11 February 2000, when the chapters in this volume were being completed, Hans-Georg Gadamer reached the age of 100; he died on 14 March 2002. The bibliography of his published works in the Library of Living Philosophers volume runs to thirty printed pages, with an additional ten pages listing published interviews and broadcast tapes; and the

publication dates run from 1922 to 1996. The final date marks the publication date of the volume itself, not the cessation of Gadamer's philosophical writings: for more than a year after his 100th birthday he was still philosophically active.[1] In the course of a philosophical journey that traverses an entire century Gadamer was, inter alia, elected to Academies of Arts and Sciences in Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, England, and the United States; elected to "the highest academic honor given in Germany," Knight of the "Order of Merit" for the Arts and Sciences; and received Doctorates "Honoris Causa" in Germany, Poland, the United States, and Canada. His was a towering philosophical presence. Yet it would be strangely incongruous to think of him as a public intellectual, for his was a more politically sequestered life than that of many thinkers of comparable stature: Sartre, Foucault, Derrida come to mind. Despite having lived through a century that witnessed and participated in two world wars, and having experienced the upheavals of the new social movements of the interwar and post–World War II years, Gadamer lived a markedly insular, scholarly life. His account of his quietistic, intentionally unobtrusive pursuit of scholarship throughout World War II (1997a, 13–15) and his silence on matters of political ferment and social-political change during the latter half of the twentieth century are striking for what they fail to address. Moreover, the "world" he depicts in his intellectual autobiography—the long lists of the male students who accompanied him from Frankfurt to Heidelberg, and the equally long lists of the influential, all-male philosophers and students he knew, taught, and worked with, beginning with Karl Löwith and concluding with "a great number of Americans" (1997a, 17) in patterns of friendship, mentorship, and discipleship—may prompt female readers to wonder where the speaking, or indeed even the listening, place for women could have been in these conversations. Thus, feminists cognizant of the social and political oppressions and philosophical exclusions that have been women's lot throughout the history of the Western world, and of the part canonical Western philosophy has played in sustaining them, have to work hard to find in Gadamer a social-political ally, or a even silent friend of feminist projects.

Yet so many themes, presuppositions, methodological practices, disenchantments, and commitments in his work are consonant with central aspects of second-wave feminist thinking that it is less surprising after all for feminists to turn to Gadamer than to discount him as a source of transformative insights and untried conceptual resources in their

projects of rereading the post-Enlightenment Western philosophical canon, contesting and reinterpreting its fundamental assumptions. Gadamer's very embeddedness in and commitment to tradition, perhaps paradoxically, presents a way of engaging with the deep historical root-edness of the circumstances and structures feminists at the beginning of the twenty-first century have to understand and challenge, even as aspects of his immersion in tradition pose obstacles to entering into unconstrained conversation with his work.

Gadamerian hermeneutics—in which knowing is engaged, situated, dialogic, and historically conscious—has much to offer to feminists and other theorists of subjectivity, agency, history, and knowledge who are disillusioned with an empiricist-positivist legacy that manifests itself in epistemologies of mastery and domination, with an operative conception of objectivity that requires dislocated, interchangeable knowers who stand as distant, disinterested spectators of the objects of knowledge. Indeed, Gadamer himself names the "barrenness" of positivism "right up to the present day new positivism" (1997a, 6) among factors that shaped his hermeneutic philosophy. Repudiating the positivistic view that knowledge worthy of the name will derive from an idealized model of knowing in the physical sciences, achieved by means of replicable empir-ical observations in ideal observation conditions and formulated in empir-ically verifiable propositions, Gadamer proposes hermeneutics as an interpretive, historically conscious practice of working to achieve under-standing. It draws its exemplary models of inquiry from the human sci-ences and, in particular, from history and from the place of art in history. Hence it is itself as much an art as it is a science; reliant on *phronesis*—practical wisdom—rather than on disengaged rationality. Whereas know-ing, in the Anglo-American mainstream, tends to be conceived as an all-or-nothing matter, exemplified in discrete, punctiform, yet uniformly knowable and ubiquitously salient "facts," hermeneutic understanding is multifaceted, complex, richly textured: it varies not just quantitatively but qualitatively in its reciprocal relations among interpreters, texts, and ideas. Both historically conscious and reflexively conscious of its own historicity, it is achieved dialogically, in conversations between the "fore-knowledge" that comprises the "horizon" from which an interpreter enters an encounter, and the texts, events, works of art, other people, that are equivalently historical. Thus Gadamer writes: "Whereas the object of the natural sciences can be described idealiter as what would be known in the perfect knowledge of nature, it is senseless to speak of

a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an 'object in itself' toward which its research is directed" (Gadamer [1960]1989, 285). Hermeneutic understanding is less definitive than orthodox empirical knowledge aims to be, but in some sense "truer to" the texts and experiences it engages.

By contrast, then, with knowledge-making projects that aim at maximal completeness, foundationally established and deductively achieved, hermeneutic understanding seeks to attain a form of coherence manifested in what Gadamer calls a "fusion of horizons." It is a difficult concept and one that, we will see, produces ambivalent responses from Gadamer's feminist readers. For some, it signals possibilities of the communal, mutual understandings that positivist-empiricist approaches can only thwart; for others it cautions against appropriation, mergings, in which separate identities and points of view are subsumed, often to the disadvantage of less privileged participants. Yet either way, it represents a potentially rich, powerful departure from the attenuated goals and methods of positivistic inquiry.

Initially, and quite simply, Gadamer conceives of the "horizon" as the aspect of a situation or standpoint that "limits the possibility of vision" (1989, 302) while ordering items within the range of vision according to their relative significance. The term is especially pertinent to historical understanding, as it points to the interpretive necessity of seeing the past in its own terms (i.e., within/as its own horizon), thus not as an aspect of the values and prejudices of the interpreter; and to the necessity of placing oneself within another situation in order to understand it, while also remaining open to developing a critical awareness of the foreknowledge integral to one's own horizon. Translated into everyday conversations, hermeneutics cautions against naively, unthinkingly assimilating another's point of view, values, concerns—horizon—to one's own, and against placing one's own point of view beyond interpretation. Although many commentators read in such cautions a commitment to respecting and preserving otherness while endeavoring to understand the other's horizon from within, others propose that the purpose is more accurately represented as one of overcoming particularities in the synthesis that an achieved fusion of horizons can accomplish.[2] Gadamer names as examples of conversations that could provide starting points for discovering the co-conversant's standpoint, or his or her horizon, "certain kinds of conversation between doctor and patient" (1989, 303), or encounters between two people who are attempting to find a common ground

(1997a, 45).These are situations that reveal our preconceptions to ourselves as much as to the other: making them "strange," and requiring us to reconsider them so as to overcome both "our own particularity . . . [and] that of the other" (1989, 305). In its historical dimension, Gadamer's concern is with how the horizon of the present meets and interprets the horizon of the past. The horizon of the present cannot be understood apart from its past, nor can a person strip her or his past away on entering a conversation; yet understanding is possible only when the tension between past and present, be it world-historical or personal, textual or conversational, is read as a productive tension out of which, ideally, a fusion of horizons may be achieved.

Achieving understanding for Gadamer is thus not the isolated, individualistic enterprise detached from the particularities of the world that acquiring scientific, historical, and other knowledge in Anglo-American philosophy commonly is, where self-reliance tends to be touted as an epistemic virtue and contrasted with the uncertainties of reliance on sedimented opinion, or on "hearsay" or "testimony." The centrality he accords the conversational/dialogic interpretive process, and his insistence on the linguisticality and historicity of the social world, points to a commonal enterprise of engagement in and with the *Lebenswelt* (life-world), whether the "commonality" refers to conversations with texts or to cooperative projects whose participants work together toward understanding, in dialogue with one another and/or with texts. Readers/co-conversants come to inquiry with their foreknowledge, their prejudgments *(Vorurteile)* in place: for Gadamer, it could not be otherwise, given his starting place in human embeddedness in the world and in history. *In-der-Welt-sein* can only, plausibly, *be* historical, at a fundamental, constitutive level. Yet this recognition of the heuristic value of prejudice or prejudgment is not without its problems for feminists and other Others; hence feminists seeking to determine what they can glean from Gadamer have to work out how to accommodate the very idea of prejudice, with its deep roots in tradition. Nonetheless, Gadamer's insistence on the inevitability of prejudice, prejudgment, situatedness, and horizons is by no means all bad from a feminist point of view. It is in many ways more intellectually honest than "the myth of the given" and its empiricist cognates, where a cluster of curious, often tyrannical, quasi–tabula rasa assumptions persists as more than just an ideal, to the effect that dislocated, presuppositionless, theory-neutral, value-free knowledge is both possible and necessary: not just of medium-sized material objects, but of human lives, situations, events,

creative endeavors, facts, artifacts, and thoughts. As Gadamer observes (1989, 275): "[T]here is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power." A central objective for feminist philosophers, theorists, and activists is to interrogate the androcentricity and other centricities that, often silently or covertly, inform and indeed saturate the Western social, intellectual, political, cultural order. Feminists need to know these centricities well if they are to achieve and enact transformative understandings. When prejudgments and the constitutive effects of situatedness are cloaked by a veil of unknowing, unacknowledged and/or systematically disavowed as this "prejudice against prejudice" requires, the intellectual labor of examining and contesting them is arduous indeed. Thus feminists can find cautious inspiration in the place prejudices and foreknowledge openly occupy in Gadamerian hermeneutics: they are *there* from the beginning, explicitly part of what any conversation, any understanding is about. Yet the issue, as we will discover, is not just about the inescapability of prejudice, but also about *which* prejudices Gadamer himself is prepared to acknowledge and committed to unsettling or modifying; and here feminist endorsement of the detail of his project is more equivocal.

Especially in his early work, Gadamer did not conceive of hermeneutics as "an epistemology," nor is it even likely that he would have accepted the label in his later works, especially in its Anglo-American stipulations.[3] Not only are mainstream epistemological projects more thoroughly physical-science-based and -modeled than hermeneutics could ever be, but two of the principal sources of Gadamer's hermeneutics are in areas where present-day orthodox epistemologists would not venture: first, the interpretation of texts, where hermeneutics traces its origins to biblical exegesis and philology; and second, experiences of works of art, and through those experiences to art's constitutive part in the production of historical consciousness and self-consciousness. His thinking about the work of art as a source of knowledge that extends beyond itself owes a debt to Martin Heidegger, particularly in "The Origin of the Work of Art," where Heidegger talks of the work as a place where "the truth of beings has set itself to work" (Heidegger 1977, 164). Truth reveals itself in the work of art, in the openness that receptivity requires: openness and receptivity that, for Gadamer, translate into the open dialogue that makes the fusion of horizons possible. These preoccupations alone give some sense of why Gadamer's work sits uncomfortably with or in relation

to the principles, goals, and methods of epistemological orthodoxy. Indeed, for the most rigorous positivist-empiricist, neither textual interpretation nor works of art can be objects, or sources, of the knowledge that it is orthodox epistemology's business to analyze, for there is no way of demonstrating their truth or falsity empirically. Nonetheless, the very prejudices that prompt theorists of knowledge to exclude such knowings and understandings from their domain of inquiry are the focus of Gadamer's attempts to undermine the Enlightenment-positivist dichotomy between reason and tradition, together with its ahistorical methodologism and the dislocated picture of knowledge and knowers that it underwrites. The truncated understandings that an ahistorical philosophy engenders out of its practices of abstracting from all specifiable human situations, and its relegation of language to a neutral medium through which "facts" are filtered, stated in monological, formulaic propositions and allegedly untouched by the filtering process, have prompted Gadamer to broaden and deepen the scope of his hermeneutics well beyond the places of its original inspiration.

A third source of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is also salient with reference to issues that animate this volume. He owes much to nineteenth-century philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey, whose term *Erlebnis* (roughly translated "lived experience") opens a way of engaging in the human sciences as a study of experience and meaning; where experience is lived linguistically, and language, as productive of meaning, is constitutive of the world that these sciences in particular seek to understand. Here, the subject/object dichotomy that functions as a basic positivist-empiricist presupposition yields to a conception of objects of knowledge as neither autonomous in, nor abstractable from, processes in which knower, known, and knowing are bound together in the *Lebenswelt* that interpretive inquiry studies. In elaborating these ideas Gadamer, like Dilthey, maintains a methodological and hence epistemological division between the human sciences *(Geisteswißenschaften)* and the natural sciences *(Naturwißenschaften)*, with the consequence that interpretive understanding as he details it *Truth and Method* pertains primarily to the methods and products of knowing in the human sciences. Yet in his philosophical autobiography Gadamer observes: "[T]he image of the natural sciences that I had in mind when I conceived my ideas for *Truth and Method* was quite one-sided. It is now clear to me . . . that a whole broad field of hermeneutical problems has been left out. . . . Nevertheless, the fact that a hermeneutical problematic is present in the natural sciences

was already clear to me when I read Moritz Schlick's convincing critique of the dogma of protocol sentences in 1934" (1997a, 41). Not only does this observation indicate that Gadamer had come to conceive the scope of hermeneutics more broadly than he initially did, but it suggests that feminists and other Others who look to hermeneutics as a way of developing insightfully historicized understandings beyond the scope of the human sciences, and indeed stretching even into the natural sciences, need not be charged before the fact with distorting Gadamer's theoretical-conceptual apparatus beyond what it can bear.

Gadamer's historical-hermeneutic approach to interpretation is addressive rather than observational: inquirers, for him, are not removed spectators of distinct and distant "objects of knowledge," but engaged participants in conversation, in dialogue with one another and with what they seek to know. They look as much to what texts, works of art, and human co-conversants have to say to them, as to what they have to say to or about texts and other people: they look as much to the part their prejudices play in the conversation as to the foreknowledge others bring into it. For Gadamer, the logic of this inquiry is a logic of question and answer, distinguished from formal propositional analysis by its starting point in the conviction that every thought, every philosophical theory, every text is an answer to a question: not an eternal or perennial question, but one posed out of and informed by specific historical circumstances. It is questions that open up processes of interpretation: thus, processes of uncovering the questions to which a text, a work, or a point of view is a response are integral to interpretive inquiry. Understanding, then, is not a matter of winning an argument against an opponent; rather, the dialectical conversation in which this logic of question and answer is enacted "requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (Gadamer 1989, 367). Feminists who have learned to look at philosophical argumentation-disputation through new lenses, following Janice Moulton's now-classic diagnosis of how "the adversary method" thwarts philosophical understanding (Moulton 1983), will find in Gadamer a potential ally on this issue. Interpretive understanding begins when someone/something addresses us and we attempt to respond. It requires a suspension of our prejudices in the sense of putting them to the question, opening up and keeping open other possibilities while taking account of its own (i.e., interpretation's own) historicality: demonstrating "the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself" (Gadamer 1989,

299–300). Here too is a dimension of Gadamerian philosophy that could serve as a feminist resource; for feminist inquiry, virtually by definition, is *situated.* It eschews quests for detached, dislocated, putatively "time-less" knowledge, to insist instead that knowledge, understanding, inter-pretation, and knowers are always, as Susan Bordo puts it, "*somewhere, and limited*" (Bordo 1990, 145). Situated knowers are historically, mate-rially, socially-culturally located and constituted, thus predisposed to real-ize the significance of what Gadamer calls an effective-historical consciousness. Whether or not Gadamer would understand or acknowl-edge the histories of social-political structures, sexual and racial oppres-sion, or material plenty or scarcity; or of stereotypes that situate and constrain human beings against their will, imposing some of the limita-tions Bordo and other feminists refer to; is by no means clear. It is a sub-ject for discussion in the next section of this introduction, and in the chapters that follow.

All of this having been said, the sheer force of tradition for Gadamer, in its breadth and depth and in the difficulty of discerning its "outside"; and Gadamer's failure to address the uneven distributions of power and privilege in human societies, in consequence of which some groups of people are more ineluctably subject to the authority of tradition than others—these factors, for many feminists, outweigh even the conceptual innovations, themes, and ideas that are markedly consonant with femi-nist projects. They suggest some reasons why feminists do not read Gadamer. Yet at least sixteen feminists whose contributions are published in this volume evidently do, as do I, its editor; nor are we his only fem-inist readers. In the next section of this introduction I turn to themes and preoccupations that run through these readings, and to some of the contrasts, criticisms, disagreements, and recommendations therein.

Feminists Reading Gadamer

What, then, can a philosophy rooted in the patriarchal authority and sometime-conservatism of the Western, predominately Christian tradi-tion offer to feminist philosophers? Among the contributors to this vol-ume, as might be expected, are theorists who endorse the basic tenets of Gadamer's approach and value the conceptual resources he makes avail-able. Other contributors find in his adherence to tradition a barrier that

blocks the way to thinking productively along with him. Yet it is clear that Gadamer has prompted these philosophers, albeit in various ways, to think seriously about how to read with, or past, the prejudices—the *Vorurteile*—that permeate his philosophy, how to bring a feminist-informed approach into conversation with his texts, and how to evaluate, or even appropriate, the unmistakable resonances between aspects of his thinking and feminist interpretive projects.

Entering a conversation with these texts requires a reader to work with Gadamer's conception of tradition, whose ambiguity he is the first to acknowledge, while recognizing that she herself or he himself enters such conversations as an Other whose otherness plays a constitutive part in the conversational-interpretive process. There are Gadamerian thinkers who emphasize the productive, critical edge of Gadamer's thought work from an understanding of tradition as neither ossified nor intransigently authoritarian: it stands for no fixed repository of received meanings, no inert persistence of "the same." Indeed, in this reading, Gadamerian tradition explicitly refuses the Romantic conception of tradition as "an antithesis to the freedom of reason . . . as something historically given, like nature . . . [that] conditions us without our questioning it." He refuses a "traditionalism" "that addresses itself to the truth of tradition and seeks to renew it" (1989, 280). Rather than blocking the freedom of reason, tradition thus engaged opens reason to singularity and strangeness, requires it to contest and resist colonization in which differences are assimilated into sameness. It is rather like a rough, resistant surface that inquiry rubs against, putting taken-for-granted views to the question, generating the frictions out of which revisionary interpretations emerge; just as otherness, too, generates frictions that interrupt the complacency of fixed self-understandings. Such readings contrast with the readings of theorists for whom Gadamer is the guardian and preserver of a single mainstream tradition, rigidly conformist and narrowly parochial in his philosophical practice; a member of a homogeneous "we" whose views of life, history, understanding, and art are normative for the culture at large.[4] The positions taken in the essays collected here do not divide neatly into the "productive" and "rigid," but sketching the division in this way marks the poles, the outer limits of the modalities of engagement with tradition that inform them.

The essays in this volume initiate, and invite the feminist reader to participate in, a range of disparate dialogues and conversations with Gadamer's texts by entering a conceptual space hitherto not densely

populated with feminist thinkers. A reader who arrives as a newcomer at this intersection between Gadamerian and feminist thought may be so drawn to the innovative possibilities as to wonder why such dialogues are so rare; or may, on the contrary, find it all so conceptually odd as to wonder what on earth she is doing there. Puzzling through such questions can be an uncomfortable exercise, but that very discomfort can expose the strangeness and contestability of the foreknowledge she brings to the reading, even as she engages with the prejudices—perhaps also foreign—from which Gadamerian philosophy is born. It can be exhilarating to encounter these ways of breaking free from the more intransigent prejudices and presuppositions of postpositivist philosophy. These feminist-Gadamer encounters run along a trajectory from disruptive to liberating. The essays in Part I of this volume introduce the themes and motifs central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, delineate the conceptual frame within which he thinks and writes, and evaluate the complexities of introducing his ideas into feminist political and social thought. Those in Part II offer a set of diverse lenses through which a feminist might view Gadamer's work as a way of enlisting his approach to untangle or illuminate specific problems and issues.

In the first chapter of Part I, Kathleen Roberts Wright urges feminists to reconsider "their suspicions about Hans-Georg Gadamer." She suggests that one reason for feminist resistance to reading Gadamer may be the seemingly inconsequential fact that the first English version of his *Truth and Method* was published almost simultaneously with Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* and Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. These texts were so radical—and so immediately popular—as to overshadow Gadamer's more traditional contribution to debates current in the 1960s and 1970s. In a productive critical analysis, Wright draws on Julie Ellison's "suspicions about Gadamer" as a cautionary example. Ellison reads Gadamer's reliance on such stereotypically feminine concepts as receptivity, dialogue, and community as evidence of an unacknowledged "desire for an ethics of the feminine": an irony echoed in Luce Irigaray's writing about the morality of the feminine speech community which likewise recalls "a forgotten masculine romanticism" (Ellison 1990, 20). Gadamer, Ellison maintains, forsakes method for receptivity and community, while suppressing the female-feminine associations. It is to this putative suppression that feminists have responded with suspicion.

Does the I-Thou of the interpreter-interpreted dyad indeed signify an isolated individual's longing for intimacy? In a subtle exploration of three ways in which an 'I' might address a text, Wright suggests that in the I-Thou relation, which resists speaking *about* or *for* the text to *engage* in dialogue with it, Gadamer invokes "the ethical ideals of autonomy, mutual recognition, and reciprocity rather than . . . [those of] receptivity, communion, and community." Some of the worries that Gemma Corradi Fiumara will voice in her essay in Part II of this volume are most salient with respect to the "masculine" stance, where the interpreter addresses the text as a "someone" (speaking about it) or a "you" (speaking for it), for in these moments the authoritative interpreter is seeking an answer from the text yet offering no answers in return. Addressing the text as a Thou, by contrast, the interpreter "lets the other's (the text's) claims matter . . . [to him] so that these claims might possibly transform . . . [him]." Wright concludes with the provocative suggestion that revisiting the Gadamerian I-Thou after Foucault and Derrida, after the contests over identity politics that bear their mark have shifted to a wider, global focus, twenty-first-century feminists might come to terms with "a new and a different sense in which we are 'the other.'" Her rereading of the modes of address embedded in *the question* allows her to enter a dialogue that takes place not just with Gadamer, but also with the quite different senses of questioning articulated both by Fiumara and by Marie Fleming in this volume.

Problems with the category "woman" are the point of entry into Georgia Warnke's chapter, "Hermeneutics and Constructed Identities." Contemporary feminists, she observes, have argued that the category in its unreconstructed versions must either rely on false generalizations about women "in general" or "as such," derived from a sample too small to support any meaningful claims about them; or must imprison women in constructed identities that are then mobilized as grounds for justifying oppressive social arrangements, legitimating claims to the effect that such arrangements best suit women's "nature." Warnke considers the implications of Denise Riley's question whether women's assigned identity can be anything more than a tool that serves historical and social-political purposes, and of Judith Butler's contention that there is no plausible sex/gender distinction, only "stylized" performances of binary social identities (Riley 1988; Butler 1990). She asks if a Gadamerian hermeneutics has the scope both to acknowledge the constructed

character of gender identity and to evaluate divergent constructions comparatively.

Warnke suggests that the concept of a fusion of horizons within a history offers another way of thinking about gender identity as constructed or innate. In her reading, identity in general and gender identities in particular are better understood as interpreted fusions of horizons: perhaps momentary, perhaps more enduring, but fusions between developing individual needs and the histories of their interpretation. Thus feminists can come to see that even traits, drives, and aspirations that commonly pose as untainted, given, and merely natural are in fact accessible to understanding only within a historical horizon. It is by no means clear, she acknowledges, that Butler could accept such a proposal: if understanding is to achieve validity, then interpretation has to be coherent; but for Butler, projects that aim to impose coherence tend to be coercive and are therefore troubling. Hence, read through Butler's brief for gender *inco*herence, Gadamer could only be seen as a conservative and constraining figure. Yet—as Linda Alcoff and Silja Freudenberger note in their essays in Part II of this volume—for Gadamer, unless it is possible to rely on textual coherence and even on truth, there is no way of evaluating or testing knowledge. The task then, as Warnke sees it, is to determine hermeneutically what truth gender identities can exhibit without merely rehabilitating traditional female virtues. Working through these issues, coming to see gender identities less as performances than as interpretations, might allow for a reconception of gender that would no longer imprison people in preordained categories but would approach sex and gender as open categories, objects of discussion and debate in "an interpretively oriented, deliberative democracy," she proposes.

Well aware of the extent of feminist skepticism both about the value of hermeneutics and about the emancipatory potential of engagement with tradition, Susan-Judith Hoffmann also addresses the question Butler poses: Who could there be to emancipate if there is no subject, or only a subject constituted by the tradition? Yet she proposes that Gadamerian hermeneutics can offer an understanding of power and domination as constitutive of concepts, ideas, and even identities without reducing meaning, or indeed knowledge, to power. Gadamer, Hoffmann believes, rehabilitates philosophy as a practical, ethical endeavor in a project that is wary of the dangers of the positivist "unity of science" credo and cognizant of how the rhetoric of objectivity and neutrality can mask agendas of power and domination. Hence Gadamer's emphasis both on

phronesis—less distanced than objective neutrality—and on the openness of questioning (pace Fiumara) as central to knowledge-seeking. Thus, Hoffmann suggests, hermeneutics becomes a deconstruction of traditional, foundational epistemology.

As for the place of prejudice in Gadamerian hermeneutics, according to Hoffmann, Gadamer rehabilitates a positive sense of the term: hence his work is consonant with the feminist claim that there can be no neutral vantage point, no tabula rasa. Nor is it possible to ground knowledge in the epistemic activities of an autonomous self who seeks to bracket, or detach himself from, the flow of ongoing discourse. Along with prejudice, then, Gadamer rehabilitates the authority of tradition in an aspect of his hermeneutical project that some feminists see as an affront to intellectual and social emancipation. Yet, as we shall see, Hoffmann is more optimistic than either Fleming or Fiumara about the possibility of deriving from his sense of the dialogic structure of language a view that language is indeed attuned or open to "the voice of the other." Nonetheless, she finds no grounds for seeing Gadamer as a "silent feminist," not just because he is silent on feminist issues, but because he does not see it as the task of the philosopher to propose solutions to social and political problems. Philosophy, he believes, is politically incompetent (see Gadamer 2000).

Approaching Gadamer from a somewhat different direction, Marie Fleming also declares it a "grave mistake" for feminists to see Gadamer as a friend, contending that his "hermeneutical courting of the other is purely instrumental." In a reading that acknowledges the resources feminists have found in Gadamer's philosophy, Fleming argues that Gadamer works from a conception of a unified and homogeneous tradition to generate a position in which, it turns out, the Other has no say. She asks, Can a female person step into the interpreter's position? She thinks not, for in the Gadamerian hermeneutic circle, the interpreter is indelibly coded as masculine. Nor is it clear who can claim—or ask—to belong to this tradition: can women and other Others belong? Again, it is doubtful, for in maintaining that experience must be universal, Gadamer homogenizes the "we" of those who participate in "the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices" (Gadamer 1989, 295) in a relation that has to be "constantly and actively produced." Although interpreters must sort out their prejudices in light of the question to which a text—and by extension, a problem, a theory, even the position of another person—is an answer, and although the other is necessary to the understanding process, Fleming sees

no equality, no reciprocity in this process; no claim to "dialogical part-nership." Hence there is only one way to belong: the idea of distinct stand-points and diverse belief systems and traditions coming together in understandings across their differences is distinctly implausible. Indeed, Fleming argues, the Gadamerian fusion of horizons assimilates differences into the one true story in which the tradition preserves itself. In view of these hidden assumptions—these unexamined *Vorurteile*—Gadamer's phi-losophy, according to Fleming, is hostile to feminist values.

It is odd that in discussions of Gadamerian conversations, much is said about questioning but very little about listening. It is true that Gadamer is dissatisfied with Plato's dialogues, Fleming notes, because of Socrates's persistent demands for answers and accounts from the other: a process in which Gadamer discerns the roots of Western logocentrism. But, she wonders, where does listening occur in the hermeneutic process? For Gadamer, it seems to be primarily a matter of listening to the tradition. Gemma Corradi Fiumara argues that this minimal attention accorded to listening is no accident, contending that Western epistemology is pre-occupied with posing questions, whereas a true *epistemophily*—her pre-ferred term—would engage the whole embodied person, fully involved both in listening and in questioning. Fiumara sees the *question* as "one of the most coercive figures of language" especially when, as she perceives it in Gadamer's writings, the questioner ignores the questioning resources of the object of knowledge or person to whom the question is posed. Thus, she contends, in the cultural narcissism of the epistemological point of origin, questions posed by women become unhearable. Indeed, for Fiumara "it is almost as if a tacit revulsion for any contact with life and historicity secretly dominated our mainstream epistemologies." Within this general frame—from which, on the surface, he seems to depart—Gadamer accords minimal recognition to listening as a funda-mental modality of the hermeneutic encounter. Yet only the primacy of listening—which is both more than and other than hearing, closer per-haps to acknowledgment—would allow for the genuine openness that hermeneutics promises but, in her view, fails to deliver. Indeed, for Fiumara, even if men's questions were to open out to encompass women's questions the results would still be coercive, for women's purposes would not be served simply by adding their questions to an established "list of legitimate interrogatives." Both women and men need to develop a more thoroughly epistemophilic stance. For Gadamer, by contrast, beginning with a question can only lead us to conclude with more of our own ques-

tions, never with a listening that would allow the object or interlocutor to express itself. Like Fleming, Fiumara concludes that the other does not really "have a say" in these conversations.

In a discussion that has many concerns in common with Wright's analysis, Veronica Vasterling introduces a more elaborated reading of postmodernism than Warnke assumes, into her interpretation of the I-Thou relation. She maintains that the authoritative, bourgeois tradition is dissolving in the Western world. Thus of particular significance for assessing the place of tradition in Gadamer's thought are the very questions Wright, Fiumara, and Fleming have posed. These questions ask whether or not the scope of the I-Thou relation, or indeed of Gadamerian dialogue in general, is restricted to those who can assume equality from the outset; whether the movement toward agreement leaves room for recognition of alterity and plurality; and how to deal with Gadamer's failure to address issues of power and domination. These same questions shape Vasterling's conclusion that although feminists have much to gain from reading Gadamer, there is also much to resist.

It is not tradition *simpliciter* that they must resist, although a tradition-imbued philosophical stance that glosses over the constitutive effects of power, privilege, domination, and alterity has radically to be interrogated. But recognizing that human beings are born into a history of "authoritative interpretations of which we are part" and from which even as critically questioning adults we can never fully free ourselves is a straightforward claim about what it is to be human. It is part of the self-understanding that, for Gadamer, is integral to the engaged practices of making sense of our lives; and hence of his appeal to *phronesis*. As I have noted, from the outset this acknowledgment of the part tradition and its *Vorurteile* play in understanding is welcome to feminists who have resisted the possibility either of entering inquiry with a tabula-rasa-like consciousness, or of achieving meaningful knowledge from a god's-eye vantage point. Postmodern contentions about difference and situation, and their challenges to (Enlightenment) universalist and foundationalist assumptions, have spurred feminist critiques of traditional presumptions of uniformity and sameness, where difference tends to be dismissed as aberration or subsumed under conceptions that erases its specificity. Only in reading Gadamer through and against some of these critiques can feminists find a resource in his philosophy.

Urgent issues are at stake in these critical rereadings: whether Gadamerian dialogue can make room for understanding without agreement;

whether the goal of a common understanding has to presuppose a common background and place within the tradition; and whether there can be understanding that preserves and recognizes the otherness of the Other. Equally pressing for Vasterling is the question of how, in a Gadamerian position, one could distinguish understanding from evaluation or judgment: does this distinction make available the conceptual tools for judging such practices as clitoridectomy or abortion; and, by extension, is it possible to avoid assimilating the other to one's own interpretive standards? Issues of power run through all of these questions, for the few have always been the effective agents of change, drowning out, absorbing, or co-opting the voices of the many so that, Vasterling suggests, it is more accurate to read tradition "as the story of the winners . . . which gains authority because the memory of the dissenters, the silenced, the losers is forgotten and erased." Truth becomes another name for power and success. Vasterling finds promise in Hannah Arendt's reflections on tradition, in which the dissolution of a tradition has the effect of opening up spaces for other, formerly excluded voices and is thus more positive than negative. Nor is her own assessment of Gadamer unremittingly negative: the situated finiteness of understanding, its dialogical character, and its interpretative capacities count among its positive attributes. Its universalist tendencies and its neglect of the issue of power undercut some of this promise, requiring feminist readers to enter it through a hermeneutic of suspicion.[5]

The need to hold prejudices open to critical examination is also important to Susan Hekman, who argues that for Gadamer, experience is a confrontation that sets something new against something old, thus disrupting the old: the encounter between strangeness and familiarity sets processes of change in motion. Approaching Gadamer through a discussion of the Gadamer-Habermas and Gadamer-Derrida debates, Hekman maintains that the ontology of his position enables Gadamer to avoid the negativism that she finds implicit in the postmodernism of Derrida and Butler. Although ontology has not been popular with feminists, Hekman urges rehabilitating it, arguing that an ontological approach deriving from the necessary situatedness of human knowledge allows Gadamer to prescribe ways of disclosing the presuppositions that make knowledge possible, and places means at his disposal that postmodern theorists do not have. Nonetheless, Hekman is aware of feminist hesitations about taking a Gadamerian route. She notes in particular that the "we" Gadamer speaks from is a masculine "we," and that traditional

assumptions about gender arrangements in a masculinist society go unquestioned—and indeed unmentioned—in his work. Nonetheless, she is persuaded that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers an ontology of change that is both useful and relevant to feminists.

In the final chapter in Part I, Robin Pappas and William Cowling revisit many of the ideas explored in the earlier chapters, while reading their principal themes in a different register and highlighting additional aspects of Gadamer's philosophy. Pappas's and Cowling's plea for a *critical* hermeneutics comes from their conviction that Gadamer's work can be a resource for feminists only if it is read and represented critically, by addressing the exclusions it effects. Claiming that dialogue repositions speakers vis-à-vis their prejudices, Pappas and Cowling offer a more benign view of the question-and-answer logic than Fiumara does, even though they argue that Gadamer does not require participants in a dialogue to anticipate the political consequences of applying their understandings; nor has he anything to say about people whose experiences have left them unaware of their phallocentric prejudices. The conversations of marginal voices are inaudible in Gadamer's work, nor does he address the issue of embodiment as it is apparent in the ways male and female participants are differently situated in their claims to occupy speaking positions. Nonetheless, the authors see the value of his method in the transformative possibilities of his conception of the historically affected consciousness, which in their reading (contra Fleming's view of Gadamer) assumes an intersubjective, relational subjectivity. On the basis of this sense of subjectivity, together with a reading of hermeneutics as an ethical practice in which subjects are accountable for their prejudices and guided by *phronesis*, Pappas and Cowling commend the antidote Gadamer's method offers to the distanced, epistemically detached stance of post-Enlightenment epistemology. Yet they argue that feminists have to be responsible, cautious, critical hermeneuticists if they are to avoid the ambiguous political implications of Gadamer's thought. This cautionary political note directs feminist re-readers of the canon toward a recognition that a philosophy rooted in an oft-times conservative tradition and in patriarchal authority can be read "against the grain" to reframe tradition and patriarchy together.

Part II, in which Gadamer's thought is enlisted to frame and illuminate a disparate if interconnected set of feminist issues, begins with two chapters whose analyses are prompted by epistemological questions. In fact, given the centrality of understanding and interpretation for

Gadamer, an epistemological point of view seems to be one of the most obvious ones from which to read his works; indeed, he seems to offer more to feminists working with questions of knowledge than to those principally concerned with politics. In one respect this is so—if only because, as Hoffmann notes, Gadamer says so little about politics in the everyday sense of the word. Yet such a suggestion assumes the contestable view that epistemology and politics are separate, and many feminists—I among them—would disagree, not in homage to the "personal is political" slogan, but from a recognition that in a patriarchal culture, a feminist stance is always political, whether in theories of knowledge, ethics, art, science, or even logic. The constitutive part played in human experiences by the historically affected consciousness—which for Gadamer acknowledges "the *limitation* placed on consciousness by history having its effect—that is *Wirkungsgeschichte,* the history within whose effects we all exist" (1997a, 47)—reminds us that knowledge and politics participate in the same *Lebenswelt* as central strands of that history. As such they must be thought within the same historical-conceptual frame even if theorists approach them from different (disciplinary) directions and with diverse problematics in mind.

Gadamer's contribution to antipositivist critiques of knowledge, epistemology, and philosophy of science prompts Linda Alcoff, both in this volume and in her 1996 book (Alcoff 1996, chaps. 1 and 2), to read Gadamer's engagement with questions about knowledge and understanding as developing *an epistemology*: hence her intentionally provocative title "Gadamer's Feminist Epistemology." Alcoff justifies her title's claim by showing that a Gadamerian epistemology can contribute to countering the cultural denigration of the feminine that has tacitly permeated conceptions of reason, knowledge, objectivity, and science throughout the history of Western philosophy, and has truncated epistemology's explanatory scope in so doing. Aware of the danger of "feminizing" the ingredients she values in Gadamer's epistemology, Alcoff must disentangle their epistemological salience from their history as modes of thought that a good knower has had, by definition, to overcome in order to preserve the autonomy of reason. In other words, she must acknowledge that, historically, these epistemic moves and attitudes are designated and thus naturalized as female/feminine, but that this very naturalizing amounts in effect to one of the fundamental prejudices *(Vorurteile)* that are opened to questioning, interpretation, and dialogue in developing a feminist-Gadamerian theory of knowledge.

Gadamer's epistemology is a relational one, Alcoff shows: it privileges the *encuentro*—the meeting—with the other, with texts, other people, the hitherto-called "objects of knowledge," as an experience, a receptive dialogic process that, in its openness to alterity, moves toward a fusion of horizons. Such knowing makes a difference; it neither merely observes and records, nor does it "equate knowledge with sets of statements." Neither monologic nor individualistic, this relational epistemology is modeled on I-Thou relations whose enacted responsibilities are epistemic *and* ethical. Understanding *(Verstehen),* then, with its open attentiveness to experience and its learned, practiced sensitivity to alterity, yields a broader conception of epistemic practices and their "products" than knowledge (*Wißen* or *Erkenntnis*) in attributing an interpretive-dialogic character to knowing. It does not seek to control its objects, but rather to achieve a coherent disclosure of the world whose meanings are both produced and disclosed in the interpretive encounter. Yet none of this amounts to equating interpretative understanding with subjectivism, for the items to be interpreted are part of the world—the *Lebenswelt*—in which the interpreter encounters them, and in which her interpretations need to be both coherent and open to ongoing questioning.

Similar epistemological issues figure in Silja Freudenberger's claims for the feminist-epistemological implications of Gadamerian hermeneutics, with its nonpropositional approach to knowledge, its privileging of the human over the natural sciences, and its attention to the singular/unique that connects with its starting point in understanding works of art. Thus Gadamerian hermeneutics contrasts with orthodox epistemology's privileging of a scientific aim to subsume phenomena, things, or events under general laws, with diversity or difference reduced to an aberration falling outside the scope of the explanatory frame. Hermeneutic interpretive conversation enables recognition of the other and cognizance of the situatedness of human life and knowledge. It requires and incorporates a reflexivity according to which it is possible, and indeed necessary, to know and critically examine one's own positioning, prejudgments, and interests.

Like Alcoff, Freudenberger is concerned with conflicts between hermeneutic requirements for openness and the limitations imposed by situatedness. Although for Gadamer experience itself assumes openness, that openness cannot be limitless and remain meaningful. This is a pressing issue for attempts to determine whether or not his method offers means of distinguishing "true" and "false" (=correct and incorrect) interpretations. As Freudenberger notes, if there are no such means, then the

theory's adherents would be unable to discredit racism, classism, or sexism: plainly an unacceptable consequence. Alcoff proposes immanent realism as a partial response to the evaluation question. She affirms the existence of a reality independent of human experience, yet maintains that truth is immanent "to the domain of lived reality": it does not transcend human interactions, specificities, and practices. Truth is produced out of interactions between knower and known in processes that are indeed selective, yet also constrained: justification—and hence truth for Gadamer as Alcoff reads him—is achieved in coherence, for "all knowledge is contextual to some degree and the truth of a proposition is never simply a matter of correspondence to human-independent reality." Yet the question persists as to how divergent yet coherent accounts could be judged against one another, along with the question as to how one would know when coherence is "good enough" to permit acting upon it.

In his departure from traditional commitments to transcending particularity, Alcoff suggests that Gadamer offers feminists ways of thinking past the denigration of immanence. His work opens up ways of asking, "What if the body, with its particular concerns, its emotions and feelings, were not seen as an obstacle to truth?" For Gadamer, "the realm of immanence retains rational processes and epistemic demarcations" so that it is possible to negotiate differences in materiality and location. Would such claims allay Freudenberger's worries about how to discern true/correct from false/incorrect interpretations? She notes that Gadamer thinks primarily in historical categories, engaging with texts and written traditions. But how could he deal with the differences that diverse forms of embodiment make? How could he engage with conflicting/contradictory present-day accounts of the Holocaust, she asks? How could conflicting interpretations of abortion, contradictory readings of the meaning of rape—both surely located within the realm of immanence—be resolved rationally and demarcated epistemically? And where, in this analysis, does power come into question? Freudenberger cautions that where there is a power gap, openness is a highly complex requirement especially for the more vulnerable, least powerful participants in conversations, and in some circumstances openness is not as methodologically fruitful as it is in textual interpretation. In her words, "lack of openness toward a sexist position is a direct consequence . . . of its original lack of openness and lack of readiness to concede others the right to be right. A second-order lack of openness may, in this conception, be justified." When there are conflicts over meanings in which it is impos-

sible for both sides of the conversation to remain open—and indeed the compromise implied in a fusion of horizons seems also to be impossible perhaps as much on ethical as on epistemic grounds—then how can one determine when understanding is good enough? Questions about equality, welfare, poverty, or affirmative action, which make tacit and sometimes explicit reference to the diversity of embodiment, are the difficult ones.

And what of tradition? Alcoff's is a generous reading of what Gadamer's immersion in tradition can offer feminists and other Others: one in which history and tradition are indeed available to be interpreted and reinterpreted, understood, worked with, contested—offering possible or partial answers to feminist quests for situated knowledges—but neither ossified nor impermeable. Recognizing Gadamer's adherence to tradition need not entail discounting him as a feminist resource. Yet Alcoff develops a second, more cautious and skeptical reading that connects with her questions about embodiment and diversity, reminding us that the tradition Gadamer takes for granted is single, monolithic, and coherent. This assumption alone truncates the promise of his commitment to alterity, for otherness within sameness is not very "other" after all. A primary task for feminists reading Gadamer is to develop a way of working productively with this most acute of tensions.

Gadamer's silence about women takes on a different, if related, pertinence in Grace Jantzen's contribution, "The Horizon of Natality," in which she contrasts the preoccupations with finitude, mortality, and death that run through Heidegger's and Gadamer's philosophy with the complete absence of references to natality. Jantzen notes that for all his discussion of horizons, Gadamer offers few specific observations about how "our" horizon is constituted: about issues feminists have attended to with great care, such as embodiment, race, class, gender, ethnic, and cultural location. All of these silences, she contends, point to a deeper silence about the other limit of existence: birth. How might it be, she asks, if Gadamer could remember birth, life, the mother? In Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, Jantzen finds a "philosophical category which enables us to make sense of the possibilities of new beginnings, freedom, and interrelationships in a finite and gendered web of life." Tracing this forgetfulness of birth to Heidegger, through Luce Irigaray's *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (Irigaray 1999), Jantzen reminds her readers that in order to create a clearing where being can disclose itself, "man" has to assert his mastery over nature. All of this Heidegger forgets, and in so doing forgets his birth. Like Irigaray, Jantzen resists

seeing this forgetting as intentional: so deeply embedded is it in the Western symbolic that it remains one of those prejudgments of which Gadamer never becomes aware. Yet having recognized its implications, she finds it implausible to locate Gadamer "among the feminists."

Arendt's concept of natality is also central to Patricia Johnson's argument, in a quintessentially Gadamerian interpretive study that she entitles "Questioning Authority." Drawing on Kathleen Jones's analysis of "compassionate authority" (Jones 1993), Johnson discusses the double-edged nature of authority for women who find themselves occupying positions of authority in a patriarchal world where authority's associations have more to do with control, obedience, power, and submission than with compassion and understanding. It is to the prejudgments that infuse authority with taken-for-granted meanings and that inform assumptions about how authority should be enacted that Johnson puts her questions. Her intention is to rehabilitate the concept of authority by moving toward a reconception based in freedom and recognition. For Jones, Arendt's analysis of natality shows that individual human uniqueness begins in and requires human connection: thinking about natality reminds us of our interdependence, and is at the same time foundational for the social order. Observing, as Fiumara does, that Gadamer's logic of question and answer fails to incorporate the value of listening, Johnson contends that compassionate authority reconceptualizes questioning as an attentive art, something to be learned and practiced in recognition and listening. In Gadamer's work on health, she sees a move toward a listening authority in which the physician—the putative authority—faces an ethical demand to humble him/herself in listening well to the patient, who "really holds the measure of any appropriate treatment." For Johnson, it is precisely for those who occupy positions of authority that the need to question authority is constantly, reflexively imperative. Indeed, Johnson sees evidence of Gadamer's having questioned authority in his account of having remained in the university "both to preserve and transform it" during the Nazi era.

Robin Schott would disagree. In "Gender, Nazism, and Hermeneutics," she asks whether Gadamer's "ontological approach to language and his goal of developing a universal hermeneutics" can help us come to terms with urgent historical questions about particular linguistic interactions that do not appear in his work. What about conversations with female students, colleagues, friends, or spouses; what about the "entrenched male chauvinism of the German academy"; what about conversations "between

German Jews and their anti-Semitic persecutors"? Finally, where does the history of anti-Semitism, with its justifications, its psychological and existential supports and implications, figure in Gadamer's work? If language is indeed the element in which we live, then how can Gadamer's readers account for there being so many places where words have evidently failed or escaped him on matters that were constitutive of the *Lebenswelt* he knew? These are some of the questions Schott poses in trying to determine something about the relation between philosophy and material life, especially for a self-identifying philosopher of the *Lebenswelt* who is disenchanted with the distanced, objective remoteness of positivism. Schott finds it difficult to reconcile these expressed commitments with Gadamer's political quietism during World War II and since. Not only his silences about gender, but also those about women, leave her without much hope for feminist reworkings of Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Schott's is the only essay in this volume to which Gadamer himself has responded (Gadamer 1997b). Because his response is both very brief (less than one page) and markedly dismissive of the position Schott takes, without engaging any part of its substance, we have chosen not to include it in this volume. In no sense does it count as a representative example of Gadamerian interpretive conversation committed to achieving understanding. Whereas Schott draws on Gadamer's autobiographical comments in his *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (Gadamer 1985) both to problematize his existential stance on the relation between philosophy and politics and to voice reservations about the capacity of hermeneutics to illuminate that relation, Gadamer flatly rejects the usefulness of autobiographical texts for addressing such questions. In a sense, their disagreement pivots on the question of silence: Schott criticizes Gadamer for complying with social hierarchies that relegate certain persons to silence, while he responds by maintaining his intention to be silent about himself. But the disagreement is neither constructive nor indicative of how Gadamerian encounters, at their best, can occur: indeed, here there is no meeting, no confrontation of prejudices, foreknowledge, or disparate points of view. Hence we are not including it in the volume.

In quite a different political vein, Meili Steele's contribution "Three Problematics of Linguistic Vulnerability" works through a set of contrasts between Judith Butler's and Seyla Benhabib's positions on "democratic political ideals, gendered differences, and their histories" to conclude by reading Susan Glaspell's story "A Jury of Her Peers" as a hermeneutical way of advancing the debate between them. His aim is to show that a

Gadamerian understanding of language can yield a productive, cooperative interaction between language and philosophy. Steele argues that the interpretation of language at work in the Glaspell story can dispel beliefs that Gadamer's idea of tradition is unitary and exclusive, or that it ignores issues of power. Out of the story of two women reconfiguring their self-understandings and their historically conferred prejudgments about the naturalness of a traditional gender order, there emerges a way of understanding the forces both of domination and of change.

Steele's point is not to argue that Gadamer is a protofeminist, but to demonstrate the implications of his hermeneutic phenomenology for addressing the ontological complexity "of our linguistic vulnerability that has made possible both women's oppression and achievement." Thus Gadamer's view of the "play" of language cannot, he believes, account for women's frequently violent relationship with tradition as it is carried in and by linguisticality, for Gadamer suppresses all traces of power. Following Butler, Steele notes that in Gadamerian terms hate speech and pornography, too, are traditions, but they are not located at the level of individual speakers. Thus feminists seeking a resource in Gadamer need to develop phenomenologies of different ways of inhabiting language and inhabiting the life-world *(Lebenswelt),* where "inhabiting" is not a static mode, as "situatedness" might be, but is a dynamic process. Just such a process is evident, he contends, in "A Jury of her Peers."

Finally, engaging in a play on Gadamer's words "I place myself within a tradition, and then continuously fuse past and present as I negotiate a modern life within traditional horizons," Laura Huhan Kaplan meditates on the implications of Gadamerian hermeneutics for her philosophy-faith-feminism. She reflects on the meaning of being a feminist Jewish philosopher reading Gadamer, cognizant of the tensions in which she is inevitably caught as she attempts to interweave—to fuse—past and present in these three traditions she inhabits. Entering the philosophical part of her meditation through poetry, thus along a path both Heidegger and Gadamer have taken, she observes that poetic moments have inspired her reading of philosophy even as her traditional training has shaped those moments in ways that generate original philosophical interpretations out of terms drawn from the past. Her meditative, receptive, yet questioning entry into the hermeneutic circle of interpretation and understanding through poetic moments is at once quintessentially Gadamerian and caught up with many of the themes that run through the rest of this volume; thus it offers an appropriate frame for thinking

back on the chapters and engagements that have gone before. As a feminist Jew, Kaplan needs to negotiate between a "hermeneutic of remembrance" and a "hermeneutic of suspicion," in a balancing act that mirrors the complexity of inhabiting the category "woman" infused as it is with past residues and present contestations. Moving within traditional meanings in order to move beyond them is what living as a historical being requires, Kaplan concludes in the final chapter of this volume.

Why I Read Gadamer

In Gadamer's interpretive hermeneutics I have found ways of thinking past what I have called the "preinterpretive crudity" of postpositivist models of knowledge, for which knowing other people barely merits the label "knowledge" and the idea of empathic knowledge counts as merely oxymoronic (Code 1995a). I have proposed that interpretive social science, in which Gadamer's influence has been crucial, has as good a claim to exemplary epistemic status as physical science has had in the aftermath of logical positivism, so long as feminists can counter the near-invisibility of gender politics among the early formulations of its projects (see Rabinow and Sullivan 1987, and Hiley, Bohman, and Shusterman 1991, where Gadamer's influence is apparent throughout). The attendant problems do not vanish when these issues are read within a Gadamerian-interpretive frame: such problems attest to entrenched practices of glossing over gendered social arrangements, naturalizing empathy as female/feminine, and assuming that knowing other people fails to satisfy the stringent requirements of knowledge properly so called. But many such practices can be productively reconfigured to offer a different "take" on the modes of knowing that engage people more regularly than those of physical science, both in their occupational practices and their everyday lives. This kind of reconfiguring has the potential to enlarge the scope of inquiry into knowledge, understanding, and the responsibilities they invoke when they are relocated into human-social settings.

Medical knowledge affords a salient example that connects both with knowing other people and with empathy. Recall that, referring to conversations directed toward engaging with another person's point of view, Gadamer names as examples "certain kinds of conversation between doctor and patient" (1989, 303); and Patricia Johnson remarks that a physi-

cian is ethically required to humble him/herself in listening well to a patient, who "really holds the measure of any appropriate treatment." Taking these comments as my point of departure, I will read an example from feminist medical practice in concert with Gadamer's elaboration of the place of hermeneutics in medicine, in *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age* (Gadamer 1996). In light of the discussions in this volume of the "female/feminine" associations of interpretive-hermeneutic understanding, and feminist hesitations about the coercive potential of questions, I propose this example as a way of illustrating some of the empowering possibilities of hermeneutic interpretation (especially, though not exclusively, in feminist medical practice). It is a plausible illustration despite Gadamer's failure to address issues of power, despite persistent questions about the extent of reciprocity and respect for alterity in Gadamerian conversations, and despite his comments about the political incompetence of philosophy.

Trained in a climate of rarely contested and amply vindicated respect for scientific medical knowledge, Kirsti Malterud learned that "the physician's task was to ask, the patient's task was to answer, and the answers were expected to fit into a universal pattern" (Malterud 1993, 366). How, then, does one deal with women's "undefined disorders," for which there are no established eliciting questions and no technologically diagnosable signs, even though the reality of women's physical suffering is undeniable?[6] A recurring lack of fit between authorized objective knowledge and patients' subjective (experiential) knowledge, combined with a growing realization in practice that "identical diseases might present and proceed quite differently in different patients" (Malterud 1995, 184; see also Malterud 1992), prompt Malterud to reconsider medical knowledge. Her aim is to challenge the hegemony of epistemologies that sustain *scientific* medicine as a locus of overriding truth, to contest scientific medicine's pretensions to universal applicability, and to devise questions for the consulting room that are neither coercive nor unidirectional, but designed instead to foster a communicative clinical method that unsettles the power imbalance between physician and patient.[7]

Malterud's knowledge-making practices are respectful of her patients' testimonial accounts and cognizant of the social-material-economic mediations that produce their experiences. Her research-in-practice seeks to show—empirically and critically—that the knowledge many women bring to her consulting room is just that: knowledge. There is no before-the-fact justification for dismissing it as naive folk conjecture to be

trumped by the authority of the doctor's expertise, yet neither does Malterud's approach simply contradict scientific medicine or assume that every "I feel" statement is immune to interpretive analysis. A commitment to take seriously, if not always literally, what a patient knows permeates these dialogic negotiations between 'objective' medical and 'subjective' experiential knowings. Doctor and patient seek meanings and treatments cooperatively, weighing the evidence, negotiating its interpretations. The doctor is prepared to evaluate the patient's causal hypotheses on their own terms, even if they are incongruous with accredited patterns of medical etiology, and to propose solutions for deliberation, rather than imposing them. The causal connections that patients draw may elicit no known scientific correlation; yet ways of alleviating symptoms can emerge when a doctor is prepared to listen closely enough to acknowledge that patients often "present plausible causal chains, sometimes [going] beyond the doctor's medical imagination" (Malterud 1992, 301). When physician and patient work together, the result can be a level of reciprocal understanding that preserves an interpretive openness and honors both points of view, frankly and respectfully, while resisting the assimilative dangers that some readers find in Gadamer's hopes for a fusion of horizons.

Evaluations of such events have to achieve a delicate balance between a simplistic assent to first-person experiential accounts that work from unquestioned assumptions *(Vorurteile)* about the transparency of privileged access, and what I have called "incredulity": systemic patterns of disbelief that discredit the experiences of women and other epistemically disenfranchised people (Code 1995b). In view of the violence incredulity enacts, especially with the already marginalized, maintaining this balance will never be easy; thus Malterud starts by accepting that women are speaking from their experiential knowledge. Her first task is to believe *in* what they say, to acknowledge and respect the conviction of their belief, even if she may also need to work with them to interpret it and find a meeting point between her, and their, divergent readings. The dialogic patterns she works with do not fall precisely within any of the three readings of the relation between questioner and questioned that Wright proposes, yet clearly these exchanges take the form neither of speaking *about* the patient nor speaking *for* the patient as authoritarian medical directives often do. But the encounters are, and from a professional point of view should be, less intimate than an I-Thou relation implies. This further nuance attests to the heuristic value of Wright's multiple readings,

and suggests that a still more finely grained distinction is required in order to rehabilitate the questioning that elicits these medical understandings.

No naive antiscience crusade informs Malterud's interpretive practice. It neither dismisses "science" (essentialized) as a villain nor accepts the patient's every word as indisputable truth, but negotiates through and away from the tyrannies of scientism and experientialism. In consequence, understandings achieved through this type of practice are transformative not just for the patient but also for the doctor, with effects that disrupt and unsettle traditional institutional patterns and prejudices. But although the aim is not a fusion of horizons in which the distinctness of doctor and patient viewpoints would merge into one, neither is it a simple reversal of epistemic hierarchies or a shift in the locus of knowledge from doctor to patient. A twist of the kaleidoscope better describes the effects of these reconfigurations. Knowledge/understandings made in a given situation may translate to other experiences and symptoms, but the art of medicine that participates as actively in it as the science will ensure that the fit is a matter of ongoing dialogic interpretation. Analogies from one "case" or set of experiences/symptoms/evidence to another will most likely be partial, and artful practitioners will be as skilled in recognizing differences as in discerning similarities.

Epistemologically, an interesting question is why this apparent contradiction should prevail in the first place: why there should appear to be a choice between practicing medicine as a science or as an art. The legacy of logical positivism in science and the philosophy of science is the principal contributor to this evaluative hierarchy, reinforced and strengthened by the achievements of medical science in the twentieth century. The astonishing progress made in immunization, radiography, laboratory testing, DNA fingerprinting, and techniques for screening and prescribing elevated technologically-enhanced observational science to the very pinnacle of human achievement. Such accumulated successes sustain an entrenched belief that science will, one day, have all the answers. They offer a level of security and certainty that many patients look for from their doctors, and that contrasts badly with the insecurity generated by suspicions that there may be more art than science in medicine, after all.[8] A different, gender-inflected reason for this forced choice attaches to age-old patterns of authority and expertise that are continuous with the examples of authority cited in this volume, in which once a practice establishes its scientific credentials—obstetrics is a common example—it becomes a male preserve in which women must struggle to

claim a place. To gain or retain professional legitimacy within such a profession, women must eschew "feminine" practices and attitudes, such as "too much" empathy or too much time listening to "anecdotal evidence." They must practice medicine "like a man": as a science, not an art. Indeed, in the twentieth century, scientific medicine seems to have demonstrated that the nineteenth-century struggle between the *Naturwißenschaften* and the *Geisteswißenschaften* has been won, hands down, by the *Naturwißenschaften*. The techniques empirical science offers are so effective that the *Geisteswißenschaften* retain only the leftovers: the softer (feminine) aspects of folk wisdom that offer no reliable resources in matters of disease and health, life and death.

Rhetorically, the choice between science and art has epistemic and moral dimensions. Epistemically, there seems to be no question that observations read from the surface—symptoms, test results, cardiograms, radiograms—are the best and the only reliable sources of objective knowledge, both replicable and universally applicable; and no question that their objectivity would be diluted or compromised if interpretation were allowed a place in the process. In this same rhetoric, interpretation counts as subjective and idiosyncratic, and therefore neither measurable nor replicable. I have read Gadamer, then, as a way of rehabilitating interpretation as a viable epistemic mode. Yet morality also figures within the framework of prejudgments constitutive of the dominant social imaginary: a diagnostician or a layperson can be accused of irresponsible epistemic practice for proposing that evidence derived from less controlled, less objective sources—such as experience—deserves equal hearing in diagnostic practice.

As several chapters in this collection show, Gadamer has refused to participate in a forced "science or art" choice: he has insisted on interpreting all knowledge, if to varying degrees, as achieved in cooperation between observation and interpretation, science and art. In *The Enigma of Health*, he speaks a language of medicine as science *and* art, where these elements work together to produce medical understanding. For him, there is no problem about how to incorporate experiential knowledge— how to fuse "art" and "science"—because they work together, dialogically, even though the mix will vary from one medical situation to another. Indeed, for Gadamer the "most fundamental" question is "what contribution *science* makes to the *art* of medicine" (1996, 129, my italics). The word order is instructive: this is a language we members of science-imbued societies, patients and doctors alike, have to re-learn in

order to reclaim understandings that both patient and physician bring to clinical consultations, which now need such complex strategies to legitimate them.

One of the little-noted features of positivist-empiricist theories is that the knowing that counts as exemplary is often available in an instant, and efficiency is an overriding, if tacit, value. Knowledge can be read directly from the visible evidence, the surface of things, to become immediately available as action-generating information. The art of knowing takes more time, is less definite, more conjectural, even tentative. Despite risks of appearing to confirm the "feminization" of art as it contrasts with masculine science, evidence for the art of medicine's having claimed a place in feminist medical practice is available. For example, we learn of female physicians' statistically documented tendencies to ask for more tests than male physicians do; and their spending more time with their patients, interpreting test results as they pertain to *that patient's* life, engaging in talk that feeds into the diagnostic process, informs and shapes it, and alters its pattern, as "life historical" aspects of the presenting symptoms become pertinent to the physician's decision-making process. Nor does dialogically-achieved understanding consist simply in a greater accumulation of facts. It broadens into understanding that is integral to thoughtful practice. For Gadamer, practical reason—*praktike* and *phronesis*—captures the idea of "an awareness appropriate to a particular situation, like that in which diagnosis, treatment, dialogue and the participation of the patient all come together," in which "a form of attentiveness" between doctor and patient is a crucial ingredient (1996, 138).

Attentiveness characterizes the listening that is as vital a part of clinical consultations, for feminist and other interpretively-inclined practitioners, as observing, prescribing remedies, or ordering tests. Yet although listening thus conceived is an active hermeneutic practice, it is rarely theorized, perhaps because it is silent and usually appears to be passive. From the outside, listening looks just like any other silence: an absence of activity where nothing of theoretical significance is happening. The putative listener could be (metaphorically) far away, lost in thought. But when listening gains recognition as a hermeneutic practice, as Fiumara urges it must, then it is not merely a space between utterances that waits passively for the other(s) to finish speaking, or for someone to fill it randomly. It becomes an attentive interpretive practice, open, receptive, and hermeneutically significant. Good listening is rare, and not all listening is innocent: there is listening that hears what it wants to hear,

forces what it hears into ready-made categories, or uses what it hears to its own ends, as both Fleming and Fiumara remind us. There is a kind of silence that can be manipulative in prompting responses that the questioner expects or wants, even without saying so. But responsible listening can be learned, communicatively and emulatively. Nurtured in reciprocal processes of checking and rechecking, it can stand as a regulative ideal, open to negotiation about just how it might be realized.

Good listening takes time and is probably not efficient; nor can good listening always be in control. Hence it presents a problem for the dominant epistemologies of modernity that dismiss empathic knowledge as oxymoronic and that are constructed around a rhetoric of mastery and control: where knowledge is seen as "acquired" for purposes of manipulation, prediction, and control over nature and human nature, and as a tool for legitimating its possessors' positions of power. Aggregating, amalgamating divergent or idiosyncratic symptoms into ready-made categories, or denying their salience, is also about control—over the wayward, the unfamiliar, the strange. Thus, closely connected to the humility that practices of listening require, are moments of not-knowing: gaps in knowledge that, not surprisingly, are as rarely theorized as listening in noninterpretive theories of knowledge. Perhaps Gadamer's goal of an achieved unity in the fusion of horizons cannot allow for such gaps, but this is a major reason why that goal evokes the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion for feminist and other critical readers, especially in regard to issues of power. Along with the power structures of orthodox medical practice goes a remarkable reluctance to admit not-knowing. Susan Wendell, for example, writes: "Collectively, doctors and medical researchers exhibit very little modesty about their knowledge, rarely admitting to patients or the public the vast remaining gaps in scientific medicine's understanding of the human body or their inability to repair or heal most physical conditions that cause suffering, limitation, and death" (1996, 94). When control takes the form of filling gaps in knowledge with conjecture masked as fact to preserve the cognitive authority of the practitioner or a certain unity in diagnosis, it has the opposite of its intended effect. It fails to realize that for some patients, an admission of ignorance prompts respect rather than contempt, and opens the spaces for doctor-patient dialogue in which listening and talking, rather than authoritarian, monologic pronouncements, are the principal events. It might seem odd for a theorist of knowledge to turn to situations of unknowing or to places of receptivity rather than to statements of fact.

But turning in these directions is turning toward possibilities of the kinds of responsible, situated knowing that Gadamerian hermeneutics, critically enacted, can foster. Thus I am suggesting that Gadamer's philosophy is more politically effective than he may be prepared to allow, at a micropolitical level where acts of empowerment can initiate changes, however minuscule, in the social order, with incremental effects that extend beyond the places of their enactment to interrogate the assumptions and prejudgments that hold larger, macropolitical institutions and structures in place.

Notes

1. For example, Gadamer's lecture "Erziehung ist sich erziehen," which he delivered in May 1999, was published as a small book (Heidelberg: Kurpfäzischer Verlag) in 2000; and he gave an interview to *Die Welt* in July 2000, on the Human Genome Project. (My thanks to Susan-Judith Hoffmann for this information.)

2. Thanks to Marie Fleming for clarifying this point.

3. For a provocative reading of hermeneutics *as* epistemology, despite its practitioners' intentions, see Westphal (1999).

4. In thinking about these ways of reading Gadamer on tradition, I am indebted to Bruns (1992), especially chapter 10, "What Is Tradition?". Thanks to an anonymous reader of this introduction for bringing this work to my attention.

5. Bruns (1992, 195–96) writes of an "analytical distinction between the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion . . . between interpretation as recollection or retrieval and interpretation as unmasking or emancipation from mental bondage."

6. Under the heading "undefined disorders," Malterud discusses "syndrome x" in cardiac medicine, and fibromyalgia and other forms of chronic pain.

7. For a discussion and elaboration of the value of Malterud's method of questioning, see Candib (1994).

8. Thanks to Hakam Al-Shawi for reminding me of this point.

References

Alcoff, Linda. 1996. *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bordo, Susan. 1990. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism." In Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Bruns, Gerald L. 1992. *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Candib, Lucy. 1994. "Reconsidering Power in the Clinical Relationship." In *The Empathic Practitioner: Empathy, Gender, and Medicine*, ed. Ellen More and Maureen Milligan. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Code, Lorraine. 1995. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1995a. "I Know Just How You Feel: Empathy and the Problem of Epistemic Authority." In *Rhetorical Spaces*.

———. 1995b. "Incredulity, Experientialism, and the Politics of Knowledge." In *Rhetorical Spaces*.

Ellison, Julie. 1990. *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1985. *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Trans. Robert R. Sullivan. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1987. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." In *Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan.

———. 1989. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

———. 1996. *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age*. Trans. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 1997a. "Reflections On My Philosophical Journey." In Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*.

———. 1997b. "Reply to Robin May Schott." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Hahn.

———. 2000. "Über die politische Incompetenz der Philosophie." Revised version in *Hermeneutische Entwürfe*, 1993. Tübingen: Mohr Siebbeck.

Hahn, Lewis Edwin, ed. 1997. *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, The Library of Living Philosophers Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.

Heidegger, Martin. 1977. "The Origin of the Work of Art" (abridged). Trans. Albert Hofstadter. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row.

Hiley, David R., James F. Bohman, and Richard Shusterman, eds. 1991. *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1999. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Mary Beth Mader. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jones, Kathleen. 1993. *Compassionate Authority*. New York: Routledge.

Malterud, Kirsti. 1992. "Women's Undefined Disorders—A Challenge for Clinical Communication." *Family Practice* 9: 3.

———. 1993. "Strategies for Empowering Women's Voices in the Medical Culture." *Health Care for Women International* 14.

———. 1995. "The Legitimacy of Clinical Knowledge: Towards a Medical Epistemology Embracing the Art of Medicine." *Theoretical Medicine* 16.

Moulton, Janice. 1983. "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Oliver, Kelly, and Marilyn Pearsall, eds. 1998. *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*. University Park: Penn State University Press.

Rabinow, Paul, and William M. Sullivan, eds. 1987. *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Riley, Denise. 1988. *"Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wendell, Susan. 1996. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. New York: Routledge.

Westphal, Merold. 1999. "Hermeneutics as Epistemology." In *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa. Oxford: Blackwell.

Part I

Hermeneutic Projects, Feminist Interventions: Engendering Gadamerian Conversations

1

(En)gendering Dialogue Between Gadamer's Hermeneutics and Feminist Thought

Kathleen Roberts Wright

[In China] I don't feel like a foreigner, the way I do in Baghdad or New York. I feel like an ape, a martian, an *other*. . . . Field anthropologists have certainly had such [culture] shocks. . . . But in China, the feeling of alienation seems to me even more important, because it is addressed to us by a society that has nothing exotic about it, no relation whatsoever to any 'primitive mentality.' On the contrary, it comes from what is called a 'modern nation,' a nation with 'modern problems.'

<div align="right">—Kristeva 1986, 11–12</div>

If we are interested in the question of how to re-read the canon, it seems we should be drawn to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer proposes a general theory of understanding, called philosophical hermeneutics, that applies to our understanding of social and historical realities as well as to our interpretation of texts. *Truth and Method* focuses on the philosophical question, "How is it that we can relate productively to a tradition from which we are alienated?" (Gadamer 1996, xxxiii). However, with only a few exceptions, feminist thinkers in North America and Europe have been suspicious about Gadamer's hermeneutics when it comes to the question of how to re-read the canonical texts associated historically with the traditions of (roughly) North America and Europe. In this chapter I will argue that feminist thinkers who question how to re-read the canon would do well to reconsider their suspicions about Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

There are at least two reasons why Gadamer's hermeneutics has not been taken up by feminist thinkers. The first is circumstantial and has

to do with when Gadamer's most important book, *Truth and Method*, first became available to English speaking readers. *Truth and Method* was written in 1960 and first published in translation in 1975.[1] Its significance for feminist thinking was to a certain extent eclipsed right from the start by the intensity of the discussion about the works of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The English translations of Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* were published in 1970 and 1972, respectively, and Derrida's *Of Grammatology* appeared in English in 1974. Gadamer's discussion of the overcoming of historical distance in Part II of *Truth and Method* appeared overly conservative in contrast to Foucault's postmodern theory of the discontinuous nature and radical rupture from one *episteme* to another. In addition, Gadamer's appropriation of Plato for his concept of dialogue in Part II of *Truth and Method*, and of Hegel for his concept of the speculative proposition in Part III, appeared to be another example of the kind of logocentrism that Derrida's postmodern theory targets for deconstruction.[2]

Now, twenty-five years later, contemporary feminist thinkers who read Gadamer, Foucault, and Derrida find themselves in different circumstances with a different set of questions. What has dawned on readers is that the circumstances of their reading—what Gadamer calls the "hermeneutical situation"—have more to do with their global or transnational condition than with their postmodern condition. The questions raised by feminist thinkers who re-read the canon have to shift accordingly.

The goal of much twentieth-century feminist thinking was to resist the role of being the feminine Other to the masculine "I," by rethinking difference and otherness. The question was, "How can we differentiate ourselves and our otherness from the identity-as-other imposed on us by the male-dominated traditions from which we perceive ourselves to be alienated because of our gender (as well as our ethnicity, or other characteristics)?" The hermeneutical situation that this postmodern feminist question stems from remains limited to the modern and premodern traditions of (roughly) North America and Europe that feminist thinking is in the process of redefining from within.[3]

In the twenty-first century, postmodern feminist thinkers will frequently find themselves defined as the Other by those who identify us with the traditions associated with North American and European philosophy that we are in the process of redefining. One of the basic questions facing feminist thinkers is how we might respond to having our

preconceptions, our background commitments, and our assumptions questioned from the perspectives of others who do not associate themselves with the traditions we operate within. The hermeneutical situation out of which this new question arises is global or transnational. We find ourselves situated in a world that recognizes and credits many perspectives other than those that are understood as Western. I shall argue that one way for feminist thinkers to meet the challenge that faces us in a global or transnational context is to take up and reconsider Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics alongside, and no longer in the shadow of, Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's archaeology/genealogy.

To show what feminist thinking stands to gain from revisiting Gadamerian hermeneutics, let us examine more critically the reason why certain feminist thinkers who are familiar with Gadamer's hermeneutics suspect it of being a viable resource for feminist thinking. I shall first take up, then argue against, Julia Ellison's suspicions about hermeneutics, found in her otherwise richly rewarding and thought-provoking book, *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding.* Ellison is a feminist thinker and literary critic who is primarily concerned with the ethics of the act of understanding or interpreting a text. She allies herself theoretically with "poststructuralist and feminist theories" that question the "discourse of philosophical hermeneutics." Ellison writes about Gadamerian hermeneutics "not from any philosophical loyalties to it, but from the ironies generated by the particular status of twentieth-century hermeneutics" inasmuch as it is "a discourse grounded in . . . [an unacknowledged] desire for an ethics of the feminine" (Ellison 1990, 20). As a feminist thinker, Ellison is leery of the stereotype of the "feminine" that is used to define the "ethics of the feminine" in regard to the act of understanding or interpreting.

Ellison objects to twentieth-century hermeneutics, and in particular to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, because it relies on masculine-constructed stereotypes of the feminine. For example, she argues that when Gadamer operates with the concepts of receptivity and dialogue that stem from nineteenth-century romantic hermeneutics, these concepts are not gender neutral, as Gadamer indeed supposes. As Ellison correctly informs us, "For the romantic subject of either gender, the feminine stereotype (not surprisingly!) is associated with the receptive attitude in which understanding is accomplished" (Ellison 1990, x). Furthermore, dialogue is associated stereotypically with the feminine by romantic

hermeneuticists and in particular by Schleiermacher, whose experience of dialogue took place in the "communal life of the early German Romantics in the Berlin salons of the 1790s, presided over by wealthy Jewish women."[4] Ellison argues that when Gadamer counters the ethical underpinnings of a theory of understanding based on method with a theory based on the concept of dialogue, the ethical underpinnings of his own concept of dialogue (receptivity and consensus) betray a masculine stereotype of dialogue among and with women.

Ellison's suspicions about the stereotype of the feminine in relation to an ethics of the feminine implicate not only those who have philosophical loyalties to Gadamer's hermeneutics. She is also suspicious about those whose loyalties lie with feminist theories such as the one advanced in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference,* by Luce Irigaray. This is because the irony Ellison calls attention to in Gadamer—the irony "generated by the peculiar status of twentieth-century hermeneutics as a discourse grounded in the desire for an ethics of the feminine"—is also at work in the writings of Irigaray. Ellison identifies this irony in the fact that the "collectively projected morality of the [feminine] speech community" is also an "ideal arising in part from a forgotten masculine romanticism" (Ellison 1990, 20).[5] According to Ellison, these two ironies have the same romantic origins. Irigaray's poststructuralist feminist theory is like Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in that both theories propose ideals of dialogue, of receptivity, and of a speech community that arise from a forgotten masculine romanticism's stereotypes of the feminine.

It is important to counter Ellison's apprehensions about Gadamerian hermeneutics if Gadamer's philosophical work is to contribute in any significant way to the practice of feminist criticism in the twenty-first century. Therefore, I will challenge Ellison's claim that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is based, albeit ironically, on an unacknowledged desire for an ethics of the feminine. (I will take up her claim about Irigaray's feminist discourse upon another occasion.) I shall start by discussing in what way Gadamer's notion of understanding or interpretation as a dialogue may appear to support Ellison's suspicions, and go on to complicate and undermine those reservations, as well as the suspicions of other postmodern feminist thinkers, in regard to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Julia Ellison's *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding* is a comparative literary study of the hermeneutical theo-

ries of Friedrich David Ernst Schleiermacher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Margaret Fuller. Ellison begins by noting in each case that "hermeneutics is above all a mode of desire. Its wish is for relationship, even for love, as the condition that guards against committing rational violence through reflective excess. Understanding, the avowed goal of hermeneutics, was and still is imagined as making possible communion and community" (Ellison 1990, 19). Ellison is interested in the way the three figures she studies use gender distinctions to express their ethical ambivalence toward aggressive forms of analytical and critical thought that they identify as "masculine," whereas they identify nonviolent forms of understanding or interpretation as "feminine" (104). She is suspicious, however, about this ethical ambivalence and the resulting desire for an ethics of the feminine.[6]

The philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer enters into the end of Ellison's discussion of Schleiermacher, who is arguably the most important theoretician of romantic hermeneutics. There she cites Gadamer's *Truth and Method* as a prime example of how contemporary hermeneutic philosophy displays a "persistent ambivalence toward its romantic past and particularly toward Schleiermacher" (Ellison 1990, 89). Ellison's analysis of Gadamer's ambivalence is as follows. When Gadamer rejects the definition of hermeneutics as a "method" for the historical humanistic and social sciences, he is in effect rejecting only one side of Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics, the side that comes to dominance in his later works. When Gadamer defines the task of hermeneutics instead as entering into a "dialogue" with the text, he is in effect affirming the other side of Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics, which valorizes conversation, receptivity, and community. This aspect of Schleiermacher's thinking emerges more strongly in his earlier theory of romantic hermeneutics. It appears in Gadamer, however, "minus the divinatory or emphathetic feminine" (93). What Gadamer ambivalently affirms of Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics betrays, according to Ellison's reading of Gadamer, an unacknowledged desire on the part of contemporary hermeneutics for an ethics of the feminine. Such an ethics privileges receptivity over agency, community over the isolation of individualism, and consensus over neutrality.

The changing significance of sexual difference in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics plays a key role in Ellison's analysis of Gadamer's ambivalence toward romantic hermeneutics. Let us first examine Ellison's

account of this change in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics before evaluating the claim she makes about Gadamer. Schleiermacher conceives of understanding as a dialectical process involving a balance between grammatical interpretation and technical interpretation. An interpretation is called "grammatical" when it refers to the language of a text in order to determine "the unity of the word-sphere" (Ellison 1990, 77, and Schleiermacher 1977, 69). An interpretation is called "technical" when it refers to "the one who speaks" in order to determine "the over-all coherence [of the text]" (Ellison 1990, 77, and Schleiermacher 1977, 166–67). Schleiermacher's understanding of the nature of technical interpretation changes, while the nature of grammatical interpretation stays basically the same from his earlier to his later writings on hermeneutics.

The function of technical interpretation is to comprehend the text as both one and a whole. In the words of Ellison, quoting from Schleiermacher: "[T]echnical interpretation executes the inaugural plunge into the hermeneutical circle, 'an overview' or 'preliminary [reading]' of the whole in which grammatical observations may then be situated. 'At the very beginning [of technical interpretation] . . . one must immediately grasp the over-all coherence. The only way to do this is by quickly reading over the whole text'" (Ellison 1990, 77, and Schleiermacher 1977, 57). Thus, within the hermeneutic circle, technical interpretation begins the work of understanding the text and alternates thereafter with grammatical interpretation, between an understanding of the whole text in relation to the parts and of the parts of the text in relation to the whole.

Technical interpretation is not just dialectically opposed to grammatical interpretation. It is also itself a dialectical process of alternating between two "methods" of access to the unity of the text. Here, gender becomes an issue when Schleiermacher remarks how the divinatory method differs from the comparative method:

> By leading the interpreter to transform himself, so to speak, into the author, the divinatory method seeks to gain an immediate comprehension of the author as an individual [*das Individuelle unmittelbar aufzufassen sucht*]. The comparative method proceeds by subsuming the author under a general type. It then tries to find his distinctive traits by comparing him with others of the same general type. Divinatory knowledge is the *feminine* strength in knowing people; comparative knowledge, the *masculine*. (Schleiermacher 1977, 150–51, emphasis added; see Ellison 1990, 80)

Both ways to "know" the "author" seek to comprehend the unity and the wholeness of the text in terms of an individual style of writing, and not psychologically in terms of the individuality of the actual author. Both modes of technical interpretation are to alternate with each other and to balance each other out in a symmetrical way.

As Schleiermacher develops his hermeneutics, however, he comes to recognize that divination, "the feminine strength in knowing people," threatens to upset the balance between divination and comparison because "intuition [divination] apprehends instantaneously the whole that comparative study forms slowly, inductively" (Ellison 1990, 81). When faced with the question asking why this alternate feminine perceptual mode [divination] doesn't render masculine methodical comparisons obsolete, Schleiermacher responds in his later works by choosing "systematic procedure" (method) over "spontaneous receptivity" (divination). In Ellison's words, "The balanced relationship of textual attributes (grammar and technique) and their corresponding readerly approaches (comparison and divination) win out over positioning the reader in a 'feminine' stance with regard to the work" (82). According to Ellison's analysis of Gadamer, by choosing dialogue over method to define the task of hermeneutics, Gadamer chooses receptivity over method, while forgetting that receptivity was originally stereotypically defined as a feminine stance toward a work. Let us look now at Gadamer's discussion of dialogue in *Truth and Method* to see how far it supports Ellison's claim that Gadamerian hermeneutics rests on an unacknowledged desire for the community and intimacy that is the ideal of an ethics of the stereotypical feminine.

Gadamer openly grants that the hermeneutic experience we have when we interpret and understand the traditional texts handed down to us is a "moral phenomenon":

> Hermeneutical experience is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is language— i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou.[7] A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. . . . For tradition is a genuine partner in a dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with the Thou. . . . It is clear that the *experience of the Thou* must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship to us. . . . Since here

> the object of experience is a person, this kind of experience is a
> moral phenomenon. (1996, 358)

His statement that tradition "expresses itself like a Thou" for the inter-
preter (the "I") who enters into a dialogue with the text of the tradition
seems to emphasize community over the isolation of the individual, and
to privilege intimacy and belonging together over neutrality. But does
this apparent emphasis really indicate an unacknowledged desire for an
ethics of the feminine? Does Gadamer really call for the kind of recep-
tivity that, following Schleiermacher, corresponds to a stereotypical, fem-
inine stance toward a text when he advocates openness on the part of
the interpreter (the "I") to being questioned by the text (the "thou")?
To answer these questions we need to establish what Gadamer does and
does not mean by a dialogue with the text.

First of all, let us ask what point is Gadamer making about interpre-
tation when he claims that the text to be interpreted is like a person and
not a thing. Does this indeed signify a desire for community on the part
of an interpreter who is isolated? Or does the interpreter personify the
text for another reason? Here we must take seriously that for Gadamer
the interpreter (the "I") is invariably historically and culturally situated,
and thus already a member of some community—at the very least, a
member of a community constituted by having a language in common
with the text being interpreted. Thus the interpreter need not personify
the text in order to satisfy a desire for community. Gadamer's point seems
to be rather to emphasize that the text (and not the actual author) makes
truth claims on its own that require a response. The text as personified
is, accordingly, more than just something, an "it," that is the "subject
matter" of an interpretation. Instead, the text expresses itself as another
"subject" that advances its own claims to truth within a dialogue.

According to Gadamer, not only is the text to be interpreted like a
person: he also claims that the text expresses itself as a "thou" to the
interpreter ("I"). What point is Gadamer making when he claims that
the other subject (the text) expresses itself as a "thou"? Why not as a
"someone" or as a "you" instead? In German, as in many other languages,
addressing someone as "you" *(Sie)* rather than as "thou" *(Du)* can be a
way of distancing the other from oneself so that the other cannot make
the same kind of claim upon the interpreter (the "I") that a "thou" can.
Is addressing the text as a "thou" evidence of an unacknowledged desire
for an ethics of the feminine, for intimacy, and a sense of belonging

together? Or is there some other explanation? Before we can answer this question, we must investigate more fully the implications of approaching a text as a "thou."

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer uses the phenomenological method to differentiate three relations the interpreter may have to the text to be interpreted. In order to better understand what Gadamer means by the "I-Thou" relation, it is helpful here to analyze these possible relations in terms of the "I-other" relation that has been so central to postmodern feminist thinking in the twentieth century. The first concept of interpretation Gadamer discusses is one where the interpreter (the "I") "speaks about" the interpreted text (the "other") as the claims made by "someone." The second concept of interpretation is one where the interpreter "speaks for" the interpreted text as the claims "you" make that "I" already comprehend. The third concept of interpretation is one where the interpreter enters into a "dialogue with" an interpreted text after recognizing that the truth claims made by the interpreted text are the claims made on the "I" by an "other who is a thou." Gadamer endorses this third concept of interpretation because the interpreted text (the "other as a thou") is recognized to be advancing claims to truth that challenge the interpreter (the "I") to respond dialogically, and that might well change the interpreter's mind (Gadamer 1996, 358–62). Let us examine in more detail the different approaches or stances to the text presupposed by these three concepts of interpretation. Is there one that takes a stance toward the text that bespeaks an unacknowledged desire for an ethics of the stereotypical feminine? And if there is one, is it the stance that Gadamer is advocating as the ethically appropriate one?

We shall start with the first concept of interpretation, where the interpreter (the "I") speaks about the text (an other subject) as a "someone" (Gadamer 1996, 358f.). In this case, the interpreter depersonalizes the other subject, and treats it not as an end in itself but only as a means to acquire from "someone" something like empirical generalizations about human nature. The interpreter who approaches the text arrives at the unity and the totality of the text slowly and by means of induction. Throughout, the interpreter maintains a critical distance from and methodological stance toward the text by making general truth claims about "someone's" beliefs, which then are verified (or not) by their adequacy to the text. Thanks to Ellison, we can now recognize the similarity between this first concept of interpretation (interpretation as a

speaking about a text based on an "I-someone" relation) and what Schleiermacher has called comparison with its masculine stance toward the text. Gadamer rejects this concept of interpretation in *Truth and Method* because the interpreter fails to let the text speak for itself and to assert its own claims to truth. Speaking about the interpreted text as the claims made by "someone" turns interpretation into a monologue.

The second concept of interpretation is one where the interpreter (the "I") speaks for the text (an other subject) (Gadamer 1996, 358f.). Here the interpreter acknowledges that the other subject asserts its own truth claims, different from her or his own. However, the interpreter claims at the same time to already "know the other's claim from his [the other's] point of view." The interpreter claims to be completely receptive to the claims made by the interpreted text (by the "other as you"), yet does not take seriously what the other claims to be true. Instead, the interpreter claims already "to understand the other better than the other understands himself" (359).

The interpreter who takes this kind of stance toward the text claims to divine already the particular truth claim being made by the text as a whole. "In this way," Gadamer writes, "the Thou [the "other as you"] loses the immediacy with which it makes its claim. It is understood, but this means it is co-opted and preempted reflectively from the standpoint of the other person [i.e., of the interpreter]" (Gadamer 1996, 359). As a result of reading Ellison, we now recognize how similar this second concept of interpretation (interpretation as a speaking for a text based on an "I-you" relation) is to what Schleiermacher had called divination, with its stereotypical feminine stance toward the text. Gadamer also rejects this second concept of interpretation in *Truth and Method*. Interpretation so understood becomes a one-sided conversation because the interpreter fails to answer to the other's (the text's) claim to truth.

Ellison's analysis of these two concepts of interpretation shows that there is a connection between sexual difference and interpretation. The connection we find, however, is not to Gadamer's concept of interpretation as a dialogue, but instead to the two concepts of interpretation rejected by Gadamer. These presuppose stereotypical masculine and feminine stances toward the text and are as such comparable to the gendered stances toward the text presupposed by Schleiermacher's comparison and divination. Ellison's analysis of Gadamer, it seems, confuses the second concept of interpretation (a one-sided conversation) with the third one

(dialogue with a text) that Gadamer actually endorses. Because the second concept of interpretation does conceive of interpretation from a stereotypical feminine stance, Ellison mistakenly attributes the same stance to Gadamer's concept of interpretation as dialogue.

Gadamer's reasons for rejecting interpretation when it is thought of as a speaking about or as a speaking for, are as Ellison correctly observes, ethical reasons. But are they the reasons that Ellison suggests? Does Gadamer reject these two concepts of interpretation because of his own unacknowledged desire for an ethics of the stereotypical feminine? According to Ellison, Schleiermacher, Coleridge, and Fuller are ambivalent about concepts of interpretation that require aggressive forms of analytical and critical thought, which they identify with the masculine. They desire instead a concept of interpretation that is stereotypically feminine because it requires nonviolence, receptivity, and community. In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer rejects the concepts of interpretation as speaking about or speaking for. However, he bases his ethical arguments on the ideals of autonomy, mutual recognition, and reciprocity rather than on the ideals of receptivity and community.

The ethics Gadamer calls upon when he argues against the first concept of interpretation is essentially Kantian, which requires that we treat the other subject (the text) as autonomous and an end in itself:

> We understand the other person [the text] in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field— i.e., he is predictable. His behavior is as much a means to our end as any other means. From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou [addressed as a "someone," KW] is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man. As we know, in interpreting the categorical imperative Kant said, inter alia, that the other should never be used as a means but always as an end in himself. (Gadamer 1996, 358)

However, Gadamer turns to Hegel's ethics, which is based on mutual recognition and reciprocity, when he rejects the second concept of interpretation: "By understanding the other [addressed as "you," KW], by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy. . . . The claim to know the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance. . . . A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its

moral bonds" (360). When the interpreter relates to another subject (the text) either as a "someone" that is depersonalized or as a "you" that makes a claim already completely comprehended by the interpreter, the interpreter's stance toward the text is authoritative and not open to being called into question. In both cases, the text must answer to the questions of the interpreter, but the interpreter need not answer the questions posed by the interpreted text. In the first case, the text as the depersonalized subject of interpretation never becomes an autonomous subject within a conversation. In the second case, the text is a subject only insofar as it is subjected to and mastered by the interpreter. Gadamer's reasons for rejecting these concepts of interpretation as a speaking about and a speaking for are ethical reasons, but they do not support Ellison's claim that there is an unacknowledged desire for an ethics of the feminine underlying Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Let us turn finally to the concept of interpretation that Gadamer endorses, namely, that interpreting a text requires that the interpreter (the "I") enter into a dialogue with the interpreted text (the "other as thou"). Here we are tempted to begin as we have in the other two cases by asking two questions. What is involved in the interpreter's stance toward a text when it is addressed as a "thou"? Does the ethics of the interpreter's relation to the text reveal an unacknowledged desire for an ethics of the stereotypical feminine? Let us start in this case, however, by asking a different question. What is the point that Gadamer is making when he begins by stating that the text [of the tradition] "expresses itself as a Thou"?

If as feminist thinkers we endorse only the postmodern Derridean starting point taken by Ellison (among others) that "hermeneutics is above all a mode of desire," we will understand this statement in the following way:

1. The interpreter initiates the relationship he or she desires (union or communion) with the other (the text) by first "addressing" the text of the tradition as a "thou."
2. Only then does the text "express itself" as a "thou" to the interpreter (the "I").

But this reading of Gadamer's statement in terms of hermeneutics as a mode of desire cannot make sense of the emphasis Gadamer places on the hermeneutical experience *(Erfahrung)* of a text as something that

transforms the interpreter. Gadamer's argument against the subjectiviza-
tion of aesthetics, his concept of play and the ontology of the work of
art, and his rejection of subjective experience *(Erlebnis)* in Part I of *Truth
and Method* all work to empower the text (the "other as thou") over the
interpreter (the "I"). According to Gadamer, an account of interpreta-
tion must explain not just the power of the interpreter over the inter-
preted text but also the power of the interpreted text to transform the
interpreter. To account for the potential of interpretation to change the
mind of the interpreter, the statement that the text "expresses itself as a
Thou" must be instead understood to make the following two claims:

3. The dialogue is initiated by the interpreted text (the "other") when
   the text "expresses itself" as a "thou."
4. A dialogue ensues when the interpreter (the "I") "responds" to the
   interpreted text as to a "thou" speaking to an "I."

Let us recall that addressing someone as a "you" *(Sie)* as opposed to as a
"thou" *(Du)* was a way of distancing oneself from the kind of claims a
"thou" makes on an "I." Responding to the text as to a "thou" has just
the opposite effect. It lets the truth claims of the "other" (the text as a
"thou") challenge the interpreter, so that these claims might possibly
transform the interpreter.

In a dialogue, the interpreted text is said to express itself as a "thou"
to the "I" of the interpreter, who responds as someone open to being
questioned by the text. What takes place in a dialogue is best described
as the interpreter being both the subject that is questioned by the text
and the subject that questions the text. Here, the ethical ideal of mutual
recognition and reciprocity requires that the interpreter be open to the
experience that his or her own preconceived understanding of the truth
of the matter called into question by the text *(die Sache)* is either false
or incomplete. It requires, therefore, that the interpreter be prepared to
have her preconceptions, her background commitments, and her assump-
tions put to the test and very possibly transformed.

I have argued that interpretation or understanding another conceived
of on the basis of an "I-Thou" relation is not grounded in "[an unac-
knowledged] desire for an ethics of the feminine" (Ellison 1990, 20).
Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is not grounded in a *feeling
(Erlebnis)* of being like-minded with the "other" ("empathy"), and it is
not captivated by an "ideal of community" with the "other" ("sympathy").

Interpretation or understanding another takes place instead through *self-recognition.* It is an experience of an increased understanding of oneself (the "I") and of the limits of one's own preconceptions, background commitments, and assumptions. This experience (*Erfahrung,* not *Erlebnis*) leads to becoming more open-minded about being challenged and changed by the "other as thou."

The contrast between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Derrida's deconstruction can underscore this point. Like deconstruction, Gadamerian hermeneutics opens up to question the conditions that have been previously closed off from reflection. Derrida's approach, however, opens up and questions only the unity and the totality (the coherence) of the interpreted text (the "other"). In addition to these possibilities, Gadamer's hermeneutics opens up and questions the unity and totality of both the interpreted text (the "other as thou") and the interpreter's (the "I's") own preconceptions, background commitments, and assumptions.[8]

Let us now return to my earlier suggestion that feminist thinkers in the twenty-first century need Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics along with the postmodern thinking of Derrida and Foucault. Twentieth-century feminist thinking took issue with patriarchal theories that identify the feminine as the Other that is opposite and subordinate to the masculine "I." Feminists were attracted to postmodernism and by thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault because they share in their project of creatively rethinking and reevaluating the ideas of difference and the Other. In the twenty-first century, however, feminist philosophers will also face another experience of being considered the Other by those who find the general North American and European assumption of and commitment to the idea of the individual (the "I") alien.[9]

Julia Kristeva describes this kind of experience of being the Other in a global or transnational situation. In 1974, Kristeva found herself confronted by the gaze of a crowd of villagers in Huxian, China: "[T]hey wait for us wordlessly, perfectly still. Calm eyes, not even curious, but slightly amused or anxious: in any case, piercing and certain of belonging to a community with which we will never have anything to do. . . . I don't feel like a foreigner, the way I do in Baghdad or New York, I feel like an ape, a martian, an *other*" (Kristeva 1986, 11–12). The exclusion that Kristeva experiences here ("I feel like . . . an *other*") comes with her self-recognition that her own "Western" process of acquiring a sense of her individual self (the "I") has barred her from a "Chinese" experience of

"community"—"a community with which we [non-Chinese] will never have anything to do."[10]

Postmodern theories helped twentieth-century feminists respond creatively to the experience of being the Other when the gaze ("I") is masculine. However, when the "wordless" gaze that makes us experience being the "other" is what we can roughly call non-Western, we will have to turn to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to break the silence that greets us as such. For Gadamer's theory of interpretation and understanding shows us a way to find a common language and to begin a dialogue with those who perceive us as their cultural Other.[11]

To do this we need not give up altogether the hermeneutics of suspicion practiced by postmodern feminist thinking in relation to the texts identified most often with North America and Europe. But we need to go beyond our own suspicions if we are to have something to say in response to questions posed by those who find the preconceptions, background commitments, and assumptions of these same Western texts alien to their own traditions. By continuing feminist thinking in a global or transnational situation, we will inevitably be forced to recognize the way our own preconditions reflect and are limited by our (roughly) North American and European experience. This self-recognition, however, can be the beginning of a dialogue that will either reaffirm or creatively rethink and reevaluate the preconceptions, background commitments, and assumptions associated not just with male experience but also, generally, with Western tradition.

Notes

1. In addition, the 1975 translation of *Truth and Method* was often inaccurate, vague, and misleading. The revised translation published in 1995 has corrected and clarified Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

2. I have argued elsewhere that it is a mistake to read Gadamer's appropriation of Plato and Hegel as a step back into the metaphysics of presence. See Wright (1986, 193–218).

3. See, for example, the essays in Nicholson (1990) and Young (1990).

4. Ellison 1990, 22f. Ellison draws on the work of Hertz (1988) and Blackwell (1982) in her discussion of the Berlin salons.

5. Ellison reminds feminist thinkers today that "[t]he tendency of our present theoretical moment to reexperience philosophical language as both violent and masculine is one of its major romantic attributes" (1990, 7).

6. This ambivalence indicates a certain awareness of the act of stereotyping when it comes to what is identified with the masculine. The same sort of ambivalence is notably absent in regard to what is called feminine.

7. When I quote Gadamer's text, I retain his and his translator's capitalization of "Thou." However, what Gadamer means by capitalizing the word "thou" may be confusing especially if it is likened to the postmodern and feminist practice of capitalizing "Other." The German word for "thou" (*du*) is only capitalized when it is used to address someone, as in *Wer bist Du?* The same is true for the German word "you" (*sie*), as in *Wie heissen Sie?* The act of addressing another and being addressed by another occurs in dialogue when there is a give-and-take of claims and counterclaims. I use the lower case for the word "thou" elsewhere in this chapter because English does not use capitalization to indicate address.

8. I have argued elsewhere that Derrida's attack on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics misses its mark. See Wright (1990, 229–48).

9. The events of September 11, 2001, also provide another experience of finding oneself positioned as the "Other" ("Why are we so hated?"). Here one could argue that we experience ourselves as the "Other" less because we are (roughly) North American or European and more because we are "modern."

10. Benjamin criticizes psychological theories of individuation that "reflect [only] the male experience that independent identity can only be gained by unlearning the identification with the mother" (1988, 44). But, she adds, these same accounts of individuation seem to be Western as well as male: "The kind of differentiation I have described here as male seems to correspond to the Western rational world view, in 'male rationality.' This world emphasizes difference over sameness, boundaries over fluidity. It conceives of polarity and opposition rather than mutuality and interdependence as the vehicles of growth" (45).

11. Zhang Longxi (1992) concretely demonstrates the power of Gadamer's hermeneutics to bring about an understanding of Chinese thinking, including both Confucianism and Taoism, throughout his *"Tao" and the "Logos": Literary Hermeneutics, East and West.* See also his exposure of the limitations of Derrida's deconstruction in "The *Tao* and the *Logos:* Notes on Derrida's Logocentrism" (1985), as well as his unmasking of Foucault's construction of China in "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West" (1988).

References

Benjamin, Jessica. 1988. "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination." In *The Future of Difference,* ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Blackwell, Albert. 1982. "Schleiermacher's Early Philosophy of Life: Determinism, Freedom, and Phantasy." *Harvard Theological Studies* 32. Greenville, S.C.: Scholar's Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1976. *Of Grammatology.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Ellison, Julie. 1990. *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Order of Things.* New York: Vintage.

———. 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1995. *Truth and Method,* 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Hertz, Deborah. 1988. *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Irigaray, Luce. 1993. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1986. *About Chinese Women*. New York: Marion Boyars Press.

Longxi, Zhang. 1985. "The *Tao* and the *Logos:* Notes on Derrida's Logocentrism." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (March): 385–98.

———. 1988. "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West." *Critical Inquiry* 15 (Autumn): 108–31.

———. 1992. *The "Tao" and the "Logos": Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Nicholson, Linda J. 1990. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst. 1977. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. Ed. Heinz Kimmerle. Trans. James Duke and Jack Forstmann. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for The American Academy of Religion.

Wright, Kathleen. 1986. "Gadamer: The Speculative Structure of Language in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*." Ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1990. "Literature and Philosophy at the Crossroads." In *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work,* ed. Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

2

Hermeneutics and Constructed Identities

Georgia Warnke

Contemporary feminist theorists have identified at least two important problems with the category of women.[1] First, they have argued that it is too general a category to adequately apprehend differences between different groups of women. Second, they have argued that it is a constructed category that serves to oppress those categorized as women rather than to describe any of their essential characteristics. The first objection suggests that we refine our ideas about women so that we no longer make false generalizations from the experiences and circumstances of a single group—usually white, middle-class women. The second objection questions whether a refinement of our categories is all that is at issue. Rather, any attempt to categorize women, either as women or as appropriately specified subgroups, imprisons them in constructed identities that serve to justify forms of discrimination against them. Both objections raise the same questions: if there are no women, or in any case, if women do not compose a single unified group with similar circumstances and experiences, who is the subject for whom feminism struggles, and for what

should it struggle? If women are a constructed identity, should feminist enterprises try to achieve rights and benefits for (groups of) women? Should they not rather try to dissolve the category in favor of a less oppressive one? And if so, in the name of what or whom?

In this chapter, I want to consider these objections and the questions that arise out of them. I then want to turn to Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics to consider how an interpretive approach might answer them.[2] I shall not try to minimize the suspicions that such a turn may raise. In comparison with the Foucaultian and postmodern direction of much contemporary feminism, Gadamerian hermeneutics may appear part of a conservative backlash insofar as it emphasizes the strength of tradition and the hold of prejudice, including, presumably, gender prejudice. For Gadamer, any understanding of our social, cultural, and historical situation, as well as of ourselves, is possible only because we possess a preunderstanding and preorientation toward that which we are trying to understand. We are socialized into particular interpretive traditions with particular histories and assumptions, and these provide us with the frameworks and categories without which no understanding is possible. If these frameworks and categories include gender distinctions and definitions of women, then it would seem to be unclear how a Gadamerian inspired hermeneutics might open up new approaches to issues of gender identity. Nevertheless, I hope to show its promise.

Feminist Objections to the Category of Women

The first objection to the categorization of women as such supposes that women not only differ from one another but also that these differences exceed those between other groups' members. Thus one might plausibly claim that Jews share a tradition and heritage, that Catholics possess a common religion, and that African-Americans share a history of discrimination. But it is not clear what women, or even Western or American women, share. Even if we assume that females are biologically similar, the objection here is that these biological similarities have no noteworthy consequences in a common identity or experiences. Women are neither all rich nor all poor, neither all white nor all members of a single minority group, neither all Catholic nor all Jewish. Nor can it be said that all have been similarly victims of discrimination or that their

ancestors have been similarly victims. While a white gentlewoman of the antebellum South may have been oppressed, her oppression was manifestly different from that of her black slave, an oppression, moreover, to which she herself contributed. If the question is what experiences and identity women share once inflections of race, social and economic status, and ethnic identity have been stripped away, it remains unclear that they share anything at all.

Nor do they necessarily share values. The controversy over abortion reflects a case in point. As Ronald Dworkin points out, pro-life women and pro-choice women differ in the way they conceive of and respect the significance of human life (Dworkin 1993, 91). Those who are pro-life tend to assume that the value and dignity of human life lies in the fact of its existence, beginning with conception. It is a natural wonder or, for some, a gift from God, and hence should not be taken away by human beings themselves. For those who are pro-choice, in contrast, the value of human life has to do with the human relationships and human creativity it involves. To condemn an infant to a short life of pain, or a woman to psychological or physical trauma, is thus a violation of human life's sanctity. Furthermore, pro-life and pro-choice women tend to inhabit different lives and possess different aspirations. The form of life many pro-life women value as a particularly female one is one that emphasizes caregiving, nurturing, and even self-sacrificial virtues; while the form of life many pro-choice women value emphasizes autonomy and self-sufficiency.[3]

Deborah Rhode has pointed to other sorts of conflict between different groups of women (Rhode 1989, 112–16): while gains for younger, working women may assure them the same rights, opportunities, and benefits that working men receive, some of these come at the expense of older women who have never worked outside the home. Ending widows' exemptions from certain taxes, for example, and equalizing Social Security benefits for the spouses of working men and women who survive their partners might help working women. The changes in policy equalize the ability of working men and women to provide for their spouses after their death, and may help to eradicate certain stereotypes about women's vulnerability and dependency on men. At the same time, because Social Security funds are limited, the new policies impose financial hardships on women who were dependent on their husbands because they never received their own salary. Rhode contends that many feminists applauded the changes in policy but, in this case as well as others,

because gains for one group of women result in losses for another, it remains unclear how feminists can support both groups of women.

Yet the problem that the category of women presents for a feminist politics goes beyond its inability to account either for differences among groups of women or for tangible conflicts in their understandings of their lives, needs, and interests. As Denise Riley points out, it also extends to the question of how women are historically defined. The historical record, she insists, is one that marks only vicissitudes in the category rather than any sustained identity. The ancient Greeks and early Christians considered women's souls to be in more grave danger than those of men, because of what was seen as their closer proximity to the body and its naturally sinful inclinations. Still, the soul itself was not yet given a sex, and the struggle for early feminists in the fourteenth and fifteenth century was thus a struggle to maintain the soul's neutrality against any attempt to sex it. Women were not yet their bodies, and not yet wholly identified with nature, at least insofar as their real nature or soul remained gender-neutral. By the eighteenth century, however, Riley insists that women *were* their sex, and the bodily sensuality of their nature pervaded their identity. Moreover, if women were their sex, that sex was akin to sexuality. "The whole moral potential of women was therefore thoroughly different, and their relation to the order of moral reason was irretrievably not that of men's" (Riley 1988, 40). Indeed, while man retained a relation to reason in general, women became part of nature.

Still, if women were neutral beings before the eighteenth century and natural beings after it, according to Riley, they were social beings in the nineteenth. At work here was both the discovery of the domain of the social, and the attempt of women themselves to cast their identity with it as a means of escaping their identification with nature. As social subjects, women were social workers and philanthropists, but they were also the objects of study for social workers, sociologists, demographers, population experts, hygiene experts, and the like. In either case, whether as subjects or objects of the social world, they were manifestly not of the political world. The very same identification that allowed women to be more than natural beings meant that they could not be political beings. In debates over extending the vote to women in Britain in the early part of the twentieth century, then, women were defined as tender, altruistic, sensitive, and nurturing. To allow them entry into the political world by extending to them the right to vote would thus be both to deny their own social nature and to threaten the political domain with concerns unconnected to it.

Of course, the project of denying women the vote could make use of different identifications of women depending on the purposes at hand. The poles around which arguments over suffrage in Britain centered, according to Riley, generally focused on women's interests and women's nature. Those against suffrage argued that women had no interests different from the interests of men. Hence, giving women the vote would simply double the voting population and complicate vote tabulation without changing any results. But other antisuffragists argued that women did have interests that differed from those of men. Hence, the public level of collisions between the interests of men and women would formalize sex hostility, while private collisions could leave women open to threats by their male relatives and even premarital agreements under which wives would have to promise never to vote. Since men's nature is to protect women, extending the franchise to women would, the argument went, upset the entire domestic sphere. Antisuffrage arguments also claimed that women were higher than men on a moral scale and hence should not be involved with politics. But other antisuffragists claimed that women were lower than men on a moral scale since their quickness to feel drowned out rational thought. Finally, antisuffragists claimed that women were neither higher nor lower than men but profoundly different, fit only for an indirect, private influence that required the mediation and moderation of male thought.

If so many different and contradictory specifications of women's identity could be used to deny them suffrage in the twentieth century, and if these specifications differed from earlier ones that also differed among themselves, the question arises as to whether women's identity is anything more than a tool for enabling various historical and social purposes. Indeed, Riley argues that when women did finally achieve the right to vote, they did so not because of their womanhood or through feminist political efforts. They rather did so in a piecemeal fashion, as widows, property-owners, and the like. Still, if women do not necessarily share experiences or circumstances, if their needs, beliefs, and interests can often conflict, and if they are "synchronically and diachronically erratic," as Riley states (Riley 1988, 2), might not we return to their bodies to provide some basis for identity and commonality with other women? Do women not possess at least common chromosomes, hormones, or brain functioning that can ground an innate difference from men and an identification with each other?

A third step in the destruction of the category of women seems to deny

this basis. Riley still refers to female persons, although she also suggests that this biological specification can have little purchase on questions of identity. She writes that "Anyone's body is—the classifications of anatomy apart—only periodically either lived or treated as sexed, therefore the gendered division of human life into bodily life cannot be adequate or absolute. Only at times will the body impose itself or be arranged as that of a woman or a man" (Riley 1988, 103). Others, such as Judith Butler, have gone further. It will not work, Butler suggests, to insist on a distinction between gender and sex, as many feminists have, according to which sexual differences describe anatomical and biological differences between men and women, while gender differences describe only supposed or socially constructed differences in interest and activity. One cannot simply argue that, for example, while women have sexed bodies that bear children, the connection between sex and gender, or between bearing children and having primary responsibility for raising them, is a social determination. Rather, Butler argues, gender is the lens through which sex first appears, and the distinction between men and women as sexed, not merely as gendered beings, is a social construction (Butler 1990).

In the first place, Butler asks, if sex and gender are distinct then why should a feminine gender not correlate with a male body, and why should genders come in only two forms? Butler's answer refers to what she calls the heterosexual matrix. The idea that gender is a binary concept and that each is correlated with a specific body type is a social construction that works to establish those identities that will count as intelligible, and to exclude others that will not. An identity that connects a female anatomy to a feminine gender and, indeed, to appropriate sexual desires—those directed exclusively at male anatomies, themselves correlated with masculine genders—will count as a consistent identity just as any confusion of the possibilities will not.

Second, Butler asks, what counts as a female or male anatomy apart from its gender identification? As Anne Fausto-Sterling has pointed out, scientific attempts to discover the biological factors that separate male and female have been less than successful. They begin with cultural assumptions about men and women, and are unable to distinguish biological factors of sex difference in mathematical or verbal ability, temperament, or brain functioning from factors of socialization (Fausto-Sterling 1992, 81). Nor do the chromosomal and genetic components of sexual difference always correlate with a strict division of sexes or genders. In

certain rural villages in the Dominican Republic, a genetically inherited deficiency for the androgen dihydrotestosterone is common enough to be referred to as the penis-at-twelve syndrome. Children with ambiguous genitalia are brought up as girls until they acquire deep voices and adult-sized penises at puberty. In the eighteen cases on which Fausto-Sterling remarks, sixteen of these children then successfully assumed male gender roles, even to the extent of marrying and fathering children. While one might view this example as indicating the force of the gender binary, it also seems to indicate its social and cultural source. Why not expand our sex and gender terms to include a range of possibilities?

Butler's point is that the very attempt to discover what creates sexual difference is itself constituted by the social idea of gender. We are interested in discovering the genetic component of male and female difference because we already assume this difference exists; and we assume this difference because of the feminine and masculine identities we have already presumed. Otherwise we would neither have to decide which biological factors count in making a body male or female, nor switch ambiguous bodies into one sex-gender identification or the other. But if questions of sex are influenced by assumptions of gender, and if one then asks what gender is, it turns out, according to Butler, that it exists only in the relations or distinctions between masculine and feminine that people themselves establish in societies with specific norms or expectations about gender. Women are women because they perform social identities that distinguish them from men; and men are men because they perform social identities that distinguish them from women. What is fundamental, then, is the continued or "stylized" repetition (Butler 1990, 140) of the binary division itself rather than any natural or corporeal reality.

Yet if women are only bizarrely, performatively, or erratically constructed identities, what is left of feminism? If feminism is meant to be a social and political struggle for the rights and opportunities of women, then it is not clear in the first place that it should be supporting one group of women at the expense of others. Nor, second, is it clear that feminism should be attempting to discover women in history, at least as a stable identity whose continuity as a group, as well as the development and interests of which, feminism might study and support. Finally, it is not clear that feminism ought to join in attempts to stabilize or promote the biological, anatomical, or social identity of women. To do so would rather be tantamount to stabilizing or promoting the identity of savages or witches. If the idea of women is a constructed identity that is employed

to oppress one group of people to the advantage of the other, then just as we need to declare that there are no witches and no savages, we need to proclaim with Riley that "there aren't any women" (Riley 1988, 2).

Still, Riley herself acknowledges the dead end to which such a declaration seems to lead: "Does all of this mean, then, that the better programme for feminism now would be—to minimize 'women'? To cope with the oscillations by so downplaying the category that insisting on either differences or identities would become equally untenable?" (112). She offers two answers. First, with a Foucaultian attention to genealogy, the task of feminism is to direct "an eagle eye" toward any use or definition of the term "women," and to question the purposes for which it is used (2). Second, feminism needs to adopt a strategic and pragmatic attitude, deciding when it makes sense to deny the existence of women and when, instead, it ought to fight on behalf of them.

> Sometimes it will be a soundly explosive tactic to deny, in the face of some thoughtless depiction, that there are any 'women.' But at other times the entrenchment of sexed thought may be too deep for this strategy to be understood and effective. So feminism must be agile enough to say, "Now we will be 'women'—but now we will be persons, not these 'women.'" And, in practice, what sounds like a rigid opposition—between a philosophical correctness about the indeterminacy of the term, and a strategical willingness to clap one's feminist hand over one's theoretical mouth and just get on with 'women' where necessary—will loosen. (Riley 1988, 113)

Riley's own example of such a loosening is unpersuasive, however. She claims that feminists must argue against those who insist that women tend to choose jobs and careers that pay less well than traditionally male jobs or careers do because the less well paying positions better suit women's natural inclinations. Such counter-arguments admittedly "leave the annoyingly separable grouping 'women workers,' untouched." Still, she insists they "successfully mudd[y] the content of that term" (Riley 1988, 113). Presumably Riley would include among muddying counter-arguments the argument that the United States government tried to use in *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears*. In this case, the government relied on statistics about Sears's employment practices, rather than the complaints of actual plaintiffs, to claim that Sears discriminated

against women by denying them access to its better paying commission sales positions. Sears, however, argued that its women employees tended simply not to apply for such positions because they were unwilling to accept the irregular hours and absence of a secure salary that the positions involved. Sears's position was buttressed by feminist scholar Rosalind Rosenberg, who argued that female employees typically took traditional values of nurturing and noncompetitiveness more seriously than economic advantage, and hence would be unlikely to apply for higher paying positions if such positions meant that they could not be home to have dinner with their children (Rhode 1989, 180–81). Although the government countered these claims with the testimony of another prominent feminist scholar, Alice Kessler-Harris, it is unclear which idea became muddied: that of women as a coherent group with needs and interests of its own, or that of feminist scholarship. If the idea that women exist is as entrenched as it seems to be, then it is unclear that the strategic use of the term can effectively undermine that concept, any more than a strategic use of the term "savage" in a struggle to gain rights and opportunities for savages might serve effectively to undermine the idea that savages exist.

Butler's conception of a postwomen feminism is somewhat different. If one's identity as a woman is a performance, as she contends, then one can also perform a different identity or parody the identity one is expected to have. In this regard, Butler points to practices of drag, crossdressing, and butch/femme lesbian relations, because she thinks they subvert conceptions of socially intelligible identities by mixing up or vamping on matrixes of sex, gender, and desire. Thus, drag and crossdressing place the features of different gender identities on different bodies and performances, while butch/femme relations within the lesbian community mirror relations between men and women in the straight community, and thus show how arbitrary their identification with specific sorts of bodies or sexes is. As Butler writes of drag,

> We are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender and gender and performance. As much

> as drag creates a unified picture of 'woman,' it also reveals the dis-
> tinctness of those aspects of gendered experience that are falsely
> naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of hetero-
> sexual coherence. (Butler 1990, 137)

For Butler, then, the point of feminism is to reveal the contingency
of gender identity and to subvert the gender identities we currently per-
form. Gender identity cannot simply be suspended, since we must pos-
sess some identity or other and can only choose—to the extent that we
choose at all—among the repertoire of cultural identities currently, if
contingently, available to us. Still, we can modify and mock those iden-
tities; we can perform them ironically and variously. "The loss of gender
norms," Butler contends, "would have the effect of proliferating gender
configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the nat-
uralizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central pro-
tagonists: 'man' and 'woman'" (Butler 1990, 146). Moreover, she insists,
such a subversive feminism would "locate the political in the very signi-
fying practices that establish, regulate and deregulate identity" (147).

Such suggestions about the potential for subversion remain somewhat
problematic, however. In attributing both sex and gender identity entirely
to the effects of social construction, Butler seems to deprive her account
of any resources for distinguishing between those norms of identity that
must be subverted and those that might rather be applauded. All norms
that create social or cultural identities are equally constraining, at least
insofar as they require that we perform our identity in one way or another.
But if we always have to perform some identity or other, where can we
look for notions of better rather than worse identities to perform? Why
not act out a Nazi or a racist instead of a cross-dresser? Butler is inter-
ested in practices that "establish, regulate and deregulate identity" and
thus emphasizes those relations of power and, hence, politics that might
be said to operate at a more fundamental level than do identifications
with certain fascist or racist ideologies: more fundamental, that is, in the
sense that while we tend to think we can shed or acquire systems of
belief, we think we simply are men or women. Still, even if questions of
gender identity are more fundamental than these and even if subversive
practices are those that destabilize established gender identities, why must
they be destabilized in only one direction? Why might we not return to
a more, rather than less, rigid structure of gender identity in which men
are uniformly heterosexual and masculine and women uniformly het-

erosexual and feminine; and in which, moreover, feminine women rejoice in their domestic roles while men reserve the bulk of careers and opportunities for themselves? To be sure, these newly rigidified gender identities could no longer be attributed to laws of nature but would instead have to acknowledge their socially constructed base. Yet Butler's analysis gives insufficient reasons for proliferating rather than decreasing the number of socially intelligible gender identities.

Martha Nussbaum has suggested that the problem with Butler's analysis here is its Foucaultian refusal to articulate a normative dimension (Nussbaum 1999). Following Foucault, Butler must deny all precultural components of identity, including desires for "food, comfort, cognitive mastery and survival," and in doing so, must reject elements that Nussbaum thinks might, in fact, be "crucial in the explanation of our development as moral and political agents" (Nussbaum 1999, 41). Indeed, she suggests that Butler might deal with "real infants," who, Nussbaum insists, "do appear to manifest a structure of striving that influences from the start their reception of cultural forms" (42). For Nussbaum, Butler's feminism remains a "hip quietism" (45) that "assumes an audience of like-minded readers who agree (sort of) about what the bad things are—discrimination against gays and lesbians, the unequal and hierarchical treatment of women—and who even agree (sort of) about why they are bad (they subordinate some women to others, they deny people freedoms that they ought to have)." Still, since it refuses to articulate or examine its own normative foundations, Butler's approach leaves itself open to different views of the proper identities to support or criticize. Why not, for example "engage in the subversive performances of making fun of feminist remarks in class, or ripping down the posters of the lesbian and gay law students' association[?] These things happen. They are parodic and subversive. Why then aren't they daring and good?" (42).

While this objection to Butler's feminism seems important, if one does not want to deny the element of contingency and constructedness that she and Riley expose, then the question is whether a feminism is possible that takes seriously both the extent to which gender identity is constructed, and the extent to which struggles to gain rights and opportunities for those constructed as gays, lesbians, and women retain a normative foundation. That is, can we acknowledge the constructed character of identity and, nonetheless, find standards for determining that certain constructions—those that allow for fluidity and flexibility in gender identity—are better than those that do not? I would like to

suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers us a way of doing so, but I shall begin by raising the question of validity in the interpretation of meaning.

Gender and the Fusion of Horizons

The conditions for the validity of textual interpretations have been defined in at least two contrasting ways. A particular understanding of a text is valid if it identifies the meaning that the text actually has (independently of how various interpreters may have understood it); or it is valid if it corresponds to the understanding of a particular group of readers. The first account might be called an objectivist view, and the second the view of reader response theory. For Gadamer, neither definition makes sense. Indeed, to suppose that the meaning of a text resides in the text apart from its interpretation would be akin to supposing that gender identity resides in a body apart from its cultural or historical construction, the idea that Fausto-Sterling, Riley, and Butler undermine. At the same time, to suppose that understanding is a totally constructed enterprise and that readers can interpret a text in any way whatsoever is equally implausible in Gadamer's view. If meaning cannot be assumed to be in the text independently of its readers, neither does it reside entirely in the reader, to construct the text according only to social conventions or cultural needs. Rather, Gadamer suggests, meaning exists as an understanding of meaning and this understanding of meaning occurs at the intersection of the framework of assumptions, purposes, and concerns that the reader brings to the text and what he calls the text's own "effective-history."

With the idea of effective-history, Gadamer argues that the meaning an interpreter understands necessarily includes the historical record of attempts to understand the meaning of the text at issue. As interpreters, readers are always historically situated. For Gadamer this circumstance does not dictate that interpreters are imprisoned within a particular cultural and historical milieu, or, in Wittgensteinian terms, that they are socialized within a particular and self-enclosed language game. Gadamer's concern is not that we are historically parochial and therefore cannot understand other historical eras in terms other than our own. Rather, for Gadamer, the circumstance that human beings are historically situated

signals the way in which they are thrown into an ongoing story, the themes and plot of which they did not themselves create, and the ending of which they cannot wholly determine or experience. Nevertheless, insofar as this story is the context of their life and their story to continue, they must live it in one way or another. Hence they must understand it in one way or another in order to know how to continue. Moreover, in trying to understand their story, interpreters necessarily make use of its framework of assumptions, categories, and purposes; this is the framework that they inherit from their participation in the story and the one "at hand" for the attempt to understand it. To this extent their understanding of the story or history in which they are involved is itself a product or effect of the history or story in question. Moreover, insofar as a text that they are trying to understand is a part of this same story, the framework of assumptions and concerns, or the framework of what Gadamer also calls prejudices, that interpreters bring to the understanding of the text is part of that text's own history of influences or effects (Gadamer 1995, 300–307).

The upshot of this analysis is to undermine an account of the understanding of meaning that identifies it with an understanding of the text, apart from its history or apart from the way is has already been understood and taken up by the traditions in which it participates. Gadamer rejects the idea that valid interpretation depends upon some sort of conscious cataloguing of all the various ways a text has historically been understood. Nevertheless, these ways necessarily already influence the way a present interpreter understands it. One cannot go back behind the moment at which Shakespeare's works began to be taken as the standard of excellence in English literature, nor can one go back behind the Holocaust to determine how Heidegger's or Nietzsche's work might have been understood without it. Rather, the meaning we apprehend when we understand a text is a synthesis of the various relations into which the text has entered because of the way in which our predecessors have appropriated it, and the way we ourselves have appropriated our predecessors. Gadamer writes, "Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the object as the counterpart of itself and hence understand both" (299).

Of course, one might try to fix the true meaning of a text as its meaning at a particular point in history. Thus, one might claim that it is the

way Shakespeare himself understood his texts that grasps their true meaning, and that an adequate or valid understanding of his work is one that retrieves this original understanding. The suggestion here is that authors possess privileged insight into their works because they possess knowledge of their intentions with regard to them. Yet such a claim raises at least two familiar problems. First, in order to accept this definition of valid understanding, one would also have to assume that authors always understand all their intentions and understand which of them are relevant to the final draft of their work. Since intentions often change and develop in the course of writing a particular text, however, and since authors themselves often understand earlier parts of a work differently than they did originally because of the form the remainder of the text takes on, the definition requires specifying which of an author's intentions are to count as indicative of meaning. Are the relevant intentions those at the time of writing any particular section of a work, those at the time the work is sent to the publisher, the author's explanations of intention after publication, or perhaps some range of intentions in between these times? The recourse to intentions turns out to be less able to fix the point of true meaning than it initially seems to promise.

Second, even if we could tie meaning to an understanding of the author's intentions at a particular fixed point, we would have to assume that this understanding itself poses no interpretive problems. But even if we decide which intentions are to count in the determination of meaning, those intentions still have themselves to be understood. To this extent, we seem caught in an infinite regress. We are to determine which understanding of a text is valid by determining which one captures the author's intentions at a specified time. We are to determine what these intentions are by a variety of methods: asking the author what he or she intended at that time, reading letters and reports of what he or she intended, decoding the text so that the author's relevant intentions emerge, and so on. Each of these methods itself already requires interpretation, however. Hence, recourse to an author's intentions cannot release us from what Gadamer calls the hermeneutic situation (Gadamer 1995, 301). Rather, the meaning we understand is always one we grasp from a historical perspective or horizon: we determine which intentions are relevant or what they mean, not ahistorically or from an unconditioned perspective, but from within an ongoing story in which both we and that which we are trying to understand continue to participate.

Still, emphasizing the extent to which interpreters understand a text

that has already been taken up by the history to which those interpreters belong indicates only one half of the situation in which Gadamer is interested. For if what we understand is a historically appropriated object, and if the historical appropriation of it composes the constantly developing and changing framework through which we approach it, the text remains a particular one that has been historically appropriated. Hence, just as Gadamer's analysis undermines an account of the understanding of meaning that identifies it with an unprejudiced comprehension of the text apart from the way it has already been taken up within an ongoing history, it also undermines an account that identifies the understanding of meaning with the independent response of the reader. The point here is simply that the reader's response is not independent. On the one hand, it is structured in advance by the prejudices it assumes from the tradition of interpretation to which it belongs. On the other hand, these prejudices are themselves simply part of the effective-history of the text. The meaning that is taken up and revised through the various circumstances of its historical appropriation is, for Gadamer, the meaning of the text, and resides as much in the text as it does in the reader's response. His model here is a conversation in which the issues raised are not issues for only one or the other of the participants in the conversation, but are given their content by the conversation itself. Conversation, according to Gadamer, unfolds "the immanent logic of the subject matter" so that "what emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know" (Gadamer 1995, 368).

This conception of a fusion of horizons within a history that continues to unfold, a fusion that for Gadamer is simply the meaning of a text, transfers usefully, I think, to the issue of constructed identities. Just as the conception offers an alternative answer to the question of whether understood meaning resides in texts themselves or in the response of interpreters, it also offers an alternative answer to the question of whether gender identity is constructed or innate. Indeed, if locating the textual meaning in a preinterpreted text is akin to locating gender in the preinterpreted facts of the body, conceiving of gender as cultural performance reproduces the idea that meaning resides in a reader's response. Instead, as in the case of textual meaning, we might think of cultural identity in general, and gender identity in particular, as interpreted—as a fusion of horizons.

Here, Nussbaum's suggestion may well hold: real infants may "manifest a structure of striving that influences from the start their reception of cultural forms." What is crucial, however, is the way in which the structure of striving and the reception of cultural forms fuse as the particular cultural identities we possess. Gender is an interpretation, a fusion between the wants and needs of developing individuals and the history of interpretations of them, including objections to those interpretations. We cannot go back behind the interpretations or the effective-history of gender to capture, in an uninterpreted way, an allegedly innate structure of striving, just as we cannot go back behind the cultural and traditional appropriation of Shakespeare to some primordial or "real" meaning of his work. If one were to claim that the drives and aspirations that infants manifest are drives and aspirations either untainted or relatively untainted by the gender norms that adults take for granted, such a claim could not avoid the familiar problems of the hermeneutic situation. For we get at those untainted drives and aspirations only from within a historical horizon and, hence, only from within a historically influenced set of concerns, assumptions, and purposes. What we take as untainted drives and aspirations are, like an author's intentions, already a fusion of horizons. To some extent, this analysis buttresses Butler's own. Whether or not our gender identities represent the best way a structure of striving might have been interpreted, appropriated, and handed down to us as our gender identities, they reflect the identities we currently possess, or the interpreted fusions we currently are. At the same time, we can acknowledge their interpretive character and modify them if we think we should.

But when, then, should we modify them, and in which directions? It is at this point that Butler's subversions might seem to be morally untethered. If gender identities are interpretations, however, then the question we might ask is whether those interpretations are adequate and, if not, how we might distinguish between better and worse gender interpretations. In the case of textual interpretation, Gadamer rejects the equation of adequacy in interpretation with a determination of an author's intentions but, significantly, he does not reject in general the necessity of distinguishing between adequate and inadequate interpretations; or otherwise put, between valid and invalid ones. In this regard, he appeals to the hermeneutic circle of part and whole, according to which the parts of a text are to be interpreted in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of the part. The assumption here is that texts compose or attempt

to compose unities of meaning, the parts of which are related to one another in coherent ways in order to create a self-consistent whole. Adequate or valid interpretations of texts are those that are able to articulate this coherence. In contrast, if an interpretation of the meaning of a text ignores large parts of it, or if the interpretation cannot connect its various sections and chapters to one another, then interpreters have some reason to question the adequacy of the interpretation at issue (Gadamer 1995, 190). For Gadamer the point here is, in part, a methodological one. If we must disconnect the understanding of meaning from insight into intentions at a fixed point in time, we can still distinguish valid from invalid understanding. Since we can no longer appeal to thoughts or intentions outside the text (or can only appeal to these thoughts or intentions through the interpretation of one text or another), we must appeal to the text itself. Accordingly, we assume that the text composes a unified whole; for only in this way do we have a criterion for modifying and revising particular pieces of our understanding of meaning. We can now reject initial projections, of either the whole of the text or a part, that do not work to compose a unified whole. In contrast, when the interpretation we have of each part of a text coheres with every other part, we can, Gadamer suggests, regard our understanding as at least potentially valid (267).

Of course, it remains unclear what might warrant our making coherence a criterion of validity; and perhaps more important, how Gadamer's account of it might apply to gender identity or interpretation. Indeed, from Butler's point of view, the assumption of coherence is just what is unwarranted—or at least problematic—insofar as it excludes identities that do not fit together in socially intelligible ways. Our traditions offer two forms of coherent gender identity: one that correlates female sexual characteristics with a feminine gender and heterosexual desires, and one that correlates male sexual characteristics with a masculine gender and heterosexual desires. If these identities are interpretations, then only two interpretations adequately connect the parts of gender identification into a unified and consistent whole. Thus, while hermeneutics projects unity onto texts, requiring coherence as a criterion for revising interpretive elements that do not cohere, within the domain of gender identity this same revision in the name of coherence justifies attempts to "cure" homosexuality, to alter bodies to cohere with chromosomal observations, and to constrain individuals within the monolithic gender identities they are "meant" to have. Hence, from Butler's point of view, it is precisely gender

incoherence—cross-dressing, drag, and butch/femme relations—that is important. From this perspective, Gadamer's insistence on intelligible unities of meaning would remain both conservative and constraining.

The criterion of interpretive validity that Gadamer takes from the hermeneutic circle of whole and part, however, is only one half of his conception. He argues that a reader does more than "assume an immanent unity of meaning . . . his understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning that proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said." Gadamer's example is the report of a newspaper correspondent who we assume knows more about the subject matter being covered than we do. Hence, we assume the truth of the report. With regard to texts in general, Gadamer insists, we are "fundamentally open to the possibility that the writer . . . is better informed than we are, with our prior opinion" (Gadamer 1995, 294). Again, Gadamer's point is at least in part a methodological one. If we do not assume that the text we are reading can teach us something, if we do not assume that what it says may be true or have some point, then we also will have no standard in terms of which to rethink either our understanding of the text or the issues with which it deals. That is, it may be possible to fit the parts and whole of a text together in such a way that the text forms a coherent whole, but it will be a coherent whole that has no point for us, and that does not seem able to speak to us or inform us in any way. Gadamer's suggestion here is that such results can signal, not the poverty of the text, but the inadequacy of our understanding of it. Unless we assume that we can learn from the texts we are reading, we will simply be victim to the understanding and knowledge we already possess, and unable to revise it. Hence, we will never know what the text might have been able to say to us, or what its meaning might have been for us had we assumed it had a point and tried to grasp it.

Gadamer's justification for looking to the coherence and even possible truth of a text as a standard for valid interpretation is, thus, that unless we rely on assumptions of textual coherence and truth we have no way of testing our own knowledge. What he calls "the tyranny of hidden prejudices" (Gadamer 1994, 270) is the failure to put our own assumptions and expectations in play by presuming, at least temporarily, that the text we are reading is correct rather than our own previous knowledge. But this analysis seems only to increase the conservative and constraining consequences of Gadamer's hermeneutics for gender interpretation. Not only are we led to accept traditional ideas of gender coher-

ence, we are led to regard them as true or to try to understand the truth or point they possess for us. Hence, not only must we restrict intelligible gender identities to those whose various elements cohere or can be made to cohere, we must also extract from these traditional coherences their point and truth for us—the effort many psychologists and psychoanalysts in the 1950s seem to have urged on their depressed female patients who were, in their view, insufficiently content with sufficiently feminine forms of life.[4]

We might argue that there is a different way of seeing the point in traditional gender identities. In this regard, we might look to Carol Gilligan's emphasis on an ethics of care that she associates with female socialization (Gilligan 1982), and to the virtues of caregiving and nurturing that others have associated with the upbringing and lives of women (see Noddings 1986 and Ruddick 1995). From a hermeneutic point of view, the substance of these accounts is an effort to find the truth and point that traditional gender identities can still have for us: these may involve recognizing care and concern for others as virtues and expanding the domain of such virtues beyond the intimate sphere of the family to the domain of politics and international affairs. Here one need not bind particular virtues to particular genders or body types. Rather, we might allow that a traditional socialization of girls and women has served to develop particular sorts of virtues that should not be left behind in the struggle for a more equitable distribution of rights and opportunities. Instead, these virtues need themselves to be more equitably distributed to different genders and to different domains.

Yet the attempt to rehabilitate particular virtues associated with women's socialization does not exhaust a hermeneutic contribution to issues of gender. For, if we conceive of gender identity less as a construction than as an interpretation, we can acknowledge the way in which an interpretive approach allows us to examine our previous knowledge and assumptions, and to inquire into the horizons and frameworks of particular interpretations. In this regard, it seems to me that conceiving of cultural identity in general as interpretive, at least in the self-critical, open way that Gadamer's work lets us conceive of interpretation, allows for a flexibility in our identities that bypasses the question of what or who we are most fundamentally. If we return to the initial questions we raised about the category of women, the promise of hermeneutics becomes clear. Indeed, instead of insisting, as Riley does, that there are no women except for strategic purposes, we can argue that from an

interpretive point of view, sometimes there are "women" and sometimes there are not.

Questions about the category of women follow a downward spiral. We are first forced to recognize that despite struggles for equal rights and opportunities, women differ from men in at least one apparently important way: women can become pregnant and men cannot. If we simply ignore this difference, then women's equal opportunity may be put in jeopardy if they must temporarily suspend their careers. Alternatively, if we stress the difference and asks for special forms of job security for women, we potentially undermine arguments for the equality of men and women. But the question of difference arises not only between men and women but, in a second turn down the spiral, between different groups of women as well. Different groups of women have different interests, as Rhode points out, and different values, as Dworkin points out. They are both rich and poor, dependent and nondependent, white and black, Anglo and non-Anglo, pro-life and pro-choice, antipornography and anti-antipornography. Yet they do not differ only "synchronically," but in a third turn of the spiral, they differ "diachronically" as well (Riley 1988, 2). They are identified with nature at one point in history, the social at another, and anything but the political yet later. Finally, in a fourth downward turn, women differ from their own genetic make-up, which can never in itself determine what it is to be a woman or whether it is anything at all apart from a stylized performance, independent of gender norms.

Suppose we work back up this spiral, conceiving of gender identity less as a performance than as an interpretation. Then we can question whether there is only one way of interpreting the factors that are meant to compose a particular gender identity. That is, we can admit that from certain perspectives, the coherence of gender identity is composed of particular factors in a particular relation. From one interpretive horizon, *Romeo and Juliet* is about first love; from another it is about the terror of family relationships. Both of these interpretations may be able to correlate the parts of the text with the whole, to show the importance of the parts they emphasize and demonstrate how, from the one perspective, the thick nature of family relations heightens the theme of first love, while from the other the love story heightens the theme of family relations. Moreover, both may be able to indicate the point of the play for us, for our loves, and for our family relationships. Nonetheless, in the case of interpreting texts we allow for different, equally valid interpretations.

The same would seem to hold for gender identity. From a medical interpretive perspective, women may well exist; they are those people whom one can look at and interpret in terms of a particular composition of genetic and anatomical features. For medical purposes it may be important to define this group as a category, to emphasize the "whole" that a stress on particular features comprises, and to distinguish this "whole" from other possible "wholes " because of the particular medical problems this group, so identified, can encounter.[5] By interpreting and dividing a group along these lines, the medical profession can efficiently check for certain diseases and watch for the possibly distinctive ways its members react to certain medications, to alcohol, and the like. From the point of view of screening for ovarian cancer, for example, we can say that there are women. From other perspectives, for example those of career opportunities, jury duty, or conferences on Shakespeare, there do not seem to be women. In any case, with regard to these events and practices, we might ask whether the category of women is not simply an interpretation that is imposed dogmatically on certain people at the expense of other, more salient interpretive categorizations: those who are qualified for a certain position or can be open-minded about the case at hand, or those who have interesting interpretations of Shakespeare's work.

The same would seem to hold for the aspects of sex and gender identity with which Butler is primarily concerned. From an interpretive perspective, an exclusively binary division of socially intelligible identities is dogmatic. It imposes one possible schema of sex-gender intelligibility and seeks to prohibit others. Still, just as different interpreters can conceive of Shakespeare's work in different legitimate ways, all of which maintain the hermeneutic standards of the coherence of whole and part and even the point of the whole, we can emphasize different aspects of identity and show the intelligibility and point of different wholes. Thus, for purposes of pregnancy and procreation, interpretive schemes that divide individuals into two sexes may have a point. We need not reify these human procreative purposes as aspects of nature, however. Nor need we dismiss them as an unwarranted imposition of power. The binary division has a certain interpretive legitimacy given specific purposes and values, but it cannot serve to exclude other legitimate interpretations of either gender or identity. Indeed, given other purposes, with regard to questions, say, of intimacy or intercourse, other interpretations of who we and others are or what our sex-gender identity is may be more compelling.

To assume that certain individuals simply are women and that individuals must be either men or women is to shortcircuit the possibility of public, interpretive discussions of the purposes for which there are women and men, and the purposes for which there are not. Moving up the spiral of difference, the merit of such discussions is that they no longer imprison individuals in culturally or historically predefined gender identities. A democratic society committed to public, interpretive discussions of cultural and gender identities need neither identify women with nature nor define them as the social. Nor, however, need it allow issues that arise over differences between so-called women to confuse the purposes for which it might still understand certain individuals as women and differentiate them from men. If working women and nonworking women have different interests, and if we should not be misled by their common identification as women to suppose that they are the same, we can nonetheless argue that certain individuals, because of certain of their biological features, should be indiscriminately screened for certain diseases. If from specific perspectives and for certain purposes we must understand populations as women and men, this circumstance need not pervade those other circumstances in which we need not, and in which we might less dogmatically allow for a proliferation of interpretations of sex and gender. Conceiving of sex and gender as interpretive allows a democratic society that is committed to free and open discussions of its purposes and ideals an interpretive flexibility in determining which interpretation is most compelling or necessary at which time. It replaces essentialist definitions that fit different individuals into normed categories, substituting instead public discussions of what we might take both cultural identities in general and our sex/gender identities in particular to be and with regard to which purposes.

Under this interpretive point of view, sex and gender as well as the purposes, whether social, medical, or otherwise, for which they are alleged to be important become objects of discussion and public debate in what might be called an interpretively oriented, deliberative democracy. The question is not simply how we might accommodate sex and gender in a just society of equal citizens. The questions we can raise from an interpretive perspective are rather when are sex and gender interpretations compelling and important ways to conceive of individuals, and for what social, medical, or cultural purposes? Are those purposes legitimate and, if so, for whom? Is the conclusion that a certain purpose is legitimate the result of open discussion in which all those affected can participate? If

we are women for purposes of health screening and procreation that we take to be legitimate, are there other legitimate purposes as well? If we are not women from a myriad of other interpretive perspectives, what are some of these perspectives and how can we ensure that they remain part of the discussion and that our interpretive perspectives do not become exclusionary? Indeed, are there other interpretations of sex and gender themselves that an exclusive focus on masculine and feminine genders, or male and female sexes, ignores? Because our possible purposes are themselves part of our discussions, they must be as subject to examination and questioning as the identities, sexes, and genders that are revealed from the horizons they create. In this regard, both conferences on Shakespeare and our public debates over issues of sex and gender remain centered on the validity of interpretations and, perhaps more importantly, on their plurality.

Notes

1. They have also raised questions with regard to the category of woman, but that category is not the focus of this paper.

2. I shall be relying for the most part on Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.

3. I have explored these differences more thoroughly in Warnke (1999). Also see Luker (1989).

4. As we can extract from Betty Freidan (1984).

5. There may, of course, be other sex- or gender-based categories that are medically important as well, such as a category of transsexuals who may face distinctive medical problems.

References

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Dworkin, Ronald. 1993. *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individula Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 1992. *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories of Women and Men*. Rev. ed. New York: Basic Books.

Freidan, Betty. [1963] 1984. *The Feminine Mystique*. Reprint, New York: Dell.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1995. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Luker, Kristin. 1989. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Noddings, Nell. 1986. *Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Nussbaum, Martha. 1999. "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler." *The New Republic*, February 22.

Riley, Denise. 1988. *"Am I that Name?": Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rhode, Deborah L. 1989. *Justice and Gender*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Ruddick, Sara. 1995. *Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1999. *Legitimate Differences: Interpretation in the Abortion Controversy and Other Public Debates*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

3

Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and Feminist Projects

Susan-Judith Hoffmann

> Hermeneutics is above all a practice, the art of understanding and of making something understood to someone else. It is the heart of all education that wants to teach how to philosophize. In it what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts.
>
> —Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reflections on My Philosophical Journey*

In the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, hermeneutics overthrows the false universalism of the natural sciences as the privileged model of human understanding with the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon. Much of contemporary feminist scholarship is presently undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis, and I suggest that the hermeneutic orientation of Gadamer's thought provides a fruitful resource for the articulation of feminist projects. Despite the fact that much feminist theorizing centers around the deconstruction of the traditional canon's faulty and oppressive universalizations, some feminist scholars have come to realize that their own philosophical efforts have repeated the sins of their forefathers, and that they too are guilty of questionable universalizations and reductive metanarratives.[1] According to Gadamer, it is the dominance of science and its methodological concerns that has obscured the hermeneutic dimension in understanding, and has led us to denigrate forms of knowledge and experience that cannot be subsumed under the epistemological model of the natural sciences as "inferior" forms of

knowledge. In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer provides a model of understanding that acknowledges our historical situatedness and connectedness to traditional canons of thought, yet that does not entail an uncritical acceptance of the reductive and oppressive elements of the tradition that feminist theorizing takes issue with. In this way, philosophical hermeneutics fulfills two important conditions for feminist theorizing: namely, a sensitivity to the historical and cultural situatedness of knowledge seekers, and the critical power to challenge reductive universalizing tendencies in traditional canons of thought.

   Against the notion that any claim to truth must be substantiated by the methodology of the natural sciences, Gadamer argues that hermeneutic inquiry is not merely a methodological problem for the human sciences. Rather, it is an essential feature of human facticity that discloses the situatedness and essentially interpretive nature of all knowledge-seeking. The quest of the natural sciences for universally valid truth and methods constitutes a false cognitive ideal, which can never, even in principle, be realized since it actually obscures what happens in human understanding. Every act of understanding is embedded in a historical context that conditions, determines, and guides the inquiry: it is conditioned by the effects of "tradition," that is, a normative, historically and linguistically mediated framework that is never fully transparent to the interpreter. Every act of understanding is dependent upon "prejudgments" or, as Gadamer unhappily calls them, "prejudices," which are *initially* neither consciously present nor thematically accessible to the inquiring subject, but that may be challenged in the confrontation with another's meaning that characterizes an act of understanding.[2] Thus philosophical hermeneutics both acknowledges its embeddedness in a tradition but describes the process of understanding as critical and engaged, and is able to challenge and transform the tradition it draws on. In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer undertakes a rehabilitation of tradition and historical prejudices, recasting their role in understanding as positive and constructive stages of any act of interpretation—indeed they are described as the very ontological conditions for the possibility of any and all attempts to understand, and thus all attempts to seek knowledge and truth. After *Truth and Method,* hermeneutics is no longer merely an elaboration of rules and techniques for correct understanding, but is more properly understood as a deconstruction of traditional foundationalist epistemology and metaphysics, and as a set of methical solutions to problems of understanding, in that it rejects any attempt to ground knowledge with certainty as

a misunderstanding of the very nature of understanding.[3] This marks a significant departure from the older, Romantic model of hermeneutics as the elaboration of *methodologies of interpretation,* which describe a set of principles that might systematically be applied in order to secure correct understanding.

Since the publication of *Truth and Method* in German in 1963, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics has sparked much criticism—notably from Emilio Betti in the 1960s, from Jürgen Habermas in the 1970s, and from Jacques Derrida in the 1980s.[4]

Betti opposed Gadamer's work on the grounds that Gadamer's rejection of hermeneutics as an absolute position and his emphasis on subjective prejudices as conditions of understanding betrayed a kind of subjectivism or relativism. If every act of interpretation is conditioned by subjective prejudices rooted in historicity, then every interpretation is relativized, and it is not possible in principle to speak of a correct interpretation in a definitive sense—a consequence that Betti took to be intolerable. Against Gadamer, Betti sought to revive the older objectivist conception of hermeneutics, and proposed the autonomy of the author's intended meaning *(mens auctoris)* and the consistency and coherence of the text as a whole *(inter alia)* as criteria that might guarantee correct interpretation.[5] Next, Habermas voiced concerns about Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and authority. He argued that philosophical hermeneutics' renovation of the Enlightenment had eliminated too much, by giving priority to tradition and authority over reason. The context of tradition as the locus of truth and consensus ignored the dangers that such consensus of meaning might be systematically distorted: for example, that it might be the result of force and coercion. Throughout the various phases of the Habermas-Gadamer debate, Habermas's main accusation was that philosophical hermeneutics ignored the fundamental Enlightenment insight that tradition is a locus for *untruth,* oppression, and distortion.[6] Against what he took to be Gadamer's naive conservatism, Habermas proposed instead an account of communicative rationality that was cognizant of the context of tradition but nevertheless emancipated from ideological distortions of tradition.[7] Finally, Derrida ferreted out in philosophical hermeneutics' account of understanding as presupposing good will, and as the appropriation of the other's point of view, a metaphysical will to dominate: an instrumental will to power that assimilates, denigrates, and annihilates otherness and difference.[8]

More recently, a new debate is emerging, namely, the relevance of Gadamerian hermeneutics to feminist projects and scholarship. The impetus for this debate lies in the fact that much feminist theorizing is undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis. Many scholars, Nancy Fraser, Linda Nicholson, Jane Flax, Nancy Hartsock, and Judith Butler among others, have recognized that, despite the central commitment of feminist scholarship to deconstruct traditional canons' false universalization of a limited and oppressive perspective, much of feminist theory from the 1960s to the 1980s was guilty of the same kinds of false universalization. In the scholarship that attempts to find a framework within which one might constructively treat difference, reference to Gadamer's hermeneutics is oddly absent: not many feminist theorists have, in fact, turned to Gadamer's hermeneutics as a possible resource for overcoming problems in feminist theorizing.[9] A few theorists such as Robin Schott, Diane Elam, and Georgia Warnke have engaged in a dialogue with Gadamerian hermeneutics; but have, with the exception of Warnke, found Gadamer's work to be conservative and patriarchal in that it celebrates custom and tradition, reifies the past, and assigns a privileged position to male-biased language.[10] Elam writes that "hermeneutics contains within it a litter of phallocentric tradition that refuses point blank to acknowledge the significance of gender differentiation," and that Gadamerian hermeneutics "fails to confront issues of gender difference" (Elam 1991, 350). The skepticism expressed by feminist scholars, either implicitly or explicitly, about the usefulness of philosophical hermeneutics for feminist projects recalls—albeit in a different context—the criticisms of Habermas and Derrida. Elam, for example, claims that Gadamer's account of tradition is "politicized" with "conservative politics," which are inimical to feminism (353). Schott argues that Gadamer "brackets questions concerning embodiment and power" (Schott 1991, 202), and that his ontological account of understanding "articulates an attitude which typifies masculine rather than feminine psychology," thereby excluding the voices of women in ontological discourse (204). Moreover, the primacy Gadamer assigns to language fails to recognize that language is a tool used to denigrate and assimilate the feminine, and fails to acknowledge that "feeling, desire, and sensuality" are also primary experiences.

There are other discussions that, while they make no direct reference to Gadamer, are dismissive of any recourse to tradition and the shared understanding that Gadamer argues are constitutive of any inquiry. For

example, Susan Okin writes, "Concepts of rationality, justice and the human good that are supposedly based on our traditions are . . . male-centric." Narratives that rely on shared social understandings "reveal their tendencies to reinforce patriarchy by neglecting to examine the effects of past and present domination on these understandings" (Okin 1989, 110). The shared traditions, language, and social understandings that Gadamer argues are constitutive of any inquiry would oppressively universalize the experiences and political concerns of white men—thus it would appear that any Gadamerian description of genuine dialogue that is productive of truth remains bogged down with patriarchal baggage. The standpoint of tradition offers a distorted and oppressive perspective (Habermas), and dialogue with this tradition, if it is characterized by good will and the appropriation of the tradition, appears to annihilate differences in experience, knowledge, and social and political interests (Derrida). Even the very notion of a gendered identity that is excluded and oppressed by tradition may be simply uncritically adapted from such a tradition. Postmodern feminists such as Jane Flax, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, and Linda Nicholson maintain that our conception of ourselves as excluded and oppressed is itself a distorted effect of those traditions. However, a probe into hidden agendas of power and domination, the idea that a distorted perspective is inevitably the ground for any investigation, and the dissemination of meaning and the deconstruction of the subject that ensues from such an investigation all seem to lead to a kind of theoretical dead end. If we grant that there is no unified subject, no category of "woman" or "oppressed group" that can adequately address the multiple aspects that might constitute an identity, such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and age, then we are hard pressed to take an emancipatory or critical stance toward tradition. As Judith Butler writes, "Without a unified concept of woman, or, minimally, a family resemblance among gender-related terms, it appears that feminist politics has lost the categorical basis of its own normative claims. What constitutes the 'who,' the subject for whom feminism seeks emancipation? If there is no subject, who is left to emancipate?" (Butler 1990, 327). What is needed, and what I propose to argue Gadamer's hermeneutics can deliver, is an account of knowledge-seeking that allows us to conceive of power and domination as influencing and formative factors in the constitution of concepts and ideas, but that does not reduce the phenomenon of meaning per se to power. As Fraser and Nicholson write, "How can we combine a postmodernist incredulity toward metanarrative

with the social critical power of feminism"? (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, 34). A response to that question is, I suggest, along with Warnke, already encompassed by philosophical hermeneutics. I shall suggest that an account of Gadamer's own work provides a paradigmatic example of what feminists claim needs to be done. I shall further propose that concepts central to Gadamerian hermeneutics, namely those of "prejudice," "tradition," "authority," and the primacy of language, do not conceal any oppressive elements that would preclude their candidacy for feminist theorizing. In this way, I hope that Gadamer's hermeneutics will have gone some way to answering Fraser and Nicholson's question.

It certainly is true that one cannot find in Gadamer any specific references to let alone any theoretical reflection on "gender issues," however, there is nothing in philosophical hermeneutics' account of understanding that is inimical to the feminist goals of ending oppressive methodologies and practices. Quite the contrary is true. Gadamer's emphasis on the importance of recognizing the embeddedness of one's assumptions within a specific historical context seems to me to be entirely in keeping with the feminist goals of guarding against a false universalism that would perpetuate and legitimize the very oppressive methodologies and practices they propose to expose.

The Hermeneutic Impulse in Gadamer's Scholarship

First I would like to draw attention to the fact that Gadamer's work is itself an example of a philosophical position that both acknowledges its connectedness with tradition and constitutes a radical break from that tradition. Thus Gadamer's work is a perfect example of what some feminists claim needs to be done, namely, both to recognize our finite nature and our dependence on tradition and the "work" of history upon us, and to break with the tradition that conditions all our inquiries.[11]

Gadamer launched his intellectual career by developing a radically antisystematic interpretation of Plato. According to his philological and poetical approach to Plato's dialogues, there is no hidden systematic doctrine of ideas that underlies the truth of dialectical language. Against the standard interpretation of Plato's doctrine as a paradigm of objective and systematic philosophy, Gadamer proposed that "truth" for Plato was not truth as such or truth in itself, but truth for us, a truth that is constantly

being tested in a lively discourse of question and answer.[12] We misread Plato when we understand his dialogues as comprising a closed system of propositions or an absolute claim to objectivity, and dismiss Socrates's proclamations of ignorance as irony or false modesty that we must analytically dissect in order to get at the hidden formulation of an absolute doctrine.[13] It is the interplay between the one and the many, between unity and diversity, that, for Plato, is the dwelling place of truth. Truth, for both Plato and Gadamer, can be characterized as an essentially open and endless dialogue that refuses to bow to a relativism claiming that any one truth is just as good as another, but does not seek to insulate itself from the problems of relativism by falsely worshipping an artificially reified language and truth. A genuinely hermeneutical philosophy can never claim to have definitive answers—its task is rather the subjection of privileged doctrines to the dialectical process that renders possible the critical examination of human values. Gadamer's later work, *Truth and Method,* can be read as a hermeneutical inquiry into, and critical dialogue with, the entire history of Western philosophy. Thus Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics constitutes an important and original "rereading of the canon," both a connection and appropriation of the Western philosophical tradition, as well as a radical departure from interpretations of that tradition that drew upon the authority of many centuries to sustain their momentum.

Moreover, Gadamer deconstructs the Enlightenment distinction between ethics and politics. Inspired by Plato's *Seventh Letter,* Gadamer argues that philosophy is the preferred way of doing politics, and that politics is an extension of ethics in a collective context. The notion of political science based on a model of the natural sciences is devoid of any ethical dimension and thus reduced to a study of power relationships where the orientation of politics as a locus of truth and justice is lost, and replaced with an emphasis on method and an ossification of privileged doctrines.[14] Against the race for constructing all-encompassing objective standpoints to describe the workings of society, "metanarratives" that can only lead to the kind of false universalism that feminists have made it their mission to expose, Gadamer suggests a rehabilitation of philosophy as a practical, ethical task that takes the form of an inclusive dialogue. The attempt by thinkers such as Marx, Hegel, and Weber to construct such metanarratives, and the attempt to make scientific method the touchstone of all knowledge and reality as exemplified by thinkers from Descartes and Bacon to the positivists and neo-Kantians

of Gadamer's day, represents the loss of true knowledge as defined by
Plato. Gadamer's work constitutes a radical break with the philosophi-
cal cultural heritage that conditioned his inquiry. As Gadamer himself
writes: "Nowhere so strongly as in Germany had the so-called human sci-
ences united in themselves scientific and orienting functions. Or better:
Nowhere else had they so consistently concealed the orienting, ideolog-
ical determination of their interests behind the method-consciousness of
their scientific procedure" (Gadamer 1985, 179). For Gadamer, the
domain of study in the *Geisteswißenschaften,* the human sciences, is not
the world of objects but human beings' knowledge about themselves, and
the constituted world in which this knowledge is found. But the posi-
tivist faith in the unity of science, and its subsumption and denigration
of the truth claim of the human sciences, represents a dangerous orient-
ing rationalization of society. The rhetoric of objectivity and neutrality
masks an agenda of power and domination that Gadamer, who lived
through the Nazi era of Germany, is acutely aware of. The calm distance
from which a middle-class educational consciousness takes satisfaction
in its own achievements omits a recognition of how much it is immersed
in its own game, and how much it is at stake in the game. Thus Gadamer
is well aware of the dangers of privileging ideals of abstraction, and of
how the notion of disembodied subjects works to marginalize and oppress
participation in the discourse of tradition. He locates the solution to this
problem in a more accurate account of what happens when we engage
in the process of understanding. Central to philosophical hermeneutics
is the claim that all of our experiences and knowledge-seeking are struc-
tured as *questions,* and one of the tasks of hermeneutics is to draw atten-
tion to the often unthematized framework that informs and guides the
knowledge-seeking process. Whoever is asking the question must clarify
their own presuppositions, their "stake" and interest in the game. And
whoever is asking the question must recognize that power is constitutive
of the process, in that we bring to the process projects, goals, and inter-
ests that guide the kinds of questions that we raise. More important, a
genuine hermeneutical inquiry will recognize the fundamental necessity
of acknowledging *difference* if one is to do justice to the truth that philo-
sophical hermeneutics can reveal. One must always be open to the pos-
sibility that the other could be right.

    The structure of knowledge-seeking, which comes in the form of a
question, logically requires an openness. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer
writes: "The essence of the question is the opening up, and keeping open

of possibilities" (Gadamer 1985, 266). A real question—one productive of knowledge—will have both sense and direction, i.e., be guided by an initially unthematized framework that, however, while it is the very ground of the inquiry, will be called into question when it is put into contact with different perspectives. "It is of the essence of a question to have sense. Now sense involves direction. Hence the sense of a question is the direction in which alone the answer can be given if it is to be meaningful. A question that places that which is questioned within a particular perspective. The emergence of the question opens up, as it were, the being of the object. Hence the logos that sets out this opened-up being is already an answer. Its sense lies in the sense of a question" (326). The openness of a question is not boundless, it is limited by the horizon of the question; however, this framework or horizon is not static—it shifts, and is also put at risk in the asking/answering of the question. The asking of a question requires both the direction of our fore-judgments and the openness that involves the suspension of our forejudgments and a questioning of their validity. It is impossible to make ourselves aware of our forejudgments as long they operate unconsciously and unnoticed, however, any knowledge-seeking encounter that is to yield genuine knowledge requires that we open up possibilities and thus put our prejudices at risk. Gadamer stresses throughout his writings that agreement is not a matter of eliminating differences but is rather a matter of putting them into contact. To superimpose one's own "research interests" upon the "text" of the other is to engage in "subtle forms of colonization" (311). The demand to be open to the other is more than a plea to engage in knowledge-seeking in an ethical manner, it is logically required by the very nature of the knowledge-seeking process.

Gadamer appeals to history and tradition as the ground for our reflections, but he also concedes that this ground is one of struggle, partisan conflicts, and controversy; and that these conflicts can and should be challenged in our dialogue with tradition. However, for Gadamer, conflict in history is much less a worry than a "standardized world civilization"—a world without the recognition of difference and the obstacles involved in communication. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is anything but exclusionary—it is the contact of different perspectives that makes possible a disclosure of truth. While Gadamer never really specifically addresses issues of gender, he is certainly the forerunner of the hermeneutical impulse in recent feminist scholarship, and his own work provides us with a paradigmatic example of how an account of

knowledge and truth that grants the primacy of tradition over subjective reflection has the critical power to break the bonds of authority, conservatism, and the status quo.

While feminist scholars might agree with my characterization of Gadamer's philosophical project *en gros,* and concur that feminist scholarship is undergoing its own hermeneutical crisis, many might nevertheless find an account of Gadamer as an ally of feminist theorizing rather dubious. So, in the remainder of this chapter, I propose to anticipate some of the aspects of philosophical hermeneutics that feminists might find objectionable, namely, Gadamer's account of prejudice, tradition, authority, and language, his notion of understanding as the appropriation of the other, and his silence on feminist issues, with the goal of representing Gadamer's hermeneutics as already being what Habermas calls "a critically enlightened hermeneutics" (Habermas 1990, 267).

Prejudice

The Western philosophical notion of an autonomous subject, a self thought of as universal and free from any contingencies of difference, constitutes, in Hans-Georg Gadamer's view, an unjustified "prejudice against prejudice" (Gadamer 1985, 240). The Enlightenment project of a global "overcoming of all prejudices"—wherein a prejudice is that which is unjustifiably biased because it has not passed the Cartesian test of method and the notion persists that a disciplined application of reason could separate what is objectively true from what is mere opinion—is, according to Gadamer, a fundamentally misguided one. It is neither possible nor desirable to ground knowledge in an autonomous self who seeks to bracket the flow of contemporary discourse and the bosom of tradition in which such discourse is held and nourished. As Gadamer points out, it is not until the Enlightenment that the concept of prejudice received the *solely* negative connotations that it carries today—connotations of dogmatism, falsehood, racism, and, we may add, sexism. From an Enlightenment standpoint, prejudices arise from an uncritical acceptance of traditional views and from an over-hasty, unmethodical use of reason. Thus reason, method, and accurate understanding are set in opposition to prejudice, authority, and tradition. Prejudices are taken to be a hindrance to the acquisition of reliable knowledge, as are authority and

tradition. Autonomous reason is the order of the day.[15] However, against this view, Gadamer argues that prejudices are, in fact, constitutive or productive of accurate understanding and reliable knowledge. Prior to the Enlightenment's "discrediting of prejudice" (Gadamer 1985, 241), prejudice simply meant a provisional judgment that is made before all the components that determine a situation are fully examined, and carried with it both a positive and a negative sense. The negative sense is the meaning of a disadvantage or adverse effect, but, as Gadamer points out, this negative sense is a secondary, derivative meaning that depends on a more fundamental and positive meaning of prejudice as a positive capacity to understand at all, albeit in a provisional manner.

Drawing on Husserl and Heidegger, Gadamer undertakes the rehabilitation of this positive sense by arguing that prejudices are conditions of, and central to, every event of understanding. A prejudice, for Gadamer, is simply an anticipation of meaning, a foreunderstanding that constitutes the basis for any understanding whatsoever, and that is then reconsidered and confirmed, or altered, in the very process of understanding. Recalling Husserl's insights about the constitution of meaning, Gadamer points out that "perception is never a mere mirroring of what is there" since perception always remains "an understanding of something *as something . . .* perception includes meaning" (Gadamer 1985, 81, my italics).[16] We never merely perceive an object, and then throw a signification over it; rather, we perceive a chair *as* a chair, a house *as* a house, an unfamiliar object—a *spaetzle* maker, for example—*as* a funny kind of colander or grating device.[17] Gadamer makes the same point by drawing on the work of Heidegger: the structure of human being, or *Dasein*, is that of "thrown projection," that is, a mode of being that is interpretive and is not consciously thematized. Understanding becomes concretized and thematized *as* historical understanding: "[T]he commitments of custom and tradition and the corresponding potentialities of one's own future become effective in understanding itself" (Gadamer 1985, 234). In order to find our way in the world, we direct ourselves toward certain "projects" of understanding, which carry within them our possibilities and ability. Before we even begin to consciously attempt to understand the meaning of an object or event, we have already placed it within a context *(Vorhabe)*, a perspective *(Vorsicht)*, and grasped it or conceived it *(vorgreifen)* in a certain way. Thus understanding of an event or object can never be objective in the Cartesian sense, since there is no neutral vantage point from which we might conduct an inquiry.

It is the foreunderstanding derivative of the prepredicative existential situation of *Dasein* that determines the thematic framework and playing range of every interpretation. The working out of this foreunderstanding, forejudgment, or prejudice, and the confirmation and revision of what was provisionally projected is the task of understanding. The objectivity or correctness of understanding is nothing other than the confirmation of the foreunderstanding or foremeaning in the working out. So prejudices are positive for Gadamer in the sense that they are fundamental conditions of any kind of understanding whatsoever, which direct and determine the sense of a question. Moreover, prejudices are positive in the sense that the horizon that is the playing range of every interpretation is never closed, and thus is never predetermined. On the contrary, to have a horizon means "not to be limited to what is nearest, but to be able to see beyond it" (Gadamer 1985, 269). Horizons change for the person who is moving, and the historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never bound to a particular standpoint. Horizons are being continually formed in that we continually have to test or put at risk all our prejudices in the asking of a question. The recognition that understanding and the prejudices operative in understanding are provisional compels us to be open to the other, and precludes an automatic disvaluing of certain types of experiences that might not fit into a dominant paradigm.

Tradition and Authority

"Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves" (Gadamer 1985, 261). For Gadamer, tradition plays a fruitful role in the project of understanding, and he is particularly concerned to rehabilitate the authority of tradition against the Enlightenment's attempt to unseat it and replace it with autonomous reason. This rehabilitation of authority sparked the first phase of the debate between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Habermas's ideology critique. Habermas pointed to the discrediting of reason, and to an over-reliance on authority that Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition seemed to imply. Feminist theorists have reiterated Habermas's concerns, albeit in a different con-

text—for thinkers such as Elam and Schott, the appeal to the authority of tradition seems to be an affront to the intellectual and social emancipation of women. However, as in the case of the Gadamer-Habermas debate, the conflict between Gadamer's rehabilitation of tradition and the feminist call for emancipatory ideology critique is minor compared to the substantial common ground hermeneutics and feminist projects share, and the objections raised against hermeneutics can be satisfactorily addressed.

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer writes that the Enlightenment makes tradition "as much an object of criticism as do the natural sciences the evidence of the senses" (Gadamer 1985, 241–42) by taking it to be rife with superstition, irrational and unreflective prejudices of the past, and a reliance on the authority of traditional texts such as the Bible. The concept of authority becomes "diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience" (248). Clearly, an appeal to the reputation of authority is a poor substitute for a one's own judgment, and Gadamer explicitly states that an over-reliance on the authority of any tradition can spawn illegitimate prejudices that are not productive of knowledge and truth. Gadamer describes the Romantics' revolt against the Enlightenment's discrediting of authority and tradition as an important improvement on its distortion of authority and tradition, and credits the Romantics for recognizing "that tradition has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason and in a large measure determines our institutions and our attitudes" (249). However, he adds that, in significant ways, the Romantics' faith in a tradition that is diametrically opposed to reason and requires no rational justification in its preservation only polarized the gulf between reason and tradition by reversing the Enlightenment criterion with an equally dogmatic embracing of tradition, the mysterious, and the unconscious. This is no less a distortion of tradition than that of the rationalist account, since it does not offer an account of reason as conditioned by custom and tradition. Rather, it simply rejects the ideal of perfect reason and replaces it with another reductive metanarrative—the return to a mysterious mythical consciousness. Both the Enlightenment's criticism of tradition and the Romantic opposition remain mired in an epistemological framework that cannot accurately describe the historical nature of tradition and the work it effects in the process of understanding. The skeptical stance Gadamer takes toward the over-reliance on the authority of reason and tradition and toward the flip side of that epistemological opposition, namely an

equally reductive embracing of the subjective, anticipates the very kind of move feminists such as Fraser and Nicholson call for.

Once the Enlightenment demand of an overcoming of all prejudices is shown to be itself an unjustified prejudice, which silences and distorts ways of knowing and fundamental features of the process of knowledge-seeking, we will, according to Gadamer, have cleared a path for an appropriate understanding of our finitude, the nature of our historical consciousness, and our connection to the tradition that sustains us. Gadamer's emphasis on prejudices as constitutive of understanding must not be taken as a kind of epistemological subjectivism, historicism, or relativism. To embrace a subjectivism instead would be to make the same mistake the Romantics made, namely to presuppose the epistemological framework of the Enlightenment, and to simply reverse its values of objectivity for subjective ones. Against this epistemological framework, which constitutes the kind of reductive metanarrative feminist theorizing hopes to overcome, Gadamer proposes a historically situated account of reason that moves and lives in the universality of language. However, while it may appear that the problem of authority in tradition has been overcome, there may be a residue of false authority in the form of oppressive elements at work in language. It is here that feminists such as Schott again raise concerns that echo the charges Habermas made against hermeneutics in part two of the Habermas-Gadamer saga—namely, that the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon in the universality of language constitutes the statement of an absolute standpoint, a reduction of all human experiences to language, and a reification of language that preclude the possibility of ideology critique.

The Universality of Language

According to Gadamer, the authority of tradition is both mediated and realized by language. However, if every act of understanding is conditioned by the "force" of tradition, that is, a normative, historically, and linguistically mediated preunderstanding that is never fully transparent to the interpreter, and the language that mediates understanding can be the locus of both truth and distortion, then perhaps Gadamer's account of the universality of language *is* an endorsement and ossification of certain privileged, male-biased modes of discourse. This is certainly the posi-

tion that Robin Schott takes in her article "Whose Home is it Anyway?" However, in what follows, I shall suggest a reading of Gadamer's account of language that differs from Schott's account of philosophical hermeneutics.

Schott argues that Gadamer treats language as an objective phenomenon, rather than as a product of interaction among people. She writes: "Gadamer's search for a relation to language that is prior to specific relations in the human community precludes seeing that one's access to language and the content of one's own discourse are shaped by existing relations of power" (Schott 1991, 204). For example, one might want to point out that when women understand various traditional doctrines about their needs and interests, and when women try to incorporate the truth of historical tradition into their own lives, what they "appropriate" is a picture of themselves that undermines their emancipatory power. An account of understanding that only focuses on the truth claims tradition makes upon us is not capable of recognizing the connection between the traditional views of women and relations of power. Schott cites Gadamer's ontological account of play as an example that illustrates his insensitivity to the role of gender in ontology. She maintains that he ignores the fact that the content of ontological discourse as exemplified by play is justified by particular ideological interests, namely, men's interests.

According to Gadamer, the subject matter that is being interpreted, be it a text, a tradition, or a work of art, holds an ontological priority over the subjectivity of the interpreter. He illustrates this ontological priority with a phenomenological account of game playing and shows how game playing is a model for the linguistic event of understanding. The requirements of a game, Gadamer writes, dictate the actions of the player, thus one must set aside one's own goals and aspirations and surrender oneself fully to the priority of the game if the player is to play properly and in the right spirit. In a much quoted passage in *Truth and Method* he states:

> [A]ll playing is a being played. The attraction of the game, the fascination that it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game tends to master the players. Even when it is a case of games in which one seeks to accomplish tasks that one has set for oneself, there is the risk whether or not it will 'work,' 'succeed,' and 'succeed again,' which is the attraction of the game. Whoever 'tries' is the one who is tried. The real subject of the game . . . is

the game itself. The game is what holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there. (Gadamer 1985, 95–96)

Schott argues that such an account of play typifies masculine psychology and cites psychological evidence that girls are more likely to break off a game when a quarrel erupts, and that boys' games tend to be longer and in larger groups.[18] If the essence of the game is to surrender to the game itself, then, according to Schott, it would appear that the success of the masculine over the feminine is ensured from the outset. Thus Gadamer fails to recognize how the tradition of ontological discourse ideologically reinforces men's interests and excludes the feminine. She states that "perhaps Gadamer's sensitivity to the inadequacy of a subjective starting point would be more effectively addressed by seeking to understand how differences between subjects may contribute to potentially different forms of self-reflection" (Schott 1991, 204–5).

It seems to me that Schott's account of differences in the play of boys and girls misses the mark, since a quarrel would not break out if indeed the players have set aside their own goals and their urge to dominate, and have indeed surrendered their will to power to the priority of the game. Once a quarrel over the game breaks out, the primacy of the game is already interrupted. What happens afterward and what differences exist between boys and girls is not relevant for the persuasiveness of Gadamer's account of the ontological priority of the game, nor for Schott's claim that this ontology is somehow male-biased. The fact that girls are much more likely to abandon a game if a quarrel breaks out points to the fact that girls do not like to quarrel, but certainly not to their inability to surrender to the primacy of play. Indeed, it seems that the opposite might be true, namely that the ontology of play might typify female psychology instead of male psychology! If indeed it is the case that girls are less likely to quarrel and prefer to compromise and cooperate rather than risk their relationships with others, then perhaps girls are more able to surrender themselves to the priority of play.

Secondly, as I explained above, Gadamer is well aware of the importance of difference in understanding. It is only in dialogical understanding that the difference of individuals, and the articulation of the possibilities these differences offer, are brought to light. A recognition of these differences with the object or partner of interpretation is fundamental to the process of understanding. The first task in interpreta-

tion is to work out one's own foreprojections so that understanding is not led astray by false presuppositions. "Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed by the things themselves, is the constant task of understanding" (Gadamer 1985, 267). The work of hermeneutics is not to develop a procedure for understanding, but is rather to work out the conditions in which understanding takes place, conditions in which a recognition of difference, not a *repression* of difference, constitutes an essential factor for productive understanding.

However, Gadamer also writes that "language completely surrounds us like the voice of home which prior to every thought of it breathes a familiarity from time out of mind" (Gadamer 1976, 97). Schott objects to this formulation of language as our home. The "us" that Gadamer refers to seems to exclude women, since language is not a secure safe dwelling place for all of "us": in fact, language dislocates and oppresses women and is often used as a tool to justify and maintain patriarchal interests. According to Schott, the primary significance Gadamer assigns to language as our primordial "home" reduces all forms of knowledge to linguistic forms, and claims a kind of universal validity for an objectified language that dislocates the feminine: "by giving primary significance to our dwelling in language, Gadamer implies that feeling, desire, and sensuality are not primary experiences" (Schott 1991, 205). But Gadamer does not deny that there are concrete experiences that are primary, including desire—desire for the other and feelings that language cannot articulate. He writes:

> Of course, the fundamental linguisticality of understanding cannot possibly mean that all experiencing of the world takes place only as language and in language. All too well known are those prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawnings, dumbnesses, and silences in which the immediate meeting with the world expresses itself. And who would deny that there are real conditions to human life? There are such things as hunger and love, work and domination, which themselves are not speech and language but that circumscribe the space within which speaking-with-each-other and listening-to-each-other can take place. There is no dispute that it is precisely such preformations of human opinion and speech that make hermeneutic reflection necessary. (Gadamer 1985, 179–80)

Hermeneutics is concerned with all human experience of the world including the concrete factors of power relationships or politics, work or economics, oppressive silences, desires, and sensuality. We cannot, as Gadamer writes, have experiences without asking questions; thus hermeneutical inquiry, which is the art of asking questions, encompasses all human experiences. The universality of philosophical hermeneutics is such that it not only encompasses experiences such as desire, but constitutes desire as a fundamental condition of linguistic communication. I shall return to this point below, after addressing the problem of the universality of language. *Does* Gadamer reify language by claiming that the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon lies in the linguisticality of being? Is the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon as a universality of language not the statement of an absolute standpoint, an ideology that is incapable of emancipatory critique? Schott is right in pointing out that Gadamer's ontology of language goes beyond a merely intersubjective account. However, Schott is one of many critics who have misunderstood Gadamer's claim "Being that can be understood is language" as a reductive universalization of all being to a reified account of language.[19] In what follows I shall suggest that Gadamer's hermeneutics must not be understood as an absolute position, and further that his transsubjective and intersubjective account of language does not constitute a reification of language that could serve to thwart feminist goals.

First, for Gadamer, any philosophy's claim to be absolute is a distortion of the finite nature of knowledge-seeking and truth. When he writes about the universality of language or the universality of the hermeneutic phenomenon he is simply claiming that the search for understanding and language is more than a methodological problem, it is a feature of human facticity. To restrict hermeneutics to the domain of the human sciences is to distort its universal nature; however, to acknowledge its universality is not to endow it with autocratic status. Hermeneutic inquiry is universal in the sense that, as Grondin writes, it "constitutes our whole universe." Language and understanding are the "totality" in which we live—this is what Gadamer means when he says that language is the home that breathes a familiarity of time out of mind—that is, it is the element within which the dialogue that we are is played out. As Grondin writes: "[I]t is important to follow the suggestions in various of Gadamer's texts that the real basis for the talk about universality in *Truth and Method* should be sought in the semantic field of the word 'universe.' Accordingly, we can take the claim that language and understanding are

universal to mean that they constitute our universe—that is, the element or the totality in which we live as finite beings" (Grondin 1994, 122). There is nothing for mortal beings that is not part of our endless task of attempting to understand ourselves and others. The fact that language is universal must not, of course, be taken to mean that everything that can be uttered is already somehow contained or present in a reified language. As Grondin writes, the words we find are nothing but "the visible terminus signaling the interminable desire for further understanding and language" (123). Understanding is a fundamentally open-ended process, and the truth it seeks can never be fully captured by language. The claim to universality does not constitute a false, reductive universalization since the only position that is excluded from it is an absolute standpoint. For Gadamer, there is only finitude that is universal in the search for goodness and truth that is the goal of philosophy.

Language can never fully capture the conversation that we are, thus language can never, if it is to reveal truth, be reduced to definitively grounded propositions. Language, Gadamer argues, is an event *(Geschehen)* that transcends every individual consciousness. There are two features of language that Gadamer develops to ground this account: (1) what he calls the self-forgetfulness of language *(Selbstvergessenheit)* of language during speech, and (2) the dialogic structure of language that grounds the intersubjectivity of language.

The Self-Forgetfulness of Language

The self-forgetfulness of language is the notion that language "recedes" as it brings the thing itself *(die Sache selbst)* into language. Language best reveals the nature of a subject when language is not consciously experienced as such. When we focus on language itself the horizon of the unsaid is bracketed, and the statement is falsely taken to be an autonomous entity of meaning. Here the speculative nature of language as the locus for truth is lost in an artificial abstraction; and what Gadamer calls the world disclosing function of language, the function of language as a revelation of the world, escapes our consciousness. Following Heidegger, Gadamer emphasizes that Being that shows itself, shows itself in language. And language exists most fully as language when it is bound up with the subject matter. If we step back and try to treat language as an objectified product by analyzing language as

language, that is, as a system of rules, we are one step removed from an interpretation or understanding of the subject matter. The "subject matter at hand has disappeared so to speak," and we end up analyzing an empty form, although we mistakenly assume that we are engaged in a substantive investigation of the very subject matter itself. Gadamer's account relativizes the primacy of the apophantic, of the propositional and predicative dimension of language. It is precisely when we focus on the propositional as primary, instead of recognizing its secondary or derivative character, that we may fall prey to false universalization and oppressive abstraction since we ignore the hermeneutical dimension of language—the preenunciative or prepredicative motivational dimension of language. Here we find the concrete experiences of love, hunger, work, domination, and desire, which are prior to language as utterance, which motivate language as utterance, and which can never be fully captured by language. To illustrate this claim, we can refer to the claim "This baby is heavy." As a statement, it tells us the property of heaviness is applied to the subject, the baby. But the meaning of the statement is not merely that the baby has the property of heaviness, and the meaning of the statement can only be grasped if we attend to the motivational dimension, that is, the hermeneutic dimension of the utterance. The subject matter of "this baby is heavy" is, if the utterance comes from an impoverished and fatigued mother, the declaration that *Dasein* suffers in its work with the baby. The mother could be protesting, resigned, furious, hoping for some help—all of these possible subject matters disappear if one focuses only on the propositional dimension of the statement. To understand the statement, we have to know *who* is uttering it, and what his or her motivation is. As Gadamer points out in *Truth and Method,* anyone who has been involved in a legal case knows how propositional language can impede an understanding of the truth of the matter, and how the reduction of truth to that which can be stated can obscure the ethical dimension of the situation that the legal process is, in fact, supposed to disclose.

The range of hermeneutic understanding is not limited to expressed truth, to claims that subjects make or values that they uphold. Hermeneutics explicitly extends to the assumptions and expectations that such truth claims include and presuppose. Philosophical concepts need to be understood in terms of *Dasein* or one's own existence. When we understand hermeneutically, we must ask "Whose philosophical concept? Whose rationality? What is motivating an instrumental account of rea-

son? Whose tradition?" In an entirely Gadamerian spirit, many feminists have raised precisely these questions, and have exposed the narrow interests that often guided knowledge-seeking, and thus distorted the true nature of the hermeneutical endeavor. Gadamer writes that "there is no possible assertion that cannot be understood as an answer to a question and only be so understood." To philosophize is to develop an "ear" for the question for which the statement is an answer, for the "prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts" (Gadamer 1997, 17). Thus whoever wishes to understand a proposition must first endeavor to understand the question that it is attempting to answer. Gadamer writes:

> 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 meaning necessarily exceed what is said in it. (Gadamer 1985, 333)

There is no objective understanding of a proposition that derives some special significance when it is subsequently applied to our existential questions, rather, it is itself an answer to a question posed by whoever wrote or stated the proposition. Schott's concern about the critical power needed for an account of "how differences between subjects may contribute potentially different forms of self-reflection" (Schott 1991, 205) is addressed by hermeneutics' account of understanding as *application*. Critical theorists, particularly Habermas, with whom Schott specifically aligns herself, have been dubious of hermeneutics' critical power and have claimed that only if the applicative dimension of understanding can be subordinated to some procedure for distinguishing between distortion and correct interpretation can hermeneutics claim emancipatory power. Gadamer quite rightly points out that the contrary is closer to the truth: only the subordination of methodological procedures to a model of understanding as a practical, existential, and engaged task *(phronesis)* can encompass the critical power needed to challenge outmoded traditions and conventions in a productive manner.

The Dialogic Structure of Language

According to Gadamer, whoever speaks a language that no one under-
stands does not speak, for to speak is to communicate, and to communi-
cate is to communicate with an other. Dialogue is understood as the
communicative form of linguistic understanding between two subjects. So
language is both understood as "absolutely prior" and as an intersubjec-
tive process, a product of the interaction of subjects. However, this must
not be understood to mean that language has both an objective and a sub-
jective dimension, both a descriptive and a creative function. In a gen-
uine conversation, the central aim is not to understand the other's point
of view as a unique expression of her individuality, nor to describe some
objective totality, but is rather to relate the possible truth of what she is
saying to the subject matter itself and to one's own views and perspec-
tives. When Gadamer speaks of relating the possible truth of the other to
one's own situation, he means not only understanding how what is said
might be right, but also realizing that, to establish contact, "I must myself
accept some things that are against me" (Gadamer 1985, 361). A condi-
tion of dialogue is being open to being addressed by the other. As James
Risser writes in an article that traces the role of the voice of the other in
philosophical hermeneutics, "for Gadamer, it is precisely the voice of the
other that breaks open what is one's own, and remains there—a desired
voice that cannot be suspended—as the partner in every conversation."
The desire for the other is nothing other than what Gadamer refers to as
the condition of linguistic communication, namely good will. Risser con-
tinues: "[W]here does a dialogue begin if not in the space of desire, in the
space of the interrogative that allows one to cross over into the word of
the other?" (Risser 1997, 397). First, there must be a desire for the ques-
tion, a desire for the other and the possibilities the other brings to the
encounter. The good will to understand the other does not, as Derrida
and Schott maintain, entail an appropriation of the other, in the sense of
an obscuring or annihilation of difference. We cannot simply subsume the
other into our own limited horizon, for the event of understanding that
puts us into contact with difference calls that very horizon into question,
and in an encounter that is productive of truth, transforms that horizon.
For Gadamer, truth is an event that "happens" to us as it were: it is not
something that we can control or predict. The will to understanding and
the desire toward the other is far from being in collusion with the drive
for domination. Finally, the notion of desire or good will as a precondi-

tion of linguistic communication speaks against understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics as a reduction of all being to language, and of his failure to acknowledge that feelings and desire are just as primary as language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to anticipate one final objection from feminist theorists. One might want to object that, even though particular aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics—such as his account of prejudice, tradition, authority, and language—have been, I hope, shown to be entirely compatible with feminist theorizing, his deliberate silence on feminist issues is itself a very telling statement that makes any account of him as an ally of feminists a dubious proposition indeed. After all, as Gadamer himself says, "oppressive silences" are undeniably part of our hermeneutic universe. It would certainly be a distortion of Gadamer's position and his intention to claim that he offers any sort of *method* that might be a useful resource for feminist issues. Moreover, it would not be accurate to represent Gadamer as a politically engaged philosopher who addresses "gender issues" in his hermemeutics. This certainly is not his intention, and it would be a serious misrepresentation of the spirit and letter of his philosophical work to make him a "silent feminist." He explicitly denies that the task of the philosopher is to propose solutions to social and political problems, rather, he sees the task of the philosopher vis-à-vis society as developing people's sense of judgment and ability to think for themselves by "engaging in the primacy of dialogue in the theory and practice of teaching" (Gadamer 1997, 258). However, I hope to have shown that Gadamer's account of the importance of difference, his notion of understanding as an inclusive dialogue, his account of prejudices as positive conditions of an understanding that must always remain provisional, his account of tradition as not only the foundation that carries us but as that which is transformed by our reflection, and his account of language as an ongoing project all point toward a hermeneutics that is in solidarity with feminist theorizing. But not all silences are oppressive, and Gadamer's silence on political matters stems from his notion that philosophy is "politically incompetent," and not from any hostility toward political issues, including gender issues. Some silences are simply a proclamation of modesty.

Notes

1. In the introduction to *Feminism/Postmodernism* Nicholson writes:
In large part the problem was a consequence of the methodological legacies which feminist scholars inadvertently took over from their teachers . . . not only did feminist scholars replicate the problematic universalizing tendencies of academic scholarship in general, but, even more strikingly, they tended to repeat the specific types of questionable universalizing moves found in the particular schools of thought to which their work was more closely allied. Thus, Marxist-feminist scholarship suffered the same kinds of faulty universalizations found in non-feminist-Marxist scholarship, while feminist developmental psychologists replicated the specific types of universalizing mistakes present in developmental psychology. (Nicholson 1990, 1)

2. It is important to point out that Gadamer stipulates a positive meaning to the term "prejudice." For Gadamer, a prejudice is not necessarily a negative, false, and unjustifiable judgment; rather, it is a provisional judgment that may be positive or negative and that is challenged in the process of understanding.

3. While hermeneutics and deconstruction are in many ways opposed to one another, they both reject the notion that the task of philosophy is to provide an objective foundation for knowledge and experience, and question an account of the meaning of language as a controllable phenomenon that can capture its object exactly and completely.

4. The three debates are well known and have been extensively discussed in contemporary scholarship in hermeneutics. See, for example, Jean Grondin's "L'hérméneutique comme science rigoureuse selon Emilio Betti (1890–1968)" (1990, 177–98); Josef Bleicher's *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (1993); J. Mendelson's "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate" (1979, 44–73); Dieter Misgeld's "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and Hermeneutics in the Light of the Debate between Habermas and Gadamer" (1977, 321–44); and Demetrius Teigas's *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Study of the Habermas-Gadamer Debate* (1995). See also Grondin's "Hermeneutics in Dialogue," a succinct overview of the Betti, Habermas, and Derrida debates in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1994).

5. See *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito,* ed. Gaspare Mura (1990). While there is no English translation of Betti's work on a general theory of interpretation for the human sciences, there is a German version by Betti entitled *Die hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften* (1962).

6. See Grondin's discussion of the evolution of Habermas's relation to hermeneutics in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1994, 129–35).

7. For Habermas's emancipatory critique of ideology based on the "objective" model of psychoanalysis, see his earlier work, for example, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1988). His theory of communicative action and discourse ethics can be found in his more recent work. See, for example, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984); *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990a); and *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (1998).

8. On the English translation of the Gadamer-Derrida encounter that took place in Paris in 1981, see Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (1989).

9. In recent works such as *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange,* ed. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (1995) and *Feminism/Postmodernism,* ed. Nicholson (1990), Gadamer's hermeneutics is never even mentioned, let alone recognized as a fruitful resource for feminist scholarship. It strikes one as particularly odd that scholars who work in the continental tradition, and who discuss the intersection of Habermas and Derrida with feminist projects, would ignore one of the most prominent interlocutors in the debate on interpretation. See also Kathy Ferguson's *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (1993), in which she discusses

what she calls "praxis feminism," which she takes to be indebted to hermeneutics, although she makes no mention of Gadamer.

10. See Robin Schott, "Whose Home is it Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature: Plato, Heidegger, Barthes, Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida*, ed. Hugh Silverman (1991, 202–9); Diane Elam, "Is Feminism the Saving Grace of Hermeneutics?," in *Social Epistemology* (1991, 349–60); Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser (1994, 206–26); and "Feminism and Hermeneutics," in *Hypatia* (1993, 81–97).

11. In *Feminism/Postmodernism* Fraser and Nicholson write:

[W]hile the specific manifestations of . . . universalizing tendencies in feminist theory might have been diverse, the underlying problem was the same. It was the failure, common to many forms of academic scholarship, to recognize the embeddedness of its own assumptions within a specific historical context. Like many other modern Western scholars, feminists were not used to acknowledging that the premises from which they were working possessed a specific location. (1990, 3)

12. See *Dialogue and Dialectic in Plato: Eight Hermeneutical Studies* (1980), and *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus* (1991).

13. Gadamer probably has some key proponents of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Plato scholarship such as Burnett, Crombie, and Ryle in mind here. He is also referring, more specifically, to his German colleagues in philology, particularly the great classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, whose project of constructing philology as a science included assuming that language was merely a shroud that obscured a doctrine of ideas in Plato's system.

14. It seems likely that Gadamer has the early Habermas in mind here, with his argument that exposing unjust relations of power in society requires going beyond hermeneutic understanding alone and appealing to an objective reference system of relations of power and conditions of social labor in society. See "A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method," in *Understanding and Social Inquiry* (1977).

15. Gadamer quotes Kant who, at the beginning of his essay "Was ist Aufklärung" (1784), commands that one must have the courage to use one's understanding.

16. See, for example, Husserl's early work, *Logical Investigations* (1970), especially sections entitled "Expression and Meaning" and "On the Theory of Wholes and Parts."

17. Device for making spaetzle, a Swabian specialty consisting of very small dumplings made out of egg noodle dough.

18. Schott writes:

[P]sychologists studying the play of boys and girls have noted that boys' games tend to be in larger groups than girls' games, more competitive, and longer, since boys seem to enjoy legal disputes about rules. Girls' games, on the other hand, tend to be in more intimate groups than boys' games, more involved in turn taking, and girls are more likely to break off a game when a quarrel breaks out than to jeopardize a relationship with other players. (1991, 204)

19. In "Language as Dialogue" in *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Grondin writes: Gadamer's hermeneutics of language is the most misunderstood aspect of his philosophy. The aphorism "Being that can be understood is language" has seemed to justify accusing his philosophy of—or, according to another school of thought, celebrating it for—reducing all being to language. Readers have also objected to the occasional moments of vague diction in the final section of *Truth and Method*, which is sometimes lacking in precise conceptual distinctions. Thus we detect a certain resignation when distinguished students such as Walter Schulz believe they have discovered that for Gadamer everything collapses into an all-embracing synonymy: "History, language, dialogue, and game—all of these, and this is the decisive thing, are interchangeable quantities." (1994, 118)

References

Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, eds. 1995. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.

Betti, Emilio. 1962. *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*. Tübingen: J. C .B. Mohr.

Bleicher, Josef. 1993. *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique*. London: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Elam, Diane. 1991. "Is Feminism the Saving Grace of Hermeneutics?" *Social Epistemology* 5, no. 4: 349–60.

Ferguson, Kathy. 1993. *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Fraser, Nancy, and Linda Nicholson. 1990. "Social Criticism Within Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism." In Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism*.

Gadamer, Hans Georg. 1976. *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1980. *Dialogue and Dialectic in Plato: Eight Hermeneutical Studies*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1985. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

———. 1991. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*. Trans. Robert Wallace. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1997. "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.

Grondin, Jean. 1990. "L'hérméneutique comme science rigoureuse selon Emilio Betti (1890–1968)." *Archives de Philosophie* 53: 177–98.

———. 1994. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

———. 1977. "A Review of Truth and Method." In *Understanding and Social Inquiry,* ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press.

———. 1988. *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1990. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality." In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur,* ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1990a. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1998. *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.

Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *Logical Investigations*. Trans. J. N. Findlay. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books.

Mendelson, J. 1979. "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate." *New German Critique* 18: 44–73.

Michelfelder, Diane, and Richard Palmer, eds. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Misgeld, Dieter. 1977. "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and Hermeneutics in Light of the Debate between Habermas and Gadamer." *Cultural Hermeneutics* 4: 321–44.

Mura, Gaspare. 1990. *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito*. Roma: Cita Nuova.

Nicholson, Linda. 1990. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge.

Okin, Susan Moller. 1989. *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.

Risser, James. 1997. "The Voice of the Other in Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.

Schott, Robin. 1991. "Whose Home is it Anyway?" In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature: Plato, Heidegger, Barthes, Ricoeur, Habermas, Derrida*, ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge.

Sullivan, Robert. 1985. "On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics." In *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Teigas, Demetrius. 1995. *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Study of the Habermas-Gadamer Debate*. Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1993. "Feminism and Hermeneutics." *Hyppatia* 8: 81–98.

———. 1994. "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women." In *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

4

Gadamer's Conversation

Does the Other Have a Say?

Marie Fleming

There is considerable support among feminists for a dialogical model of understanding. In looking to dialogue, feminists reject the Western image of the individual knower intent on purifying himself of bodily and historical distractions in the pursuit of value-neutrality and objectivity. Feminists also repudiate the adversarial model of interaction whereby the supposedly disembodied and disinterested knower paradoxically seeks to preserve himself and his findings in a contest with similarly individuated knowers. As feminists have shown, these androcentric images are empirically inadequate for grasping the cooperative elements of producing knowledge; they have material effects that contribute to the discrimination, in knowledge and knowledge production, against women and racial groups culturally associated with the body; and they have generally functioned as barriers to the development of new and liberating knowledge for everyone. There are important areas of dialogical understanding that feminists have to work through. For example, many feminists now hold that the ideal of global sisterhood, which once seemed so

productive, tends to obscure relations of power between women and to privilege the experiences of white, middle-class, Western feminists. I agree that the sisterhood ideal has to be given up, in order to begin an accountable theorizing about feminism in the contemporary context of global capitalism and the international division of labor. I remain convinced, however, that there is much to gain from continuing to develop the feminist idea of dialogue.

In a feminist dialogue, the partners are interested rather than disinterested, speak from positions of social situatedness rather than gaze at the world from no place in particular, engage in the flow of historical events rather than yearn for the certainty of a "totalizing" truth, aim to make room for cultural difference rather than try to contain it, understand successful communication as more than mere preservation of one's self, and in every case understand that our responsibility is not to some transcendent truth, but to the other person who is in dialogue with us. As I see it, the core of feminist dialogue is openness to the other and to history. This relation to the other is by definition nonappropriative. I also believe that we have much work to do, to articulate what it means to have a nonappropriative relation to the other and to say what, precisely, would count as coming to an understanding in history.

In doing this work, feminists are confronted with the figure of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is a severe critic of Western individualism and who explicitly puts conversation at the center of his philosophical hermeneutics. Does he have anything to offer us? Is he a "nascently feminist" writer (Alcoff 1996, 20) who can contribute constructively to our efforts to think further about feminist dialogue? In this chapter I want to argue that it is a grave mistake to think of Gadamer as a potential friend, but first I would like to indicate why someone might be tempted to claim (wrongly, as I will argue) that his hermeneutics is grounded in an openness to the other and to history.

In Gadamer's conversational model of hermeneutics, the other is the one with whom I am in continual dialogical contact and without whom I would have no knowledge. There are various kinds of others, ranging from those who are rather like me to those who are radically different from me. Whereas much Western philosophy seems to favor a particular type of conversation partner, and attempts, sometimes explicitly, to place restrictions on those who are entitled to participate, Gadamer's approach would strongly encourage me to seek out those others who are as different from me as possible. Although engaging with others who are like me might be pleasant, it reduces the quality of my knowledge of myself and

the world, because these others will share my views and tend to confirm me in my assumptions, some of which are probably false and should be given up. The other who is different from me makes me feel unsettled in my assumptions and forces me, sometimes radically, to rearrange my understanding of myself and the world. Thus Gadamer explicitly departs from the view, characteristic of much Western thinking, that understanding is more likely when the partners already have much in common. Contrary to typical Western thought: "This conversation should seek its partner everywhere, just because this partner is other, and especially if the other is completely different" (Gadamer 1989a, 113). In a Gadamerian conversation, my ideal partner would be the person who is as much unlike me as possible, and I should actively promote conversation with those who do not share my opinions and commitments.

   This hermeneutical view of otherness, though seemingly promising, actually generates a view of interpretive understanding that is deeply hostile to feminist values. To see why this is so, I will address the role Gadamer offers the other in conversational and textual interpretation. What kind of advantage does he see in his privileging of the radically different other? What exactly does he mean by openness to history? What does he mean by coming to an understanding? Are the conversation partners trying to understand each other? What, in his view, is being understood? As I will show, Gadamer's hermeneutical courting of the other is purely instrumental: the dialogue partners do not pledge to understand each other, they are not equal, and there is no genuine reciprocity. Instead, everything in Gadamer's hermeneutics is scrupulously oriented to the containment of difference in the name of unity and continuity. Alterity, in his text, stands for rupture and the possibility of rupture, and cultural and linguistic disorder.

   I will begin by discussing what Gadamer calls the "hermeneutical experience," and will then take up an analysis of his hermeneutic treatment of otherness.

Hermeneutical Experience

Gadamer maintains that his hermeneutics agrees systematically with the starting-point of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, i.e, "*Dasein* understanding itself in its being" (1989c, 95). In *Being and Time*, the solitary *Dasein* (Being-there) contrasts with *Mitsein* (Being-with), a term used by

Heidegger in relation to a crucial passage where he writes disparagingly about *das Man*, rendered in English as the "they" (also as the "everybody"). As this passage indicates, Heidegger distinguishes *Dasein*'s mode of existence from Being-with-one-another, which he sees as concerned with "everydayness" and thus as an average, deficient, and inauthentic mode of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962, 149ff.). Despite this Heideggerian stance on the deficiency of the "they," Gadamer anchors his hermeneutics to an attempt to shed light on the "the authenticity of Being-with" and maintains that dialogue is "a mode of being truly 'on the way to language'" (Gadamer 1989c, 94–95). In turning to the dialogical process of coming to an understanding of what takes place in language, Gadamer might seem to be forsaking the ground of the individualistic *Dasein*, but he assures us that his hermeneutics does not depart from the Heideggerian project of thinking about Being *(Sein)*. In fact, it was against Heidegger's own belief that *Being and Time* was too closely tied to transcendental reflection that Gadamer set out to "look for ways in which Heidegger's discussion of that Being, which is not the Being of beings, [could] be legitimated." His own contribution, he says, is "the discovery that no conceptual language, not even what Heidegger called the 'language of metaphysics,' represents an unbreakable constraint upon thought if only the thinker allows himself to trust language; that is, if he engages in dialogue with other thinkers and other ways of thinking." It was thus in full agreement with Heidegger's critique of the concept of the subject that he sought the "original phenomenon of language in dialogue" (1989e, 23).

Gadamer maintains that Heidegger's *Being and Time* successfully demonstrates the circular structure of understanding. Because the subject is always in the world it tries to understand, there can be no clear separation of subject and object. But Heidegger's achievement goes further, in Gadamer's view, because the very concepts of subject and object, along with the idea of a method that lets one imagine oneself as distanced from the world rather than being-in-the-world, can now be viewed as falsely posited by the Enlightenment philosophy of subjectivity. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is neither subject nor object, and just as *Dasein* is the starting-point and end-point for Heidegger, Gadamer seeks a comparable reference point in everyday dialogue. In trying to show that dialogue, like *Dasein*, belongs to the circularity of understanding and is not related to subjectivity, Gadamer argues that dialogue is structurally similar to play. In play one becomes so wrapped up in the activity of playing that

one "loses" one's self, so to speak; in dialogue, understood as play, one risks one's prejudices, puts them into play, and so abandons oneself to the situation at hand. Engaging in play transforms the players in ways they do not intend and cannot anticipate. While transformative effects are especially apparent in artistic play, notably those involving performance, Gadamer holds that there is transformation in every kind of understanding. As players, we are transformed by the play, thus no longer what we were, and the play, though it only exists through its effects on us, achieves an "absolute autonomy" (1994, 101ff.).

The idea of play also allows him to tie together dialogical and aesthetic experience. For our purposes, it is worth noting that, for Gadamer, aesthetic experience has a dialogical core—something speaks to us in art and transforms us; while everyday dialogue, which is complex, unpredictable, and discontinuous, and thus like the experience of art, has an aesthetic core. This strategy does not, however, provide for structurally similar though independently existing realms of aesthetic and hermeneutic experience, but subordinates the one to the other. Gadamer's hermeneutics is meant not only to accommodate the experience of art, but also to become comprehensive enough to "absorb" aesthetics (1994, 164). The task for hermeneutics can then be conceived as one of "preserving the hermeneutic continuity which constitutes our being, despite the discontinuity intrinsic to aesthetic being and aesthetic experience" (96).

In choosing an ethics of continuity over an aesthetics of rupture, Gadamer is following a path opened up for him many years ago, when at the age of nineteen, he first read Søren Kierkegaard's radical differentiation of ethical and aesthetic existence in *Either/Or*. Gadamer sees in *Either/Or* the inspiration for his own "hermeneutical option for continuity." In Kierkegaard's figure of William, the assessor, "ethical continuity stands over against aesthetic immediacy and the self-criticism of the conscience-bearing will is opposed to aesthetic enjoyment" (1989c, 97; cf. 1997, 46). In choosing "William," who symbolizes continuity, Gadamer takes a stand against dialogical complexity and aesthetic rupture. This choice, made early on by Gadamer, would deeply influence his reading of Heidegger and, in my view, it laid a theoretical basis for his eventual philosophical hostility to difference and to history. In *Truth and Method* and elsewhere, we see Gadamer tirelessly turning to the thought of continuity. For him, continuity has to be understood in terms of Being manifesting itself in the event or happening of meaning, what he refers to as the "hermeneutical experience."

The notion of "hermeneutical experience," though fundamental for Gadamer, is not, and in his view cannot be, explained. He tries to clarify what he means by saying what it is not. For example, he points out that the event or happening of meaning cannot be understood by referring to linguistics. As an analysis concerned with the formal elements of language, linguistics leaves out of account what hermeneutics takes to be its theme. He maintains that, although what comes into language comes in with the spoken word, the word in itself is only a word by virtue of what comes into language in it. The "physical being" of the word exists "only in order to disappear into what is said" (1994, 475). What makes understanding possible is "precisely the forgetfulness of language, a forgetting of the formal elements in which the discourse or the text is encased" (1989e, 32). Gadamer is also not saying that what comes into language exists prior to language, that it points to something prelinguistic or nonlinguistic. He would be especially against saying that the event or happening of meaning can refer to the coming into language of something we "knew" all along—for example, feelings, hurts, and so on—that seem to have existed prior to the dialogical situation. That would give the thing that comes into language the status of a proposition. While propositional knowledge is the "hermeneutical dimension in which Being 'manifests itself,'" the Being that arrives with the something that comes into language refers "beyond" propositions (25). In Gadamer's view, just as we can experience a truth of art, for which no words are adequate—which goes "beyond" propositions—so too is the experience of Being not reducible to prepositional knowledge about the experience.

Gadamer similarly does not allow what comes into language to be identified with statements of agreement between partners in dialogue. The dialogical experience is not simply the "sphere of arguments and counterarguments the exchange and unification of which may be the end meaning of every confrontation." Rather there is "something else" in the dialogical experience, "namely, a potentiality for being other [*Anderssein*] that lies beyond every coming to agreement about what is common" (1989e, 26). Gadamer sees this dimension of dialogue, its ability to transmit something beyond every concrete understanding, as an important discovery, foreshadowed in the writings of the nineteenth-century hermeneutic theorists Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, and developed in the early work of Heidegger. Plato's presentation of Socratic dialogue misses the point, in Gadamer's view, because Plato always has Socrates demanding an account from the other, thereby preparing the way for Western logocentrism. This logocentrism begins

at the point where dialectic experienced as an abandonment of the self to the play of the conversation turns into dialectic experienced as a self-centeredness established on the ground of the better argument (26–27). According to Gadamer, both Plato and Hegel make the mistake of subordinating language to the "statement." He claims that Hegel's dialectic, in which the concept of the statement is sharpened to the point of contradiction, is "antithetical" to the nature of hermeneutical experience. Hegel's dialectic is within the "dimension of statements," whereas hermeneutics, building on Heidegger, seeks the "dimension of the linguistic experience of the world" (1994, 468–69).

For Gadamer, "hermeneutical experience" is what we all presumably know, but it cannot be re-presented because in the re-presentation it would no longer be what it is—it would be dead, no longer in a "living dialogue" (1989e, 23; 1989d, 56). He insists that he is just describing experiences that everyone has, every day, all over the world, that he is simply showing what happens in conversation "as it goes along" (1989b, 119), that he is not presenting an argument, that the hermeneutic circle is not vicious because it cannot be avoided (1989e, 26). In repeatedly pointing to "hermeneutical experience," which supposedly cannot be further explained, Gadamer steps out of the conversation, so to speak. This stopping of the conversation also serves as a silencing of anyone who might still be wondering about his urgent concern to assert the need for hermeneutic continuity. How is it, he asks, that through all this flux that prevails in the play of conversation, through the many transformations of self that defy explanation, we still understand each other? This emphasis on continuity also leads to a hermeneutics that calls on the other to support the event of meaning, even as it simultaneously and relentlessly tries to eliminate everything connected to concrete individuality, particularity, otherness, and difference. I will discuss Gadamer's treatment of otherness by examining his comments on the hermeneutic circle, temporal distance, and the fusion of horizons.[1]

The Hermeneutic Circle

Gadamer's hermeneutic circle refers to the "interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter." He maintains that nineteenth-century hermeneutic theorists were mistaken about the nature of this circle. They believed that the interpreter was intuitively

guided in his understanding of a text by the formal relation of whole and part, and that successful understanding resulted in the dissolution of the circle. To the contrary, he writes, Heidegger shows us that the "anticipatory movement of foreunderstanding," or the interpreter's anticipation of meaning, permanently determines the understanding of the text, so that the circle, far from being dissolved with the newly created text, is "most fully realized." He contends that the interpreter's foreunderstanding issues from the "commonality that binds us to the tradition" and that this commonality is itself circular in that it is always in the process of being formed in relation to tradition (1994, 293). The hermeneutic circle goes something like this: the interpreter, as one who is constituted by the tradition, gains access to the "truth" of the text, and the tradition that constitutes the interpreter is also the fount from which he must draw if the text is to yield its truth.[2]

Gadamer, as discussed above, follows Heidegger in setting up his hermeneutics as an argument against the epistemological subject. Whereas in (classically understood) epistemology, the subject is viewed as separate from the object it tries to know, for Gadamer every kind of knowing—whether related to art, literature, or nature—involves something that speaks to us in the context of a dialogue, in which we "lose" ourselves as if in play. However, his decision to move beyond subject and object also impels him to try to erase, from interpretive activity, all traces of concrete individuality, the site of differences, otherness, embodiment, and history. It thus becomes impossible, inside Gadamer's hermeneutics, to raise questions about identity. Not only are interpreters interchangeable in their "commonality," but the interpreter's anticipation of meaning—his foreunderstanding, which is the "most basic" of the hermeneutic preconditions—is "not an act of subjectivity" (1994, 293–94). The interpreter cannot be bound to the tradition as an individual, or member of a group, nor can he be bound differently, in his alterity, as a subjected other, as an other struggling against oppressive social conditions and cultural values.

The idea of the hermeneutic circle also suggests to Gadamer that the "foreconception of completeness" is a formal condition of all understanding. This condition states that for something to be intelligible, it must constitute a "unity of meaning." In reading a text, he says, we always make the assumption that it is unified or "complete," and it is only when the text turns out to be "unintelligible" that we try to find a "remedy" (1994, 294). Some feminists might object here that the anticipation of

completeness need not be accepted as the only way to interpret a text, that in fact reading with a prejudice of completeness only gives support to the deconstructionist argument that interpretation inevitably involves intersubjective violence, insofar as it seeks unity in the midst of diversity and inevitably tends to level differences. From that perspective, reading with an anticipation of incompleteness might be a way to mitigate cultural/linguistic violence. However, Gadamer does not allow for this line of reasoning. In his view, the foreconception of completeness has nothing to do with subjectivity, or with intersubjectivity for that matter. Rather, what determines the interpreter's anticipation of meaning is the "specific content" of the text. Thus, while the reader makes the assumption of the "immanent unity" of meaning, what guides his understanding are the "constant transcendent expectations of meaning" that derive from his relation to the "truth of what is being said." One's own anticipation of meaning, which ties one to the "commonality that binds one to the tradition," is fundamental because it "determines what can be realized as unified meaning." If understanding fails, that is, if the text cannot be interpreted as "true," then one attempts to "understand" the text in psychological or historical terms, that is, as "another's opinion." According to Gadamer, the prejudice of completeness is always enabling, always productive, and more than a formal condition—text should "completely express its meaning." What the text says should be the "complete truth." The other's meaning is not the truth of what is said in the text. Understanding "means, primarily, to understand the content of what is said, and only secondarily to isolate and understand another's meaning as such" (294). So what is this "complete truth"? And in what sense is the other's meaning only secondary?

These questions are crucial for assessing Gadamer's hermeneutics. Let me anticipate my later discussion by saying that he regards the interpreting of texts as having a "hermeneutical conversation." In this conversation the one partner, the text, speaks through the other partner, the interpreter. The partnership does not extend to the author of the text. Insofar as the author's meaning, or concrete individuality, is part of the text, it has to be viewed as secondary to the "common subject matter" that binds the interpreter and the text to the tradition (1994, 387–88). As well, it is important to note that Gadamer simultaneously de-individualizes the understanding process and gives tradition an ever-expanding role. What constitutes the hermeneutical event proper, he claims, is the "coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an

event that is at once appropriation and interpretation." This event "is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself." Something occurs, and from the side of the "object" this occurrence means the "coming into play, the playing out, of the content of tradition in its constantly widening possibilities of significance and resonance, extended by the different people receiving it" (462–63). The interpreter's anticipation of meaning moves him out of the realm of individuality and puts him in touch with the tradition, the source of his meaning anticipation. However, while he has a "bond" to the subject matter, itself a piece of tradition coming into its own, as it were, the subject matter can come into language only if, in the process of understanding, the interpreter works his way through the prejudices and foremeanings "occupying" his consciousness. He must, according to Gadamer, separate the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the unproductive ones that lead to misunderstanding (295). In this respect, Gadamer sees productive prejudices as standing for what binds the interpreter to the tradition and unproductive prejudices as representing the interpreter's individuality. It is by divesting his consciousness of its individualistic impulses that the interpreter fulfils the conditions for entering into communion with the tradition.

Gadamer remains unmoved by criticisms that he does not provide a principle of selection to guide the interpreter in distinguishing true and false prejudices. He contends that the hermeneutical experience "has its own rigor: that of uninterrupted listening." It is through listening to the tradition that one gets ideas to try out various interpretive strategies, and repeated efforts are needed to find the right interpretation for the text. Moreover, it is just this possibility of listening and making a connection—finding just the right word—that shows one belongs to the tradition. To explicate this idea of "belonging," he points to the primacy of hearing as the basis of the hermeneutical phenomenon. "It is not just that he who hears is also addressed, but also that he who is addressed must hear whether he wants to or not. When you look at something, you can also look away from it . . . but you cannot 'hear away.'" He maintains that transmitting the tradition through written materials does not affect the primacy of hearing—though it makes the work of listening more difficult. "Belonging is brought about by tradition's addressing us. Everyone who is situated in a tradition . . . must listen to what reaches him from it" (1994, 462–65). For Gadamer, "belonging" means that we share in the "commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices" (295), but those

who belong constantly have to show they belong by separating out the true prejudices from the false ones.

Feminists are likely to object to Gadamer's suggestion that we "all" belong to tradition. Clearly, not everyone "belongs" in the same way. How do women and other others belong? Do they belong differently? Do they belong at all? Gadamer's homogenizing use of the "we" is partly a function of the key role he gives hermeneutical experience. The "we" is constructed by those who have the hermeneutical experience, and what that experience is, no one, including Gadamer, can say; but he refuses to entertain the possibility that the experience—whatever it is—might not be universal. Either one has had the experience, or one has not, so that if one denies having had it, there is supposedly little more to be said. This forced inclusion into the "we" is a major concern for feminists because it aggressively discourages us from critically examining what "belonging" to tradition means. As I will discuss in the next section, a yet more serious consequence for feminists arises out of Gadamer's idea of belonging to the tradition as a relation that has to be constantly and actively produced. In his hermeneutics, one must work at belonging to the tradition, and one proves that one belongs by showing one is able to separate the true prejudices from the false ones. He understands this separation as involving a relation to the other that is antithetical to feminist values.

To reiterate: for Gadamer, understanding cannot take place unless there is separation of the true and false prejudices. To see how this separation takes place and the role he gives the other in this separation process, I will consider his discussion of temporal distance.

Temporal Distance

Whereas poststructuralist thinking attempts to allow for the strangeness of historical contexts by emphasizing discontinuity and rupture, Gadamer holds that it is a mistake to look at a text as intelligible only in its context, as irreducibly other. We should not, he says, try to put past and present historical contexts on the same footing, as if each could be said to have its own truth and its own claim to validity. In the first place, the interpreter must bring to the text his own prejudices and foremeanings, so that the meaning the text has for the author and his original audience is, in any case, "co-determined" also by the interpreter's historical

context and thus by the "totality of the objective course of history" (1994, 296). But his main point is that temporal distance is positive and productive, an enabling condition of understanding that we should gladly embrace rather than try to overcome. For Gadamer there have to be differences if there is to be any understanding, and differences are all the more recognizable in the stark reality of the temporal distance that the historian confronts. How, then, should the historian deal with differences? The answer Gadamer gives pertains to how he views the problem of difference in conversations generally because, as he says, interpretive distance cannot be avoided. "Thought contains deferral and distance. Otherwise, thought would not be thought" (1989b, 125; cf. 1997, 45). For Gadamer, therefore, the historian's encounter with the differences that constitute the past brings into relief the situation faced by anyone who enters into a conversation under any circumstances, whether with a text, a thing, or another person.

In discussing the matter of historical texts, Gadamer contends that each historical context has a relation to the tradition, so that past and present are not really separate, as we tend to think, but actually united. If they are united, he writes, they are also in a relation to each other, and it is the task of hermeneutics to spell out what this relation means. He encourages us to see that the interpreter of a historical text is concerned "not with individuality and what it thinks but with the truth of what is said." To be concerned with individuality in its own historical context would turn the text into a "mere expression of life," whereas the interpreter has to take the text "seriously in its claim to truth." He argues that historical distance creates an "insuperable difference" between the interpreter and the author and that the interpreter's understanding is also a "superior" one. Thus, in regard to interpreting texts from the past, Gadamer maintains both that we understand "in a different way, if we understand at all," and that our understanding, if we do understand, is superior to the original (1994, 296–97).

Gadamer's explication of the "superiority" of the subsequent understanding of a text is profoundly connected to the part he attributes to the other in the understanding process. He maintains that the interpreter, in approaching a text, wants the "complete truth" (1994, 294), but must first isolate and appreciate it as "another's meaning," i.e., "something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity" (299). But for the text to be valued in this way, the interpreter has to become aware of the prejudices governing his own understanding. Becoming aware of our prej-

udices means foregrounding them, suspending their validity for us, and Gadamer declares that it is the text itself, in its strangeness, that assists this process. He remarks that it is not possible to become conscious of a prejudice while it is still operating on and influencing us. It needs to be "provoked." In the context of this provocation, we engage in the difficult task of finding the right question to ask of the text, and we sort out our prejudices in light of the question to which the text is an answer. He writes that if the other person or text says something that brings a prejudice of ours into question, it is not the case that we simply accept what the text or other person says. In the first instance, we should be happy that the understanding process is proceeding as it should (299). Engaging in dialogue with another person or with a text is precisely to put one's prejudices in play, i.e., "to expose oneself and to risk oneself. Genuinely speaking one's mind . . . risks our prejudices—it exposes oneself to one's own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other" (1989e, 26). A prejudice has to be in full play if we are to experience the "other's claim to truth" and if the other is to have full play herself (1994, 299).

I now want to argue that Gadamer has an instrumentalist view of otherness. In his hermeneutics, the other, through her provocation, enables understanding; but as other, she is not a partner in the dialogue. As mentioned previously, the partnership is between the interpreter and the text. But it is not simply that the other is excluded from the partnership. One begins to get a sense of the complexity of the problem, once one sees that Gadamer also believes that the other's meaning is absolutely essential to the understanding process. Without the other, it would not be possible to understand at all. One must also have "good will" toward the other. Good will means that "one does not go about identifying the weaknesses of what another person says in order to prove that one is always right, but one seeks instead as far as possible to strengthen the other's viewpoint so that what the other person has to say becomes illuminating" (1989d, 55). For Gadamer, understanding begins when something "addresses" us, and the more alien the form in which that something arrives, the more we are provoked, the more our prejudices are shook up, the more we think them through, and the more likely we are to arrive at a true understanding. The other's meaning, while essential, is only secondary. There is no equality and no reciprocity. The other can never provide a view that we can accept as valid in its own right and, in her alterity, has no claim to the dialogical partnership. In understanding, Gadamer writes, there is this "thing that is being conveyed" but it is "not

what the speaker or writer originally said, but rather what he would have wanted to say to me if I had been his original interlocutor" (1989e, 35). Quite in keeping with what he claims is his Heideggerian starting-point, his hermeneutics favors a solitary self, a hermeneutically remodeled *Dasein*, seeking to preserve himself by erasing the other's concrete identity, while calling on her to witness his understanding of himself and his world. The point of interpreting the past, according to Gadamer, is to get to the "unity of the one and the other" (1994, 299), a unity that can take place only in the interpreter's own present.

Gadamer compares the work of the interpreter to that of someone who translates from a foreign language. The translator, he explains, is usually described as facing the problem of how to keep the character of his own language intact as he tries to recognize the worth of the "alien, even antagonistic" character of the text he is translating. In opposition to this view, Gadamer argues that the competent translator brings into language not what is alien, but rather the "subject matter that the text points to," though to do this, he has to find a language that is both "his" and also "proportionate to the original." The translator's situation and the interpreter's are basically the same, he thinks. Translating a foreign language is just an "extreme case of hermeneutical difficulty—i.e., of alienness and its conquest" (1994, 387). He declares that the interpreter's task is to intervene when the text cannot be heard, when it is not doing "what it is supposed to do," so that "whatever is alienating in a text, whatever makes the text unintelligible" can be "overcome and thereby cancelled out." Once the text is heard, the interpreter's only remaining function is to "disappear completely into the achievement of full harmony in understanding" (1989e, 41).

This disappearance of the interpreter into the text is what Gadamer calls the "fusion of horizons." This terminology is misleading and can suggest (mistakenly) that he thinks of understanding in terms of a process of interaction between historically and culturally diverse horizons of meanings that can lead to some sort of negotiated unity.[3] However, the question of how to think about a possible plurality of horizons, whatever its value for feminism, does not arise in the context of Gadamer's hermeneutics. As I will discuss, he disallows the idea of the coming together of two or more distinct standpoints in some sort of unity that would, for example, encompass aspects of each. Nor do I see any basis for saying that his hermeneutics might be reinterpreted to support such a view.[4] Rather, Gadamer explicitly argues that, for the interpreter, there

is really only "one" horizon. This aspect of his account is troubling, not the least because, here again, we have the suggestion that there is only one way to "belong" to the tradition.

The "One" Horizon

The "hermeneutical situation," as understood by Gadamer, refers to where we find ourselves in relation to the tradition we are trying to understand. In this situation, we have a consciousness of being affected by history and must grant that knowledge of ourselves is ongoing, never complete. How, then, can we have any knowledge at all? Here, as elsewhere, he falls back on what he takes to be the circularity of the understanding process. He maintains that historically effected consciousness is itself a part of our historical understanding and thus a resource for finding the right questions to ask. We might begin, he suggests, by defining the concept of "situation" as a standpoint "that limits the possibility of vision," so that the concept of "horizon" refers to the "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point." A horizon can be narrow, it can expand, new horizons can open up, and when someone "has" a horizon, he is not "limited to what is nearby but . . . able to see beyond it" (1994, 301–2).

Gadamer's discussion of horizons is meant, in part, to contest the notion of historical understanding, i.e., the idea that a past situation has its own truth and its own validity. He develops his argument by describing what he takes to be a common way of thinking about the past. When we set out to understand historically, he says, we try to acquire an "appropriate" horizon, one that allows us to see what we are trying to understand as it truly is. We think of ourselves as having our own historical horizon, but we also have to place ourselves into the other historical horizon, lest we misunderstand what the text from the tradition is saying. He claims that placing ourselves in the other's situation, in order to understand it, is like the type of conversation we have with someone when we are simply trying to get to know him, that is, when we are trying to find out where he is coming from, what his horizon is. This is not a "true" conversation, in his view, because it is only a means of getting acquainted, not a process of seeking agreement on something (1994, 303). In a "true" conversation one opens oneself to the other, accepts the other's stand-

point as a valid point of departure, and "transposes" oneself "into the other" to the point where one understands what the other is saying. However, for Gadamer, what one understands is not the individual herself, in her concreteness and particularity, but rather the "substantive rightness" of her opinion, so that we can be "at one with each other on the subject." Moreover, one relates the other's opinion not to her, but rather to our own opinions and perspectives. He suggests that examples of communication focused around the individuality of the other person are therapeutic dialogue and interrogation of crime suspects, both of which he thinks of as getting to know the person. According to Gadamer, this characterization of conversation applies to all situations in which one tries to come to an understanding, including hermeneutics. In a "hermeneutical conversation," where the dialogue is between interpreter and text, one partner—the interpreter—takes the "written marks" and changes them "back" into meaning, so that "the subject matter of which the text speaks itself finds expression." In hermeneutical conversation, as in "real" conversation, the "common subject matter is what binds the two partners, the text and the interpreter, to each other" (385–88).

Applying this model to historical understanding, Gadamer maintains that a true conversation does not occur when we transpose ourselves into a situation in the past and try to discover the horizon that is right for that situation. The person understanding—the interpreter—is no longer trying to come to an agreement. The interpreter himself cannot be reached. "By factoring the other person's standpoint into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable." He contends that Nietzsche was wrong when he wrote about placing ourselves in many changing horizons. To follow Nietzsche is to "disregard ourselves" and not to have a historical horizon at all. Providing further evidence of my previous claim that he has an instrumental view of otherness, Gadamer argues that to place ourselves in the other situation and to allow otherness to remain unassimilated is to make an end of "what is only a means." Understanding a text in its own historical horizon only forces the text "to abandon its claim to be saying something true." If we try to see the standpoint of the other and do not take the text "seriously in its claim to truth," we give up looking to the past for "any truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves." In Gadamer's hermeneutics, acknowledging the "otherness of the other" can only amount to the "fundamental suspension" of her claim to truth (1994, 303–5).

From the perspective of Gadamer's hermeneutics, so long as we think in terms of two separate horizons there will be the temptation to see irreducible otherness in a particular historical situation, and we will be disinclined to have a "true" encounter with the tradition. He suggests that we get a better picture of the hermeneutical phenomenon by describing it as not involving two different horizons at all. He claims that the horizon of "one's own present time" is never truly closed and that it is also not possible to imagine a historical horizon that is fully closed. "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." Rather, everything is in motion. We are always moving into a horizon, and the horizon is itself constantly changing. What we have, then, is one horizon, the horizon of the past, or tradition, "out of which all human life lives." What we call the horizon of the present, our own historical consciousness, "surrounds" the horizon of the past. Thus, instead of two horizons—the one in which we live and the other one in which we have to place ourselves—there is, in fact, "one great horizon that moves from within," a moving horizon "whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition." Moreover, everything of which we are historically conscious is contained in a "single historical horizon." It is true that we must have a historical horizon in order to understand tradition, but it is not true that we have to acquire it, since we "always already" have it. Transposing ourselves into a historical situation "always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other" (1994, 304–6).

If, as Gadamer says, there is only "one" horizon, why does he not give up the talk of acquiring a horizon? He responds that this talk is still useful because the concept of horizon indicates the "superior breadth of vision" that a person must have if he wants to understand. "To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion." It takes hard work "to listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard." We are always affected by what is close to us, he explains, and we have to take care to place ourselves and the historically other "within the right relationships." For that reason, Gadamer advises, we should not be overly hasty in our assimilation of the past and tradition. He is convinced that this assimilation is inevitable, and also desirable, but believes that it should take

place only after we have made every effort to work our way through the prejudices that constitute the horizon of our own present. He has constructed past and present in such a way that the horizon of the present is permanently in motion, continually being shaped, and constantly in touch with the past. There are no independently existing horizons, and everything is continually coming together in a new unity represented by the "fusion" of horizons "supposedly existing by themselves" (1994, 305–6).

But if these horizons only supposedly exist by themselves, why then talk about a fusion? Gadamer holds that even though there is but one great horizon that encompasses everything, i.e., tradition, it is still acceptable to refer to a fusion of horizons. He explains that the encounter with tradition involves a tension between the text and tradition, that hermeneutics wants to foreground this tension rather than cover it up, and that this foregrounding assists understanding because it encourages us to be on our guard against "naively" assimilating the text. However, now that hermeneutics acknowledges that there is just "one" horizon, he reasons, we must also admit that the hermeneutic approach consists in consciously projecting a historical horizon onto the past. He admits that the horizon we project onto the past derives from the horizon of our own present, but maintains that this projection is still legitimate because the present horizon is itself "only something superimposed upon continuing tradition." The present horizon, in recombining "with what it has foregrounded itself from," becomes "one with itself again in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires." For Gadamer, this means that a "real fusing" takes place: "as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded" (1994, 306–7). The fusion is achieved as the interpreter, having overcome whatever is alienating in the text, and no longer having any further hermeneutic function, disappears completely into the "achievement of full harmony in understanding."

Gadamer's "harmony" in understanding refers to a tradition that he thinks of as being constantly in a process of renewing itself. We can get a better view of his hermeneutical idea of tradition by noting that tradition makes its appearance in his text not just through interpretation and understanding, but also in the form of application. According to Gadamer, interpretation is always culturally and historically situated, thus unavoidably implicated in a historical context, and it always serves some purpose. By its very nature, interpretation involves application. The problem, for feminists, is that the overwhelming impression we get from

Gadamer's hermeneutics is that application, like interpretation, happens inevitably, without any sort of conscious direction and with no possibility that a person or group could be held accountable. Feminists would argue that tradition is culturally constructed, but not free-floating, as Gadamer seems to be suggesting in so many places. As feminists, we need to theorize the specific cultural and historical interests involved in interpretation and application. Who is likely to find a particular interpretation useful? What is the interpretation useful for and how can it be justified? These political questions are disqualified in Gadamer's hermeneutics because they are viewed as linked to subjectivity.

Nonetheless, Gadamer's argument about a tradition that is constantly renewing itself, without conscious direction, begins to unravel in his account of the type of application involved in historical interpretation. As I will discuss, in this part of his analysis he ties the act of application to the conscious direction of the historian and gives him the task of "applying" the tradition to which he "belongs."

"Applying" Tradition

Gadamer praises nineteenth-century hermeneutic theorists for recognizing the "inner unity" of understanding and interpretation. "Understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding." However, despite the importance of their discovery of the "inner fusion" of understanding and interpretation, these hermeneuticists, notably Schleiermacher and Dilthey, presumably lost sight of the problem of application. They no longer saw the point of the "edifying" application of Scripture that was so important to theological hermeneutics. Gadamer's reflections on the interpretation of historical texts convince him that understanding always involves "something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation." Thus he sees himself as going beyond nineteenth-century hermeneutics when he holds that application, understanding, and interpretation are all part of "one unified process" (1994, 307–8). This addition of application to the hermeneutical problematic suggests to Gadamer that we should look to legal and theological hermeneutics to help us understand the hermeneutics of the historical sciences.

In both legal and theological hermeneutics, he remarks, there is an

essential tension. On the one hand, we have the fixed text—law or gospel—but on the other hand the text is understood, interpreted, and applied in a concrete situation, whether in judging or in preaching. A law or the gospel, by its very nature, exists to be interpreted and applied; but this means that the text, law or gospel, "to be understood properly— i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way." Gadamer maintains that in historical interpretation, too, there is a tension "between the identity of the common object and the changing situation in which it must be understood." Moreover, just as in the judge's proclamation of justice or the preacher's proclamation of salvation, the interpreting of texts from the past—for example a philosophical or literary work— requires a "special activity" of the reader and interpreter. We "do not have the freedom" to view ourselves as historically distant from any of these texts, and the meaning to be understood is realized in the interpretation itself, even though interpreters understand themselves as fully bound by the meaning of the text. He also claims that there is no fundamental difference between the meaning of a law as it is applied and the meaning one reaches in understanding a text. In each case, we are able to "open ourselves to the superior claim the text makes and to respond to what it has to tell us." The historian's job is to present us with meaning that is applicable to ourselves, and he does this by "explicitly and consciously" bridging temporal distance and overcoming the "alienation of meaning that the text has undergone" (1994, 308–11, 333).

But the historian's "explicit and conscious" bridging of temporal distance seems to fracture Gadamer's linkage of historical, legal, and theological hermeneutics. There is something different, he notes, about understanding the past, since the historian is not bound by the meaning of a historical text in the same way that the judge or preacher is bound by the meaning of a law or the gospel. The key difference in the way the interpreters of the various texts are bound has to do with the role of intent.

According to Gadamer, historical, legal, and theological hermeneutics each have the task of concretizing something universal and applying it to oneself. He admits, however, that this task has a "very different function" in the historical sciences. Whereas one examines legal and theological texts to see what the law wills or what God promises, in the human sciences the point of examining the text is to "find something it is not, of itself, attempting to provide." In this way the historian, unlike the interpreters of legal and theological texts, does not restrict himself

to discovering the intent contained in the linguistic expression. For historical interpretation, "what the expression expresses is not merely what is supposed to be expressed in it—what is meant by it—but primarily what is also expressed by the words without its being intended—i.e., what the expression, as it were, 'betrays.' " In this wider sense "expression" includes "everything that we have to get behind, and that at the same time enables us to get behind it." Historical interpretation does not refer to what is intended, but to what is "hidden and has to be disclosed." The historian "will always go back behind [the texts] and the meaning they express to inquire into the reality they express involuntarily" (1994, 332–36). Thus, whereas interpreters of legal and theological texts are guided by the intent to be found in their respective texts, the historian goes "back behind" the expressed intent of historical texts, to see what they can be made to say.

For Gadamer, historical interpretation does not belong to the "hermeneutics of intention." But he is also not advocating a "hermeneutics of suspicion," as for example, that of Marx and Nietzsche, where the text is forced to show a different side of the (same) reality from the one it wants to present. Feminists tend to support a hermeneutics of suspicion because it can be used to uncover power relations that operate in ways that are largely unknown to social actors. However, Gadamer explicitly rejects the hermeneutics of suspicion and, in reference to Paul Ricoeur, declares it a mistake to privilege "these forms of distorted intelligibility, of neurotic derangement, as the normal case in textual interpretation" (1989e, 40). Gadamer's conservative bias comes through strongly in his rejection of the hermeneutics of suspicion. We are also left wondering just what kind of hermeneutics he is advocating for the historical sciences. What, then, can it mean to say that the historian deals with "something that is not expressed in the text itself and need have nothing to do with the intended meaning of the text"?

Gadamer explains that, for the historian, the individual text does not stand alone but, together with other testimonies and sources, makes up the "unity of the whole tradition." Thus, the "true" object of historical interpretation is the "whole unified tradition." So, the historian deals with a unity that refers to the whole tradition, a unity that is not to be found in the text, that may have nothing to do with intended or expressed meaning, and that the historian gets the text to say "involuntarily." As indicated above, Gadamer refers to the "superior claim that the text makes." This claim, too, must be one that the text has to be

made to say, i.e., against its expressed meaning. In Gadamer's hermeneutics, the historian fulfills his task of application by understanding the "great text of world history he has himself discovered, in which every text handed down to us is but a fragment of meaning, one letter, as it were, and he understands himself in this great text" (1994, 339–40). Whereas the judge or preacher applies a law or the gospel, each of which is pre-given or fixed, by a legislative body or by God, the historian, as Gadamer recently wrote, "has first to reconstruct his basic text, namely history itself" (1997, 54). He makes the text of tradition, "explicitly and consciously," from whatever fragments he finds in the course of his interpretive activity. Like Gadamer, he must opt for hermeneutic continuity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to show that Gadamer instrumentally inscribes difference into his call for unity, continuity, and assimilation. In his hermeneutics, no conversation can get started without the other, and there is always a "truth" that comes in with what she says. That truth, however, can never be hers, can never be her meaning. Although the other, as other, is denied equality, and although she has no share in the reciprocity of the dialogue, she remains absolutely essential to the understanding process. Without her provocation, Gadamer says, it would not be possible to have an understanding at all, and the more alien the other, the more distant her relation to our own present situation, the more valuable she will be in helping us identify which of our prejudices should count as true. Conversation with like-minded partners tends to leave us unprovoked, he thinks, whereas the partner who is other and different, by virtue of her otherness and difference, forces us to ask questions about what is addressing us and to find a way to cancel out what he understands as the "alien, even antagonistic" character of her expressions. In Gadamer's conversation, understanding is not about understanding each other, but about creating unity. This unity project is ongoing, thus always in need of differences to overcome and ever prepared for an instrumental encounter with the other. The hermeneutic circle, in which there is apparently no beginning, no end, and no "outside"—only circular motion—turns out to be a figure for the tradition

preserving itself, taking care of itself, withdrawing into itself, determined to eliminate everything that is other, foreign, and opaque.

However, the figure of the all-pervasive, self-renewing tradition, along with the circular motion that Gadamer so assiduously inserts into every aspect of his hermeneutics, starts to flatten out in his description of the historian's task of application. Gadamer's historian is an intentional agent: historically situated in Gadamer's present, actively committed to wiping out concrete and particular identities, and consciously constructing a tradition of unity in the face of historical and cultural inscriptions of differences.

Notes

1. I have benefited from Kögler (1996), but disagree with his Habermasian framing of the problem.

2. In the first draft of this chapter I used feminine pronouns throughout my discussion. However, in consultation with other feminist theorists, I decided to use masculine pronouns when referring to Gadamer's description of the interpreter, in order to underline the interpreter's indelibly coded masculinity. I will use feminine pronouns, where appropriate, to refer to the other who, in Gadamer's text, is essential to interpretation, but never the interpreter's dialogical partner. In so proceeding, I leave open the question of whether or not, and to what extent, a female person can step into the (masculine) position of the interpreter.

3. Alcoff (1996, 20) provides this type of reading.

4. Warnke (1987, 106–8) suggests we can reinterpret his idea of the fusion of horizons.

References

Alcoff, Linda Martín. 1996. *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1989a. "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

———. 1989b. "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

———. 1989c. "Letter to Dallmayr." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

———. 1989d. "Reply to Jacques Derrida." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

———. 1989e. "Text and Interpretation." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

———. 1994. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

———. 1997. "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Kögler, Hans Herbert. 1996. *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Michelfelder, Diane P., and Richard E. Palmer. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1987. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

5

The Development of Hermeneutic Prospects

Gemma Corradi Fiumara

The "Primacy" of Questions

This chapter is an attempt to monitor the risks of narrowing and constraining our hermeneutic prospects, while also striving to develop and expand the general scope of interpretation. To this end, I shall begin criticizing the concept and function of the "question" in Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975, 326). Considering Gadamer's contributions to hermeneutics, we are confronted with a perspective that is impinged upon, or nearly vitiated, by regulative aspects of our Western classic mindset that may properly sustain different epistemologies but that are perhaps unduly restrictive of hermeneutics. Our Western tradition may be regarded as a general attitude that is more inclined to posing questions than to Socratic listening. As Gadamer theorizes and proclaims the primacy of the question he, in fact, seems to produce the hermeneutic rendition of our logocratic classicities. Mainstream philosophies rule the epistemic scenario through the questions they ask; and

thus not only do other, "lesser" questions become vulnerable to obscu-
rity (and as such cannot attain the status of proper philosophical issues),
but their different epistemic outlooks are altogether ignored. I believe
that it is not so much "questions" that are inappropriate, but the
Gadamerian insistence on their primacy, almost as if the classical incli-
nation to express hierarchizing assertions prevailed upon hermeneutic
interests and curiosity; as if the variegated forces of epistemophily were
subjected to the questioning power of institutional philosophy. Perhaps
we might tentatively think of philosophy as an activity that requires
intellectual capacities, and of epistemophily as an attitude involving the
whole embodied person—with the corollary that epistemophily is open
to both listening *and* questioning.

   The development of the human sciences is usually characterized more
by the formulation of relevant questions than by the solutions that are
elaborated in answer to them. Although it is true that the answers are
the material from which the edifice is built, the structure of the produced
knowledge is determined by the type of questions that are initially asked,
in the sense that the answer cooperates with the question and produces
everything that is demanded of it—and no more. But then, there seems
to be hardly any hermeneutic quality to this distinctly epistemological
enterprise. The possibility that this generic logic may induce the extinc-
tion of epistemophily does not even constitute a problem worthy of note,
since any 'knowledge' that is sufficiently publicized exhibits a progres-
sive tendency to establish itself as the only legitimate way of knowing.
Also, any inquiry initiated outside reigning epistemologies turns out to
be so very difficult to articulate and be accepted that it almost sounds
like something unheard of—probably because it is unhearable. But then,
why listen and pay heed when involved in the superior, "sublime" activ-
ity of posing questions? And thus the unhearable questions posed, for
instance by women, become no questions at all—ultimately no issues:
basically women's interrogatives represent something that cannot be
included in the initial questions that shape the structure of the inquiry.
At the point at which Gadamer affirms that "[w]e shall have to consider
in greater depth what is the *essence of the question,* if we are to clarify the
particular nature of hermeneutical experience" (Gadamer 1975, 326), we
come suddenly to confront the unhalting advance of Western thought,
driven and nearly obsessed by one of the most coercive figures of lan-
guage, the question itself. No doubt, questions can be productive and
creative, but only in an integrated epistemic outlook in which listening

and speaking sustain one another. We may also consider that an inability to listen to the answer may render the question useless and, with it, any attempt at hermeneutic philosophy. But, in fact, the problem hardly exists because the answer is directly shaped by the initial question. The primacy of the question is not an innovative formulation of the way of going about interpretation and philosophy; it is, in fact, the typical methodological expression in the sequence of our Western classicities.

Gadamer writes: "The sense of the question is the direction in which alone the answer can be given. A question places that which is questioned within a particular perspective . . . the question opens up . . . the being of the object. Hence the logos that sets out the opened-up being is already an answer." Further on, "Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that the thing be opened up by the question" (Gadamer 1975, 326). Nothing less than that. And yet, should the object of the question—hypothetically—express itself outside the limits posed by the question, it might perhaps encompass and even surpass the scope inherent in the question itself. In Gadamer's perspective the possibility seems excluded that the questioned object may return the epistemic gaze in a different unquestioning logic, or that it might even be capable of exploring the genesis of the questions addressed to it. An emblematic figure in feminist thinking, Luce Irigaray aptly remarks, "But what if the 'object' started to speak?" (Irigaray 1985, 135).

Gadamer's theory of the question is so constructed that it seems to ignore the questioning resources of the interrogated object. This obscuring is made especially readable in those "hermeneutic" contexts in which the processes and labors of maieutic listening seem to be largely ignored. The object—be it a person or a text—might perhaps take a distance from a questioning agent that places that which is questioned *within* a particular perspective, and who is determined to "open up the being of the object." Who or what should ever choose to be "placed within" and "opened up"? And yet, if "placing within" and "opening up" the object are regarded as essential functions of the question, it becomes difficult to reconcile the reiterated invocation to (or recommendation of) openness of the hermeneutic agent with the intention of enclosing and dissecting something that is, in fact, the object of the hermeneutic enterprise. Gadamer's thesis is a typical case of the power/knowledge nexus that feminist theorizing proceeds to reveal.[1] But then, it would seem that the recognition of such incongruities ultimately indicates general difficulties in the mainstream of the epistemic tradition. As Susan Langer

synoptically remarks, "A question is really an ambiguous proposition; the answer is its determination" (Langer 1951, 4).

If the richness of our psychodiversity says nothing autonomously, it is because of our constraining questions and consequent incapacity to listen; it is because we are ultimately dependent upon institutional forms of self-induced obtuseness. Adhering to the primacy of the question would thus be the way to participate in the dominant 'forms of life'— even if they turn out to be 'forms of death.' In this stagnant and benumbing outlook we are illusorily induced to believe that the latest 'philosophical question' will surely resolve our state of epistemic boredom—indeed a poor substitute for epistemophily. Attributing to the question the *entire* array of the different interpretative approaches, without assuming responsibility for the choice, may only serve to obscure vital aspects of the hermeneutic endeavor. As feminist culture points out, mature cognitive attitudes tend to require recognition of epistemic agency and an appreciation of the situatedness of knowledge claims. However, as Donna Haraway remarks, "positioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices" (Haraway 1988, 575). Hence inquiry cannot be separated from responsibility; or, more strongly, responsibility enhances the depth and scope of inquiry.

It may be remarked, incidentally, that the term 'arrogance' is etymologically related to the verb *ad rogare*, to approach with a question. And yet, the powerful logic of posing questions is the one that succumbs most easily when confronted with the slightest pressure from the vestiges of primitive neural mechanisms that operate alongside cognitive structures in human beings. When faced with the incursions of these more archaic dynamics, our powerful questions seem to be futile and in any case anything but strong. Perhaps mainstream epistemology is unable to recognize an ineradicable passion for epistemic obscurity and torpor—which is just as human as our epistemophily. It is, in fact, an "illness" that official rationality neither wants nor is capable of conceiving since it has no idea on how to confront it. And while our rationality does not want to know about it, we are silently drawn to it, both individually and socially. Perhaps we need a better appreciation of the extent of the tendency our logic induces us to underestimate with the illusory prospect that we can always reinterpret *ex post facto* whatever humans do.

Gadamer writes that "[t]he logic of the human sciences is, then, as appears from what we have said, a logic of the question" (Gadamer 1975, 333). And this is, of course, characteristic of our Western tradition. Thus

the "logic of the question" that Gadamer propagates is ultimately a transfer of paradigms from mainstream epistemology into the human sciences. But then, he also tries to transfer these paradigms into the domain of hermeneutics, almost as if a mechanism of territorial expansion were operative at the level of philosophical inquiry. Yet if we were capable of listening only to the messages that we are willing to produce, and formulated our questions accordingly, we might consider only those massive and evident issues to which we could respond while remaining within safe limits.[2] Heidegger, conversely, suggests repeatedly: "It . . . might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of only hearing what we already understand" (Heidegger 1972, 58). The asking of the question or the interrogative approach so heavily predetermines the reply that it may conceal those disturbing features, or anomalies, that might instead reveal something more enlightening than the question itself—if the question did not make them inaudible.[3] In this outlook we are not permitted to believe that creative messages from *beyond* the intended conceptual scope of the question might appear. We can certainly agree with Gadamer's view that the way in which we seek initial access to a problem is frequently expressed in the form of a question. And perhaps no one would disagree, because this is indeed a common practice. But then why theorize it, recommend it, or proclaim its primacy? The approach almost seems tantamount to suggesting that since this is the custom, then it must be the rule. It seems formally tautological and perhaps superfluous as an exhortation. This is the habitual logic of inquiry, but it does not seem ideal for hermeneutic purposes. It is the sort of philosophy that tends to stay away from the complex labors of epistemophily.

From Philosophy to Epistemophily

The questioning approach may so heavily predetermine the reply that it ultimately conceals those features that might instead reveal something more enlightening than the question itself. The Gadamerian emphasis on the question ultimately impedes the belief that significant messages might appear, emanating from beyond the intended scope of the question. This is an attitude that endorses a reassuring epistemological (and nonepistemophilic) mechanism of question and answer, a mechanism that may primarily function to perpetuate itself. Paradoxically, even

though Gadamer is frequently presented as a disciple of Heidegger, his work is unmindful of his mentor's seminal intuitions on the function of listening. It is not clear why in proclaiming the fundamental function of the question he entirely disregards the essential relevance of listening, which can be found throughout most of Heidegger's writings. In general Gadamer seems to ignore the Heideggerian suggestion that "the authentic attitude of thinking is *not* a putting of questions" (Heidegger 1972, 138). This dramatic contrast is altogether silenced.

A seemingly "casual" statement of Gadamer's may thus take on considerable significance: "Anyone who listens is *fundamentally* open. Without this kind of openness to one another there is no genuine human relationship" (Gadamer 1975, 325). This is clearly the vital human openness of listening to each other. But then, if there is a 'fundamental' way of being open (the openness of a listening epistemophily), why is it that the hermeneutic philosopher should be concerned with less fundamental ways of being open, such as for instance the practice of posing questions? Questions might be studied by other linguistic disciplines rather than by philosophy itself. The fact that there is a form of openness that is fundamental (and perhaps more so than the question) seems to be touched upon glancingly—mentioned simply *en passant*—in the hundreds of pages of *Truth and Method*. This unexpected remark seems to indicate that epistemophily is an incoercible human propensity that at times makes itself evident even in inhospitable scenarios such as Gadamer's outlook. But an inquiry into the reasons for the oversight would appear to be almost superfluous for, indeed, in the constant affirmation of an unrecognized logocratic style there is hardly any logical space for ulterior practices of hermeneutic philosophy, such as listening to interlocutors and elaborating upon their suggestions, rather than coercing them with our own questions. In Sandra Harding's perspective, feminist analyses in the social sciences reveal that often it is not exactly renewed or amended methodologies that are responsible for what is relevant about its research; what is significant are the alternative origins of problematics, the innovative purposes of inquiry, and a new 'ethics' for the responsible relationship between the inquirer and her/his subject of inquiry (Harding 1987, vii).

The outlook that sustains mainstream epistemologies is too far removed from epistemophily, and thus unable to allow for a more authentic openness that may engender revealing dialogues; that is, a process of understanding the fullness of answers, and a willingness to be questioned

on our own claim to pose questions. A dialogue based on questions is only illusorily open, for authentic openness is essentially based on a capacity to listen. The posing of questions, moreover, is an intellectual practice involving only a part of the human being, while the practice of listening requires the fullness of the embodied person. Gadamer writes: "We cannot have experiences without asking questions," and goes on to remark: "The recognition that an object is different and not as we first thought, obviously involves the question whether it was this or that" (Gadamer 1975, 325). But then, this may only happen on the condition that we do not move too far away from the assumptions, style, and paradigms imposed by the question itself: in fact, the question seems to be posed to ensure that the object be either this or that—and nothing else. In our view, however, hermeneutics is especially intended to explore ulterior dimensions, facets, and features; it tries to break away from binary oppositions of the either/or type. "The openness that is part of experience is, from a logical point of view, precisely the openness of being this or that" (325). But the openness that is part of experience cannot, in our opinion, be seen from such a sublime "logical point of view," if the logic to be used is the derivative of a dominating and questioning reason, the sort of reason that cannot ultimately allow for the more authentic openness of epistemophily. Novel epistemic practices, in fact, are only attempted in cultural scenarios in which reason can be sufficiently "desublimated"—in Lorraine Code's language (1996, 1–22). We consider epistemophily as philosophically more authentic than epistemology because it is more open, less exclusionary, not only capable of intraepistemic connections, but also daring enough to attempt interepistemic links.

It is ironic and interesting that Freud, the actual founder of the revolutionary therapeutic method based on interpretation, is not always immune to the logocratic tendency that ignores the expressive potential of the "object" of psycho-*logical* investigation. He, in fact, remarks: "Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity. . . . Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem" (Freud 1932, 36). This is indeed an amazing convergence between Gadamer and Freud: "our" emblematic figures in the domains of hermeneutics and interpretation. Not only does it seem that "people throughout history" must be men, but when Freud tries to remedy the oversight by pointing to "those of you who are men," he goes on to say that to "those of you who are

women," the riddle—yes, the 'question'—of femininity should not apply because indeed they *are* the problem. Freud is thus obliquely suggesting that whoever is placed within the domain of a question, and "opened up" by means of "scholarly" interrogatives, is ultimately without curiosity, incapable of creative expression, and incapable of returning the theoretic gaze by posing questions different from those posed to/about them. In fact, the object of study as such should not be concerned with expressing itself on the riddle that it constitutes for the "scholars." This perversion of philosophy has, of course, been especially detrimental to women. But then, the enigma represented not only by women but by *any* human being is degraded in this way to the level of the object of study by the managers of an epistemology that ultimately benumbs the researcher and makes the inquiry itself banal. Once again this style of inquiry stifles any potential epistemophily, for the sake of the elitist games allowed for in any enclave of epistemology.

The Illusions of Autonomy

Certain areas of culture seem to cope with life problems so efficiently as to relieve other domains of thought from these burdens. Such coping areas are usually regarded as only capable of auxiliary or ancillary functions. By way of example, we could think of the relationship between ordinary language and philosophical language, metaphoric expressions and literal discourse, caring work and theoretic work, hermeneutics and epistemology. The "lesser" philosophical agents—perhaps innumerable unsung heroes silently at work in our culture—can be the creative thinkers who are not included in (or do not wish to be co-opted into) the class of the official philosophers, the Socratic philosophers who are relentlessly focused on the birth of thinking. Such "lesser" areas of our culture almost protect the lucid intraepistemic games of the "higher" branches by steadily coping with coexistential and interepistemic vicissitudes on their behalf. It is unlikely that any epistemology will begin to cope with problems of external relations and of its own psychic origins as long as the more hermeneutic disciplines will laboriously perform these functions. If the "lesser" philosophical agents were to monitor their inclination to be hyperfunctional and to solve coexistential problems for the dominant epistemologies, it is possible that the more homogeneous and

coherent ("sublime") intellectual domains might have to confront their hypofunctional policies. Eventually, certain areas of philosophy generating the "serious" questions might no longer avoid the crucial issues of their origin on the grounds that they are—of course—peripheral, tangentially connected, insufficiently focused. In Alessandra Tanesini's synoptic view, objectivity is maximized when we scrutinize the background values that influence the formulation of a given theory, rather than pretend that they play no role (Tanesini 1999, 175).

It is almost as if the truly functional hermeneutic work is performed by agents who are willing to endure a transformation of their outlook from philosophy to epistemophily. Hermeneutic thinkers are not so much interested in disciplining the surrounding culture by means of the questions generated within their own epistemic logic; they are more interested in creating a dialogic continuity between world views and between different epistemologies. They seem to avoid the exclusionary identifications with "autonomous" epistemic constructs. Dominant outlooks, in fact, may achieve control but not quite autonomy: by themselves they could not confront the conditions of dependency that derive from our belonging to life.[4] The illuminating function ascribed to certain question-generating epistemologies is often dependent upon the auxiliary functions performed by "lesser" agents of culture, the hermeneuticists in charge of humanizing our knowledge. The dominant rational styles may thus come to recognize that their intellectual freedom and lucid arguments can be operative only within circumscribed domains of literalness.[5] In order to stabilize domination, reigning epistemologies need increasingly to delegate *and* ignore the tasks of creating links with the "alien" domains. In order to proclaim the primacy of the question, they must rely upon hermeneutic services that are at the same time needed and denied. The "lesser" aspects of culture thus fulfill innumerable tasks from which the dominant areas of rationality are relieved. As Seyla Benhabib remarks, "Feminists have questioned the abstract and disembodied . . . ideal of the autonomous male ego that the universalist tradition privileges; they have unmasked the inability of such . . . legislative reason to deal with the . . . multiplicity of contexts and life-situations with which practical reason is always confronted" (Benhabib 1992, 3). Areas of epistemic literalness allowing for lucid internal communication seem to actually require a symbiosis with other areas of culture performing functions of listening and linkage. Within any 'normal' knowledge, no confrontation is ever invited with diverse languages, styles, and assumptions—with *other* 'normalities.'

And even a conjunction of horizons may be advocated on the basis of questions emanating from the cultural narcissism of one's originary 'horizon'—thus, ultimately, a fusion. It is almost as if a tacit revulsion for any contact with life and historicity secretly dominates our mainstream epistemologies. Certain theorists, however, appear to generate hermeneutic theories that are perfectly consonant with reigning epistemologies—their derivatives, in fact—because the laborious linking work is reserved for peripheral others, or "minor" functions of one's mental life.

The relevance of questioning is possible because others take on the challenge of listening. Even Gadamer, of course, unwittingly agrees that listening is essential for any hermeneutic opening—"Anyone who listens is *fundamentally* open" (Gadamer 1975, 325)—but he does not seem interested in knowing why. Thus he supports the suspicion that his background, sublime logic, prevents him from understanding why it is so. It is possible that the listening minds of "lesser" others are hyperfunctional in creating the proper setting for the questioning epistemologies; theorists of the question seem to provide an occasion for exploring this paradoxical situation. There seems to be a paradox because, while theorists of the question appear to invite an open dialogue, they also inconspicuously impede it by proclaiming the supremacy of questions. Only the epistemically stronger interlocutors can pose questions: those questions that constitute the prologues, preliminaries, or premises of any so-called dialogue. The coexistential interpretative functions seem ultimately to be performed by individuals, or by parts of the mind, that never take the center stage; they remain out of the scene, they are unpresentable, nearly "obscene." If one wonders how the immense mechanism is developed whereby what is sufficiently enunciated (at the center of the epistemic stage) produces an intangible but constraining normativity, we come to face the vital issue of symbol formation and of its role in the construction of reality.[6] As is known, saying tends to impose canons of being and thus nothing is more seriously normative than discursive practices. In fact, enunciations that come to prevail upon others as enunciations of knowledge acquire a prescriptive resonance, and thus come to be accepted as such. The acumen of women epistemologists is often displayed through their capacity to step out of conventional discursive practices while faithfully listening to whatever goes on within them; they subsequently reapproach the conversation in a different and more encompassing logic. Elias Canetti remarks that there is "acumen in all areas of

life, always dividing them apart, and no acumen for bridging the chasms between them" (Canetti 1986, 265). This acumen is the much needed metaphoric capacity of hermeneutics, the ability to generate connecting links between alien domains. Epistemology is relieved of the burden of inquiring about the plurality of epistemologies or of their coexistence; it only seeks the literal, translucid exchanges that take place within a circumscribed enclave of homogeneous knowledge. Mark Johnson argues that most philosophical debates imply a distinction between a meaning (regarded as conceptual, propositional, representational) and a background (regarded as prelogical and preintentional) against which the meaning proper emerges (Johnson 1987, 10). This entails nonpropositional structures in our living background that play a more relevant role in the elaboration of meaning than is usually allowed in mainstream epistemology. And if we take this general view seriously enough, we will need to confront the problem of the relationship (interaction, rapport, exchange) between meaning proper and whatever constitutes its necessary background. As the two domains usually function in synergy, it should be illuminating to explore their interactions. It is thus fruitless to focus either on hermeneutic understanding (as a variant of background) or on propositional explanation (as a variant of meaning), inasmuch as the currently devalued understanding may actually function as the generative basis of explanatory knowledge. In this perspective, then, it is not surprising that our official questions somehow relate to the world well enough, and link with events—that have been previously understood through our laborious participatory efforts. A "convenient" attitude would be to opt for one or other of the functions and to construct a view of rationality (knowledge, linguistic capacity, humanness . . .) through either of these polarities, without excessive concern for the relations between our affective life and rational life, between listening and questioning, between our biological condition and our dialogic existence.

Perhaps we could even legitimately suspect that our elaborations of normal epistemology do not only represent intellectual pastimes, but that they constitute, more than anything else, a way of keeping our minds occupied and thus, possibly, of not seeing any further. Epistemic games might respond, paradoxically, to the need to close our minds, to avoid problems involving our whole embodied experience, and to seek refuge into the lucid, homogeneous constructs provided by the standard paradigms. If philosophy were to confront problems of our whole embod-

ied experience then it would have to automatically allow for disparate forms of women's thinking and men's thinking—an outlook that would seriously problematize mainstream epistemology.

This generalized outlook seems to foreclose any hermeneutic prospects. We devote ourselves with inexplicable tenacity to learning ever more complex intraepistemic games, even though we are defenseless against the more serious problems, or blind to interepistemic difficulties. Intraepistemic games are intellectual exercises that do not challenge the general outlook or basic paradigms, but only deal with the variegated recombinations of homogeneous elements. In this sense we may become indebted to an outlook that exempts us from the labors involved in somehow inventing connections with "answers" reaching us from outside our canonic questions. Hermeneutic prospects are, in fact, aimed to challenge the classical, unbreakable barriers that separate domains classified as either experiential or formal, synthetic or *a priori,* bodily or mental, instinctual or rational, cognitive or affective—and that produce a sequence of comparable oppositions.

An excessively detached way of looking at the language of our inquiries may not only conceal the life of language but may also remain unaware of this concealment. Indeed, an excessive gap between life and philosophy remains largely unnoticed and, as a consequence, philosophers may see through their instruments of analysis no more than the literal constructs of whatever current epistemology is at work. The interrogatives posed by women, for instance, have thus been necessarily ignored by a philosophy based on the primacy of (its own) questions. Only a "primacy" of listening would allow for a qualitative plurality of questions emanating from different sources. A tradition of questioning may ultimately become a screen, which not only obscures the fact that our linguistic life is reduced to an artifact but also renders the whole predicament vulnerable to obscurity. Connecting difficulties are, in fact, likely to obtrude whenever the questioning approach collides with the mind's life and tries to encompass subjectivity in its cognitive scope. This linkage between available knowledge and the affective depths of the mind is frequently attempted outside scholastic endeavors, since these find the issue of such links intractable.[7] Whenever the two outlooks cannot be integrated we may recognize the incompatibility, and refrain from putting the whole problem out of sight by simply ignoring one side of it and opting for the primacy of canonic questions. These have little to

offer to a developing epistemophily interested not only in intraepistemic deductions but intent also upon pursuing hermeneutic prospects and interepistemic relations.

Preliminaries as Conclusions

The discursive vicissitudes subjacent to any micro- or macrocommunity constitute the precondition and essential prologue to its subsequent developments. This is not to say that the primacy of the questions asked is some abstract, autonomous construct; it is rather to emphasize the relevance of the proleptic narratives that influence the subsequent course of human reasoning. Unless we are attentive to the origins of our inquiries we may unwittingly make use of premises to automatically fabricate conclusions. Indifference to these issues may enforce the compulsive use of preliminaries (the 'questions') as if they were ultimate goals. But then, is it not true that we usually start with questions that guide us to an end? To the extent that we unknowingly adhere to this comfortable inclination, questions may increasingly function as silent constraints rather than as instruments for flexible and diversified developments. Although the difference between binding constraints and inspiring guidelines is a small one, the equilibrium between the two seems enormously important. The vicissitudes of this necessary equilibrium constitute, in our view, the setting for the exercise of our human epistemophily.

In Gadamer's view, "Hermeneutics cannot have any problem of a beginning. . . . Wherever it arises, the problem of the beginning is, in fact, the problem of the end, for it is with respect to an end that a beginning is defined as a beginning of an end" (Gadamer 1975, 429). If the problem of the beginning is, in fact, the problem of the end, it is obvious that traditional questions leave out, for instance, women's questions. And even if—hypothetically—men's questions were to integrate and include women's questions, we would always end with a coercive philosophy. As I see it, different women theorists seem to aspire to a plurality of altogether diverse philosophical styles. They do not only wish to add their own questions to the list of legitimate interrogatives; they try to develop a more epistemophilic way of doing philosophy. Gadamer seems here to be suggesting that a speech act such as the question selects

an aspect of reality simply by speaking about it, by circumscribing it with a question; and whatever is said is then, either unwittingly or astutely, transformed into a disciplinary basis for discourses that ultimately predetermine their ends. It is as if prologues could coincide with conclusions and as if preliminaries could generate achievements. At this point the risk is no longer that we may go too far in the exploration of preliminaries, but that we do not go far enough in the clarification of the enormous implications of discursive premises, preliminaries, and prologues. And, of course, for that which is omitted in the prologue there will be no possible developments. Gadamer's general attitude may fall within Richard Rorty's criticism of classicities: in his synoptic view, the distinction between 'rationality' and something else has traditionally been drawn so as to coincide roughly with a distinction between inference and imagination. We are being rational, 'so the story goes,' insofar as we adhere to the logical structure given at the beginning of the inquiry, and so long as we can offer an argument for the belief developed at the end of the inquiry by referring back to the beliefs held at the beginning (Rorty 1991, 95). According to Gadamer, "The dialectic of question and answer always precedes the dialectic of interpretation" (Gadamer 1975, 329); and thus if we begin with a question ("It is with respect to an end that a beginning is defined"), we shall conclude with more of our own questions and will never achieve a listening experience that might allow our object or interlocutor an opportunity for its own expression.

If we regard fantasies as indicators of profound affects, we can perhaps search for prologues in the 'dreams' that animate any individual or collective venture. The imaginary is not alien to knowledge and culture; it is its subjacent, necessary accompaniment. Even though fantasies shape our curiosity for the inner and outer world, it is sometimes believed that these psychic processes are of little significance to our theoretic constructs. They are erroneously regarded as evanescent, inconsequential psychic presentations that diffuse in the course of our mind's affective life; and yet they constitute the essential scenarios in which all the other mental activities unfold and implement their course, all the way to a full construction of reality. In Ethel Person's view fantasies are catalysts that organize our lives as well as our epistemic and cultural pursuits (Person 1997, 1). From this illuminating perspective we can certainly appreciate the need of becoming more conversant with psychic preliminaries that might otherwise just function as conclusions.

Some very general beliefs are essential to action at large, even though

what they amount to may vary from individual to individual, and between cultures and subcultures. But insofar as there are these convictions, they maintain mental and epistemic order: what lies beyond them appears to incline toward fragmentation. The risks involved in abandoning preliminary assumptions testify to their necessity, to the importance of defending them.[8] The insufficient familiarity with our inner depths may even mutate our use of preliminary assumptions in such a way that they come to function automatically as final answers that erase the fact that they were psychic issues in the first place; their status becomes unshakeable, almost natural, and hardly if ever interrogated. Only a retrospective "historical" insight could perhaps permit the identification of mental representations that have influenced a particular development of values as inconspicuous as they are generally shared—and ultimately quite constraining. However singular or exceptional, what a subject knows is probably made possible by the affective interactions animating the preludes of any cultural venture. For, indeed, the synergy between affective prologues and epistemic preliminaries can be more profound than we are prepared to admit. Attempting a synoptic view we could say, in the language of Hilary Putnam (1981,137): "What counts as the real world depends upon values," that is upon the ultimate developments of our originary fantasies.

Notes

1. For a discussion of the power/knowledge nexus, see Lennon and Whitford (1994, 1–14).

2. Traditional research has unconsciously followed a "logic of discovery," which Harding formulates in the following way: "Ask only those questions about nature and social life which (white, Western, bourgeois) men want answered." Harding (1987, 6).

3. This issue is extensively explored in Corradi Fiumara (1990). See especially chap. 3, "A Philosophy of Listening Within a Tradition of Questioning," 28–51; chap. 4, "The Power of Discourse and the Strength of Listening," 52–71; and chap. 10, "Midwifery and Philosophy," 143–68.

4. In the language of Benhabib, while continuing the broad philosophical shift from legislative to interactive reason, we seek to be "sensitive to the differences of identity, needs, and modes of reasoning without obliterating these behind some conception of uniform rational autonomy." Benhabib (1992, 8).

5. On this topic, see Corradi Fiumara (1995), especially the section entitled "The Pathology of Literalness," 55–61, and chap. 6, "The Relationship between Digital and Analogic Styles," 64–83.

6. This issue is explored in Corradi Fiumara (1992, 14–12).

7. "Psychoanalytic work in particular emphasizes a fragmentation and lack of coherence within the consciousness and life-histories of individual subjects. The knower, or knowing subject, is now defined by opacity rather than transparency." Lennon and Whitford (1994, 4.)

8. For a discussion of this issue, see Corradi Fiumara (2001).

References

Benhabib, Seyla. 1992. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Canetti, Elias. 1986. *The Human Province*. Trans. J. Neugroschell. London: Pan Books.

Code, Lorraine. 1996. "What is Natural about Epistemology Naturalized?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33:1: 1–22.

Corradi Fiumara, Gemma. 1990. *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1992. *The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 1995. *The Metaphoric Process: Connections Between Language and Life*. New York: Routledge.

———. 2001. *The Mind's Affective Life: A Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: Routledge.

Freud, Sigmund. 1932. *Lecture 33, 'Femininity,'* in "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume 22*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey in collaboration with A. Freud. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. Trans. W. Glen Doepel, J. Cumming and G. Barden. London: Sheed and Ward.

Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14:3: 575–99.

Harding, Sandra. 1987. "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?" In *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*, ed. Sandra Harding. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1972. *What is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. G. Gray and F. D. Wieck. New York: Harper and Row.

Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Johnson, Mark. 1987. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reasoning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Langer, Susan K. 1951. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. London: Oxford University Press.

Lennon, Kathleen, and Margaret Whitford. 1994. "Introduction." In *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. New York: Routledge.

Person, Ethel S. 1997. *The Force of Fantasy: its Roles, its Benefits, and What it Reveals About our Lives*. London: Harper Collins.

Putnam, Hilary. 1981. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rorty, Richard. 1991. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tanesini, Alessandra. 1999. *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

6

Postmodern Hermeneutics?

Toward a Critical Hermeneutics

Veronica Vasterling

Over the past two decades, the postmodern turn has been a recurrent and hotly debated issue in contemporary philosophy and feminist theory. Though questions of definition crop up regularly, postmodern philosophy usually is associated with the following issues and concerns: (over) emphasis on language, critique of the autonomous subject, focus on difference and context, and undermining of universalist and foundationalist assumptions. Especially the last two issues have been, and are still, attractive for feminist theorists because of our concern with articulating the different viewpoints of and among women and our critique of oppressive generalizations. The feminist alliance with postmodernism also has its downside. Some critics argue that exclusive focus on differences and radical contextualism threatens to lead to relativism in the epistemological, existential, and ethical-political sense. Often the question of truth is not raised, or it is only analyzed in terms of power or reduced to a local question belonging to a certain (scientific) context. The emphasis on differences in identity and experience seems to under-

mine the possibility of a shared understanding of world and life. And the contextualization and historicization of values and norms leave us with the question whether or not there is any sense in speaking and acting in the name of feminist politics, emancipation, and solidarity.

It is in view of this postmodern predicament that I intend to reread Gadamer's work. On first inspection Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics appears to offer a neat solution. On the one hand, his work demonstrates a close affinity to postmodern philosophy, especially to the first three issues I mention above, while on the other hand, it avoids sinking into the morass of relativism. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer elaborates a hermeneutic-ontological conception of understanding that combines an emphasis on the situatedness of understanding and the plurality of meaning with an account of truth, valid interpretation, and the possibility of shared understanding. On closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that a wholesale adoption of the Gadamerian solution is out of the question for feminists. The presuppositions of his conception of understanding are inadequate in at least two respects. First, it is questionable whether the presupposition that understanding culminates in agreement leaves enough room for the recognition of alterity and plurality. Second, Gadamer almost completely ignores the issue of power and domination, an omission that undermines two cornerstones of his hermeneutics, i.e., tradition and dialogue. I will argue that these inadequacies undermine the critical potential of Gadamerian hermeneutics. In order to make his philosophical hermeneutics more productive for feminist theory, I will propose some adaptations to enhance its critical potential.

General Characteristic of Understanding: World, Language, and Time

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is indebted to Martin Heidegger's elaboration of the concept of understanding in *Sein und Zeit*. According to Heidegger, understanding is the fundamental characteristic of human existence. In Gadamer's work, as in Heidegger's, understanding is not simply a capacity human beings have; rather it is the way human beings *are*. Understanding is primarily an ontological category and only secondarily an epistemological one. As an ontological category understanding refers to the disclosedness or openness of human existence

toward being. This ontological interpretation of the concept of under-standing undermines an important assumption underlying the traditional (Kantian) concept of the subject. In modern philosophy, the subject is understood as an entity enclosed in itself, endowed with the faculty of perception that enables it to receive impressions of the surrounding world. Heidegger rejects this assumption, for it fails to distinguish between the ontological characteristics of human beings and those of things or objects. Rather than being entities enclosed within themselves, human beings are always already "outside" themselves in the world: their way of being is being-in-the-world. Following Heidegger, Gadamer defines understanding as the carrying out of this being-in-the-world itself (Gadamer 1989, 23). As such, understanding comprises the many dif-ferent ways in which human beings relate to, and are in touch with, the world; for instance the practical way of handling things—objects and sit-uations—and social interaction, and the more theoretical way of research and abstract thought. What all modifications of understanding have in common is that language is their medium: "man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal (*sprachlich*) in nature, and hence intelligible" (Gadamer 1999, 475–76). The world we live in is a world disclosed by, and understood through, language. Language is not only the medium of intelligibility, it is also the medium of disclosure. These two aspects of language are, as it were, two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, language discloses the world or being in general. On the other hand, what is disclosed by language is never purely or merely given but, on the contrary, always already named and interpreted as such and such. That is why Gadamer characterizes language as the "medium" where I and world belong together (474). As an open, intersubjective network of sedimented and transformable meanings, language both manifests a common world and encompasses individual subjects in the linguistic space of this world, making it possible to understand people, things, and states of affairs encountered in the world.

If, on a fundamental ontological level, understanding refers to the openness of human existence, then this openness should not be mis-construed as boundless transparency. Understanding for Gadamer is nei-ther boundless nor transparent. It is doubly finite in the sense that the scope of understanding is always limited by a horizon and its transparency clouded by a certain opaqueness. The finiteness of understanding is due to its situatedness. Characteristic of Gadamer's conception of finiteness is that it focuses on time (history) rather than space (world). Because of

the linguistic constitution of the world, the limits of our situatedness in a specific cultural space or world are always transgressible. The scope of understanding does not have to be confined to one's own culture, but can always be broadened to include the understanding of other cultures. Despite the plurality of languages and worlds, neither the languages themselves nor the worlds disclosed in language are mutually exclusive domains that are sealed off from one another. Languages are translatable into one another, and foreign worlds or cultures can be understood exactly because of the fact that they are disclosed in language. Despite the differences in culture, what human beings have in common is language. Hence, language is the universal medium of disclosure and understanding.

Gadamer explicates the finiteness of understanding as a situatedness in time or, more precisely, as a temporally structured situatedness. Human existence is an existence in time; it is finite in that it has a beginning and an end. Understanding, however, is finite not only because of the limits time imposes on human existence, for in human existence time is not simply an external limit but rather the intrinsic structure of existence and understanding. Understanding is always rooted in the horizon of the present, but this horizon is shaped by a past that is never completely retrievable. In order to understand what we encounter here and now, we, mostly implicitly, rely on skills and frames of reference we have acquired in the past. In other words, if understanding is always rooted in the present, it is the past that enables the understanding of the present. Without the skills and knowledge—in the widest possible sense—that we have acquired in the past, we would be as helpless and disoriented as newborn babies who, upon their arrival in the world, do not understand what is happening to them. The past on which understanding relies is both "longer" and "wider" than one's individual past. The skills and knowledge I have acquired are not only shaped and transmitted by the generation preceding me, but by a whole chain of preceding generations, sometimes reaching far back into history. The past on which understanding relies is also "wider" than the individual past because the acquisition of skills and knowledge involves interaction with many people in diverse social settings and institutions, like families, schools, friends, and peer groups.

Understanding is rooted in and bounded by the horizon of the present, though this horizon is neither permanently fixed—for time goes by— nor simply restrictive, for it enables a "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer

1999, 302). As the horizon of the present is shaped by a past that is never completely retrievable, understanding always has a certain opaqueness. The light of insight as it were feeds on the dark recesses of the past. The past that informs our understanding is part of our historical existence—we *are* the past—but that does not mean that we can simply rise above and survey the past of which we are part. Being part of the past does not mean that complete or exhaustive consciousness of the past is possible. On the contrary: historical existence is, as Gadamer writes, more *Sein* (being) than *Bewusstsein* (consciousness). Gadamer rejects Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge, which claims complete awareness and, hence, the transparency of the past (301). Understanding is always finite and opaque, for no degree of self-reflection, of retracing the steps of understanding will ever succeed in completely illuminating the past on which it depends.[1]

The Situatedness of Understanding: Tradition and Application

The rather abstract and general formula that understanding is rooted in the present and shaped by the past does not do justice to Gadamer's explication of the way understanding is situated in time. It is the notions of tradition and application that give the formula more body. In Gadamer's view, the past that enables and shapes understanding is not the short, idiosyncratic past of the individual, but the long, communal past of tradition. The notion of tradition refers to the history of authoritative interpretations of which we are part. Gadamer explains his notion of tradition mainly with reference to the history of canonical texts and artifacts, for the history of the canon expresses in exemplary fashion what he understands by tradition: those interpretations of human life that have stood the test of time, that have acquired authority over the course of time. Growing up in the world means being inserted into tradition and assimilating its interpretations, which become part of one's frame of reference. Though we are capable, when we grow older, of critical judgment and transformation of the tradition we have grown up in, Gadamer insists that we can never liberate ourselves completely from the tradition that informs our understanding. Complete liberation from tradition would mean cutting off the branch from which understanding grows. Moreover, to think that one can free oneself completely from tradition amounts to

self-deception, for such an endeavor denies the finiteness of historical existence. If absolute knowledge or exhaustive awareness of tradition (the past) is impossible, then *complete* liberation from tradition (the past) is impossible as well, for one can only liberate oneself from something one has become aware of.

Two points are worth stressing here. First, as already appears from his notion of tradition, understanding for Gadamer is first and foremost practical understanding in the sense of Aristotelian *phronesis*. Understanding is primarily engaged in the interpretation and articulation of what human beings have always been concerned about: the quality and meaning of human life. That is also why understanding in Gadamer's sense always involves self-understanding. If understanding refers primarily to the specifically human project of making sense of life as opposed to simply living life, then this project necessarily involves a relation to myself, for I am not only part of, but also have a stake in, the "object" of understanding. The second point concerns a possible misunderstanding of the notion of tradition. Though, as I will argue later, Gadamer's notion of tradition is anything but unproblematic, his general claim that the past has an unbreakable hold on us is based on an important and, in my opinion, undeniable insight into the human condition. Compared to most animals, human beings require a long period of maturation before they are capable of taking care of themselves adequately. To put it another way, unlike most animals who rely on an innate instinctual program for their orientation and survival in the world, human beings have to learn these things. The basic human condition of having to learn practically everything about the world into which we are born inevitably involves a long period of assimilating the meanings, norms, explanations, knowledge, and stories that circulate and are transmitted in the family, school, and society of which we are part. In the first part of our life, learning is mostly a question of uncritical absorption, for the knowledge, experience, and frame of reference that enable critical judgment are lacking as yet. And, as argued before, what has been absorbed cannot be completely left behind later in life. It does remain, to a certain and variable extent, the unwitting condition of the ability to understand the world and human life.

Whereas insertion into tradition refers to the communal background of understanding, application refers to its differentiating dimension. Understanding is not only shaped by the past, it is also rooted in the (horizon of the) present, and that is where application comes in. To

understand the meaning of classical texts requires an application of what these texts have to say here and now, for me and my generation.[2] Similarly, understanding the sense of the norms I have been brought up with requires my being able to apply these norms in concrete situations. Far from being a formal method or routine of instantiation of the general in the particular, application is more like Aristotelian *phronesis* or Kantian reflective judgment: the rules of judgment are not given, but have to be worked out in every particular case. Application means appropriating transmitted meanings from the always specific vantage point of the present—that is, of the concrete situation in which the interpreter finds herself or himself. As the vantage point of appropriation changes from one historical situation to the next, and from one individual to another, understanding is always a process of differentiation of meaning. The meaning of the Bible, for instance, has both changed and proliferated in the course of the history of its transmission because of the many different vantage points from which interpreters have appropriated its meaning. These vantage points differ both historically and individually. Present-day interpreters of the Bible understand its meaning in a different way than medieval interpreters because the world in which modern interpreters—and in which we—live is another world than the medieval world. But present-day interpreters also differ among themselves with respect to their interpretation of the Bible, for the concrete situation in which the interpreter finds herself or himself varies from one individual to the next. There is, for instance, little chance that a feminist theologian and a Christian fundamentalist will concur in their understanding of the meaning of the Bible.

To sum up, understanding in the full sense of the word, that is, including application, is the re-actualization and reinterpretation of transmitted meanings. That is why Gadamer says that "we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (Gadamer 1999, 297). Understanding without application is not really understanding: it is at best assimilation, at worst repetition. Whereas assimilation is the precondition of understanding something new—one first has to integrate new meanings in to one's frame of reference before applying them—repetition mostly signals a failure of assimilation. Those who are familiar with grading student papers will recognize the phenomenon: papers that consist of various repetitions—of what the text says or what others have said, of jargon, standardized formulas, or empty schemes—often are a sign of lack of comprehension.

Gadamer's emphatic conclusion that understanding means understanding differently appears to anticipate the radical contextualism associated with postmodernist philosophy. His explication of the situatedness of understanding not only acknowledges the plurality of contexts—the different cultural and historical worlds, the different concrete situations—but also the context-dependency and, hence, plurality of meaning. His philosophical hermeneutics appears to presuppose, to a certain extent at least, a conception of language that acknowledges one of the basic tenets of postmodern philosophy: the differentiation, i.e., the continuous change and proliferation, of meaning.[3] But if this tenet of postmodern philosophy is one of the issues that has raised the question of relativism, then Gadamer's hermeneutics, despite its affinity to this postmodernist tenet, assuages several worries connected with the question of relativism. For Gadamer's hermeneutics and postmodern philosophy part ways when it comes to the questions of shared understanding, validity, and truth. Whereas postmodern philosophy either shuns these questions altogether or confines itself to a critique of their presuppositions, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers an account of the possibility of shared understanding, validity, and truth.

In the following three sections I will first examine and then render a critical account of the presuppositions of shared understanding in Gadamer's work. In the final section I will discuss Gadamer's account of validity, and make an attempt to reconstruct Gadamer's rather implicit conception of truth.

Presuppositions of Shared Understanding

If understanding always depends on specific contexts, how can people in varying contexts understand each other? How is shared understanding possible? The situatedness of understanding in Gadamer's hermeneutics does not erode the possibility of shared understanding, because the possibility is safeguarded by three interconnected presuppositions. The first presupposition I have discussed already in the previous section, i.e., the presupposition of a common tradition on which understanding relies. The second presupposition concerns the dialectical conception of understanding. According to Gadamer, understanding is a dialectical process that mediates transmitted meanings and specific, individual applications.

Finally, Gadamer connects the dialectical conception of understanding with a dialogical model that conceives of understanding as the process of coming to an agreement with somebody about something.

Gadamer's dialectical conception of understanding provides an explicative interpretation of the so-called hermeneutic circle, that is, the circular process of understanding that consists of three steps or phases. The first phase is the phase of foreunderstanding *(Vorverständnis)*. When we try to understand something, we do not start from scratch but, on the contrary, with a foreunderstanding—an anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding. Foreunderstanding derives from the interpretations and meanings we have assimilated as inheritors of a common tradition. As its name indicates, *fore*-understanding is not (yet) explicit understanding or even awareness of tradition. Rather it is the light— derived from tradition—in which things here and now appear meaningful to us. In the light of foreunderstanding the object we are trying to understand is neither familiar nor strange, but something in between.[4] It is not familiar in the sense that its meaning is not obvious or self-evident to us. Nor is it strange because we do already have some preconceptions—based on what we have heard or read—about its meaning. Another way of putting it is that understanding always begins with something that "addresses us" (Gadamer 1999, 299) or "pulls us up short" and "alerts" us (268). Though Gadamer's explication of foreunderstanding implies that the scope of understanding is demarcated by the polarity of familiarity and strangeness, this does not mean that the familiar and the strange never become the object of understanding. Because of changes in our lives, increases in knowledge and experience, and other reasons, the familiar may lose its obviousness: it may "pull us up short," and the strange may enter our range of vision and "address" us.

Explicit understanding or, in other words, appropriation of the meaning of what we are trying to understand requires differentiation of the communal horizon of transmitted meanings and the individual horizon of understanding. That is what happens in the second phase of understanding: the received or standard interpretations of a text, an artifact, a historical event, and so on, are confronted with the question "what does this mean, here and now, to me?" Differentiation of both horizons involves the appropriation and explication of what has remained external and implicit. On the one hand, we familiarize ourselves with the history of authoritative interpretations pertaining to the object of understanding. On the other hand, and at the same time, we explicate and

delimit our present perspective. The latter is not possible without the former, for I can become aware of my present perspective only if there is something else, i.e., the horizon of the past or tradition, with respect to which it can be delimited. The third phase of understanding consists in the reciprocal application of the horizons of the past and the present. Though these horizons are different, the reciprocal application discloses their common ground, for both are joined "in the depth of tradition" (Gadamer 1999, 306). The interpreter finds out that her perspective is prestructured by, and hence united with, the perspective of tradition.[5] Therefore the last step of understanding results in the so-called fusion of horizons, that is, the explicit appropriation—which is at the same time a reinterpretation—of transmitted meanings.

It is not very difficult to recognize the structure of Hegelian dialectics in Gadamer's explication of the circular process of understanding. Summarized in Hegelian terms, the process of understanding is a process of sublation *(Aufhebung)* in which the apparently separate horizons of past and present, of tradition and individual, are fused and transformed. The fusion transforms the horizon of both tradition and individual. Whereas the horizon of the tradition is extended to and re-actualized from the viewpoint of the present, the horizon of the interpreter has expanded and deepened: not only does she understand more of the world around her, she also understands herself better. The process of understanding thus resembles the movement of the Hegelian spirit who, through the gradual appropriation of the apparently alien, continuously expands the scope of its knowledge while at the same time coming more and more into its own.

Nor is it difficult to see how the circular-dialectical conception of understanding guarantees the possibility of shared understanding. Understanding begins and ends with the communal horizon of tradition, that is, of shared understanding. If the horizon of shared understanding is implicit at the beginning, in foreunderstanding, it is explicitly appropriated and transformed at the end, in the fusion of horizons. Gadamer's conception of course does not imply that understanding always succeeds in the fusion of horizons, but failure of fusion does not rupture the horizon of shared understanding. Failure of fusion does not effect a break in the tradition, it merely indicates failure of application or appropriation on the part of the individual. Characteristic of Gadamer's dialectical conception is that it emphasizes the embeddedness of understanding in tradition, in the horizon of shared understanding, at the expense of the

differentiating and individuating movement, the potential proliferation, of understanding. The former actually contains and circumscribes the latter. The differentiating and individuating movement of understanding never ruptures or disseminates the communal horizon of shared understanding (tradition) but, on the contrary, functions as the motor of its transmission and renewal. That is why Gadamer insists on the continuity of tradition for "even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value" (Gadamer 1999, 281).

Gadamer connects the dialectical conception of understanding with a dialogical model of understanding. The process of understanding is dialogical because understanding is, primarily, the process of coming to an understanding, an agreement, with somebody about a certain subject matter (Gadamer 1999, 180). The dialogical model of understanding of course does not mean that understanding always takes the shape of an actual dialogue with somebody about something. Rather, it means that understanding is analogous to dialogue in at least three respects. First, understanding is always understanding something: that is, understanding always is concerned with a certain subject matter. The interpretation of a text, for instance, resembles dialogue in that interpreter and interlocutor "both are concerned with a subject matter that is placed before them. Just as each interlocutor is trying to reach agreement on some subject with his partner, so also the interpreter is trying to understand what the text is saying" (378). Second, both understanding and dialogue require openness with respect to the claims of the other (361). Dialogue requires that the interlocutors take seriously what the other says; understanding requires that the interpreter takes seriously what the text says. Without such openness, understanding would be nothing more than the imposition of one's own horizon or perspective on the other. Third, understanding, like dialogue, is oriented toward agreement, that is, toward the fusion of horizons. Like the interlocutors who come to a shared understanding of the subject matter in the give and take of dialogue, the interpreter comes to an understanding of the subject matter or meaning of a text through the reciprocal application and fusion of her own horizon and the horizon of the text.

The dialogical model of understanding offers a further explication of the dialectical conception of understanding. For Gadamer, one of the basic features of understanding is its orientation toward fusion or, in

dialogical terms, agreement. Fusion or agreement is not an external goal of understanding, it is the culmination of understanding. It is the point at which understanding comes into its own, where one can say that one really understands something. In the dialectical conception the possibility of fusion is explained by reference to tradition: tradition is the communal background that unites the horizons of the text and the interpreter. The dialogical model offers a further explanation of the possibility of fusion or agreement. Understanding is not a question of empathy, of getting into the other's skin, it is concerned with a subject matter—whether that is the topic of a text or of a conversation—that forms a more or less "objective" point of reference. According to Gadamer, fusion or agreement is possible exactly because the subject matter is the point of reference to which the viewpoints of the interlocutors, or of the interpreter and the author of a text, can be related.[6] Another point the dialogical model highlights is that openness with respect to the claims of the other is a necessary condition of understanding. Without taking the viewpoint of the other seriously there can be no real understanding, that is, fusion or agreement, for the latter presupposes that understanding always is concerned with more perspectives on the subject matter than only one's own.

Taken together, the three presuppositions of the common tradition, the dialectical structure of understanding, and the model of open dialogue are more than sufficient to guarantee the possibility of shared understanding. The question, however, is whether these presuppositions are valid. In the next two sections I will argue that Gadamer's account has to be revised on two points in order to be useful, or even acceptable, for feminist theory. First, the dialectical-dialogical conception of understanding appears to negate or reduce an essential feature of understanding, namely its situated finiteness. One would expect a hermeneutical philosopher who emphasizes the situated finiteness of understanding to develop a conception of understanding that enables the recognition of alterity and plurality. Though the dialectical-dialogical conception looks promising at first sight—for it requires differentiation of horizons and openness toward the claims of the other—its orientation toward agreement or fusion suggests that recognition of alterity and plurality is merely a transitory phase to be sublated in fusion or agreement. Second, Gadamer's notions of tradition and dialogue are inadequate, for an essential issue is missing from his discussion: the issue of power. Many readers of Gadamer's work, both sympathetic and critical ones, have noticed his

tendency to downplay the question of power and conflict in his discussion of tradition and dialogue.[7] From a feminist viewpoint it is obvious that this omission has to be redressed. Any argument for the possibility of shared understanding that fails to take into account the reality of relations of domination that may pervert the conditions of dialogue and of the (trans)formation of tradition is at best naive, and at worst totally inadequate.

Dialectical-Dialogical Understanding: The Question of Alterity and Plurality

One of the most important insights of Gadamerian hermeneutics is that understanding is situated and, hence, finite. Though Gadamer's concept of situatedness is rather limited—he only focuses on the historical-cultural aspect, neglects the social and material aspect, and is, probably for that reason, oblivious to power and embodiment—this does not invalidate his insight. Of course, Gadamerian hermeneutics will become more adequate and useful if the concept of situatedness is extended to include these aspects.[8] But the real problem lies elsewhere, in the dialectical-dialogical conception of understanding.

One way of phrasing the problem is that his conception is too dialectical and too little genuinely dialogical. Though Gadamer criticizes Hegel's concept of absolute, infinite knowledge (Gadamer 1999, 341, 472), he adopts the basic assumption of Hegelian dialectics. For Gadamer, as for Hegel, understanding is mediation—of past and present, tradition and individual, self and other—and sublation. According to Gadamer, Hegel's philosophy "is not affected by the objection that it leaves no room for the experience of the other and the alterity of history. The life of the mind consists precisely in recognizing oneself in other being" (346). That is why he adopts the following Hegelian formula as the central maxim of understanding: "To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other" (14).[9]

The dialectical conception of understanding seems to imply that the other can be understood only insofar as (the perspective of) the other can be recognized and, hence, assimilated and appropriated by the self. For Gadamer, as for Hegel, recognizing oneself in the other is the only

way really to *understand* the (perspective of the) other. It is either that or no understanding at all. If the mediation and sublation of self and other fails, understanding fails. Yet, is the only alternative to recognizing oneself in the other not understanding the other at all? Is there not another possibility, namely an understanding of the other that preserves and recognizes the otherness of the other? It is this possibility that seems to be excluded in the dialectical conception of understanding. But is this conclusion not too hasty? Gadamer might object that recognizing oneself in the other does not mean that (the perspective of) the other is assimilated and appropriated by the self. It means that the horizons of self and other are fused, and fusion is not a one-sided affair. Fusion of the horizons of self and other means that the understanding of both self and other is transformed and enriched. And such mutual transformation and enrichment can only take place if fusion is based on dialogical reciprocity and openness. Thus, before drawing any conclusions, we have to take a closer look at Gadamer's conception of understanding as dialogue.

Gadamer describes the dialogical character of understanding as the coming to an agreement with somebody about something. The obvious first question is: why agreement? Is it not possible to understand what the other is saying about something without agreeing with him or her? And is it not possible to understand the meaning of a text without agreeing with its content or point of view? Gadamer does not deny the possibility of lack of agreement, but in his view dialogue that does not culminate in a common interpretation of the subject matter is unproductive. Genuine dialogue is not confined to the identification of the other's point of view as the expression of the other's unique individuality. Rather, it is the attempt to relate the meaning or possible truth of the other's words to one's own perspective and assumptions. The productivity of dialogue lies in the reciprocal application of horizons in such a way that a common interpretation emerges that transforms and enriches the understanding of both partners. Hence, dialogical understanding neither involves "the empathy of one individual for another nor 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" (Gadamer 1999, 305). What we should not forget, however, is that rising to a higher universality—the fusion of horizons, reaching of agreement, or discovery of a common interpretation—always already presupposes that self and other have a common background, namely the background of a common tradition and world.

In view of Gadamer's presupposition of commonality, the question with respect to the recognition of the otherness of the other becomes tied up with the question concerning the recognition of plurality. How substantial is the commonality Gadamer presupposes? Does it leave room for real plurality, that is, substantial differences in worldview and in views with respect to the good life? If it does, then one wonders why Gadamer insists on the connection of understanding and agreement or fusion. Would it not make more sense to make an explicit distinction between understanding on the one hand and agreement or fusion on the other hand? For real plurality does not necessarily imply the incomprehensibility of different viewpoints, but it does imply that different viewpoints may be incompatible or unfusible. Somebody may, for instance, understand quite well what the patriarchal worldview is about without agreeing at all with it. Moreover, I do not see any reason why understanding in these cases should be considered unproductive or failed. In my opinion, understanding is the only way to find out whether one does or does not agree, and both are equally important. To sum up, if Gadamer leaves room for real plurality, then his conception of understanding strikes me as being rather inconsistent, for why the intrinsic connection of understanding and agreement/fusion? The other possibility is that Gadamer's presupposition of commonality does not leave room for real plurality. This possibility confronts us with another problem. In this case the question of recognition of alterity is "solved" in a way, for there is no real other—that is, an other whose views and convictions differ so much from my views and convictions that I cannot recognize myself in the other, nor reach agreement with the other without either subordinating myself to the other's standards or vice versa. In other words, if the commonality Gadamer presupposes is substantial in the sense that there is no real plurality of worldviews and views of the good life, then the recognition of the otherness of the other ceases to be an obstacle standing in the way of fusion or agreement. For what self and other have in common is more encompassing than the differences that seem to divide them. Their different perspectives are in that case nothing but particular horizons embedded in the more universal horizon of a common tradition and world.

The discussion in the previous paragraph suggests that with respect to the question of plurality and alterity, Gadamer's work is either inconsistent or inadequate, for differences are reduced to particularities to be overcome when one broadens one's view. I would commit an offense against an important rule of hermeneutics if I were to leave the discussion

at that, for I have not yet seriously considered all the claims Gadamer makes with respect to commonality. Moreover, I still have to answer the question I raised in the previous paragraph, i.e., how substantial is the commonality Gadamer presupposes? The answer to this question requires an examination of two presuppositions: the presupposition of a common tradition and of a common world. I will examine the first presupposition in the next section, and the second one I will examine in the remainder of this section.

Despite his acknowledgment of the existence of different cultures and worldviews, Gadamer holds on to the presupposition of a common world. The explanation of how the two conditions—i.e., plurality of cultures and worldviews on the one hand and a common world on the other hand—fit together lies in his conception of language. For Gadamer, language is the ultimate ground of commonality. What different worldviews and cultures have in common is their linguistic constitution and, hence, intelligibility. The alienness, strangeness, or difference of cultures and worldviews does not constitute per se a barrier to understanding, for language offers access and, hence, the possibility of understanding. Nor does the plurality of languages constitute a barrier, for languages are translatable into each other.[10] But language for Gadamer is not simply an epistemological common ground enabling the intelligibility of other cultures and worldviews. The commonality of language is more substantial than that, for it also enables the fusion of different perspectives. The substantial commonality of language in Gadamer's view is derived from the world-disclosing character of language. Language is not the creation of subjects nor the representation of objects, but the disclosure of matters of fact *(Sachverhalte)*, the epitome of which is the world. Gadamer's explication of the "unique factuality *(Sachlichkeit)*" of language is basically phenomenological (Gadamer 1999, 445). The factuality of language denotes the independence and, hence, the distance of the speaker vis-à-vis the articulated "thing" *(Sache)*. Though articulation always involves interpretation and therefore always introduces a certain view or perspective on the articulated "thing," the factuality of language ensures that the content of the articulation stands out as a distinct and identifiable "thing." In other words, the factuality of language prevents the dissolution of understanding into subjectivism, into a mere juxtaposition of subjective interpretations without a common reference point. Understanding does not create the world, it interprets and articulates an already disclosed world from its specific, situated perspective. Gadamer's phe-

nomenological explication draws attention to the analogy of language and perception. Analogous to perception, which preserves the identity of the perceptual object in the manifold of its appearances, language preserves the identity of the world in the manifold of interpretational perspectives in which the world appears. The difference between perception and language is that in the former case every appearance of the perceptual object is "exclusively distinct from every other," whereas in the latter case the interpretational perspectives are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, "each one potentially contains every other one within it—i.e., each worldview can be extended into every other" (Gadamer 1999, 448). Gadamer's phenomenological argument concerning the nature of language leads thus to the following conclusion. As the world-disclosing function of language guarantees that a *common world* is disclosed in the various worldviews, the perspectives of different worldviews can be fused and integrated in the universal horizon of the common world.

How valid is this conclusion? Let me first sum up what is, in my opinion, the valid kernel of the argument. Gadamer's premise that language is world-disclosing is true insofar as it means that we see and understand the world through language. Two inferences from this premise are valid as well: first that, for this reason, our worldview is never completely private or subjective because language is not private; second that language discloses a common world. It is the third inference that, in my opinion, is not valid, i.e., that different worldviews can be fused. Gadamer does not seem to realize that the guarantee of a common world is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the possibility of fusion of different worldviews. It is a necessary condition because understanding and, hence, fusion presupposes the possibility to establish a *common reference point* of discussion. If different worldviews would refer to different worlds, instead of the same, common world, representatives of different worldviews would not be able to enter into dialogue with each other, let alone understand each other. The establishment of a common reference point, that is, a common subject matter of discussion, is a sufficient condition for the possibility of understanding different views on that subject matter. It is not a sufficient condition for the possibility of fusion or agreement. Agreement not only requires that interlocutors have a common subject matter and understand the other's meaning, they have to share *the same evaluative standards* as well.[11] Despite the suggestion of Gadamer's phenomenological argument, it is not at all evident that the latter follows from the former. On the contrary, partners in dialogue may be perfectly

aware of the fact that they are discussing the same subject matter, and may as well perfectly understand the other's meaning, but disagree completely with respect to the evaluation of the subject matter.

Consider, for example, the heated discussions about abortion and clitoridectomy. In both cases, proponents and opponents are (mostly) referring to the same phenomenon, i.e., they have a common subject matter. They may dispute each other's definitions of the subject matter, but these disputes are possible only *because* they understand what the other party considers to be the relevant cases of abortion and clitoridectomy. The important point is that, even when there is no dispute over definition, i.e., even when there is agreement over what constitutes the subject matter of discussion, many members of both parties still disagree completely as to the evaluation of the subject matter. The American characterization of proponents and opponents of abortion as, respectively, "pro-choice" and "pro-life" captures succinctly the fundamental evaluative difference. In the case of clitoridectomy the evaluative difference often is summarized under the caption of "mutilation of the body" versus "cultural identity." Disagreement here, as in many other cases, is not due to the lack of a common reference point, nor to the lack of understanding with respect to what the other is saying, but to divergent, maybe even incommensurable evaluative standards.

Though Gadamer is right in stressing that dialogical understanding presupposes a common world and, therefore, enables the understanding of other worldviews, he is wrong in assuming that such understanding implies shared evaluative standards and, thus, agreement. Because he fails to distinguish understanding from evaluation, his dialogical model of understanding is dangerously deficient with respect to the recognition of other evaluative standards. In a case of a dialogical encounter between two (groups of) people whose evaluative standards differ significantly, Gadamer's model only allows for three equally dismal outcomes of the dialogue. The interlocutors may conclude that the other (group) does not want to understand, i.e., lacks the openness that is essential to dialogical understanding. Or, one partner (group) may understand the meaning of the other (group) and mistake that understanding for agreement, which means that the other's evaluative standards are either disregarded or (unwittingly) assimilated. The last and best option Gadamer's model allows is that both parties simply agree to disagree and hence admit the

failure of the dialogue. In all three cases the two parties fail to recognize what only open dialogue can actually help us to recognize, i.e., the real, irreducible plurality of evaluative standards and, hence, the disturbing otherness of the other who challenges my worldview and my conception of the good life.

The recognition of plurality and otherness is important because it enables the *critical* function of open dialogue.[12] Worldviews are a specific interpretation of a common world, an interpretation that is influenced not only by specific evaluative standards but also—as I will show in the next section—by (social) relations of power and domination. Worldviews, and hence evaluative standards, are part of our situatedness and we are, therefore, often not aware of the way they affect our understanding of the world. It is only the open, dialogical confrontation with other worldviews and evaluative standards that can make us aware of our own views and standards. And it is only the recognition of other views and standards *as other* that enables the process of critical reflection on our own views and standards. Recognizing the other's perspective as other, instead of recognizing myself (my own perspective) in the other's perspective, enables me to distance and hence differentiate myself from my own perspective, from the views and standards I have grown up with and take for granted. It helps me to realize that there are other and maybe better ways to live life and inhabit the world. Critical reflection on my own views and standards may or may not lead to revision and subsequent agreement with the other. But whether we reach agreement or not, critical reflection will at least have checked the well-intentioned but uncritical impulse Gadamer urges us to follow: to recognize ourselves in the other and stay comfortably at home in the world as we know it.

In order to enable the critical function of open dialogue, Gadamer's dialogical model has to be adapted in two respects. First, its exclusive orientation toward agreement should be opened up to include the equally important concern to guard against assimilating the other's meaning to our own evaluative standards, and to recognize the existence of other, possibly incommensurable evaluative standards. Second, Gadamer only emphasizes one virtue of open dialogue, namely that it enables one to widen the horizon of one's understanding. This one-sided emphasis should be supplemented with the equally important virtue of open dialogue to enable critical reflection on the situatedness of our understanding and evaluations.

Tradition and Dialogue: The Question of Power

Gadamer's portrayal of tradition as "the great tapestry that supports us" (Gadamer 1999, 338), his portrayal of tradition as an encompassing, ever-developing, continuous whole, and his emphasis on the authority of tradition (280) betray a rather unrealistic view of tradition. His view completely neglects the important role power struggles play in the weaving of the tapestry of tradition. No student of the history of Western culture can overlook the fact that the construction of the tapestry of tradition has taken the form of a continuous and sometimes deathly struggle in which books are burned and people silenced.[13] We only have to take a look at the history, for instance, of Christianity—with its inquisitions, witch trials, pogroms, and excommunications—to get an idea of the power contest involved in the establishment of tradition. In view of the power struggles involved, it might be more correct to describe tradition as the story of the winners, a story that gains authority because the memory of the dissenters, the silenced, the losers is forgotten and erased. If, according to Gadamer, tradition "always mediates truth in which one must try to share" (xxiii), the question arises whether "truth" is another, more respectable name for power or success.

It would be historically incorrect to suggest that the weaving of the tapestry of tradition involves a struggle of all against all. Struggle presupposes active participation in the (trans)formation of tradition. Yet, until very recently, active participation in the process of tradition (trans)formation has mainly been the prerogative of the privileged few, whereas the majority of people—women, slaves, peasants, laborers, colonized peoples—did not have the chance, the means, or the right to participate in such processes. It was only in the twentieth century that, in the Western world at least, the opportunity to fulfill the most important condition for active participation, i.e., (higher) education, became generally available. The fact that, until very recently, the (trans)formation of tradition had been predicated on the structural marginalization and exclusion of women and other large groups, fundamentally affects Gadamer's sanguine conception of tradition. It belies his assumption that tradition supports those who have grown up in it, for women and other marginalized groups were not so much supported by, as subordinated to, the authoritative teachings of tradition. Without the opportunity, the means, or the right to participate in the (trans)formation of tradition, the binding force of tradition becomes a repressive force.

Gadamer's assumption that tradition is an encompassing, ever-developing, continuous whole is questionable as well. Whereas the 'voice' of tradition used to be relatively homogeneous, coming from a small elite of white, well-to-do, literate men, the emancipation of formerly excluded and marginalized groups in the course of the twentieth century has introduced a still open-ended series of other voices. The entry of so many new (groups of) actors on the social and cultural stage is, I think, one of the most important changes making up our present postmodern condition. And I doubt whether Gadamer's notion of tradition is still applicable in the present condition. For the Western world seems to be in the process of dissolving the type of tradition Gadamer talks about, i.e., an authoritative and homogeneous tradition. Not only has the Western cultural canon lost its exclusive authority, but the postmodern condition also has introduced the conflictual coexistence of many heterogeneous—and formerly unacknowledged or repressed—traditions, one of which is the feminist tradition.

What conclusions can we draw from this critique of Gadamer's notion of tradition with respect to the question of shared understanding? In Gadamer's hermeneutics the embeddedness in tradition is one of the most important conditions of the possibility of shared understanding. It provides the background of substantial commonality that enables shared understanding. In view of the fact, however, that the majority of people have been excluded from participating in the (trans)formation of tradition, it is questionable whether Western tradition has ever played the role Gadamer accords it. Moreover, there are good reasons to assume that both the commonality and authority of Western tradition has dissolved in this time and age. Consequently, Gadamer's notion of tradition as that which enables shared understanding has, I think, lost its relevance.

In my opinion, Hannah Arendt's reflections on tradition provide a much more illuminating perspective if we want to come to grips with the present postmodern condition. In the preface of *Between Past and Future*, Arendt describes tradition as the testament on the basis of which the inheritance of the past is interpreted and transmitted to future generations (Arendt 1987, 5). Her description of tradition as a 'testament' indicates that the dissolution of tradition can be interpreted as the loss of meaning, not of the inheritance of the past itself, but of the testament— that is, the authoritative interpretive framework on the basis of which the inheritance has been sifted and passed on to a select group of people. Interpreted in this way, the dissolution of tradition is not simply a

negative phenomenon, for it offers new chances to the formerly excluded and marginalized. Now that the testament has lost its binding force, the inheritance of the past can be (re)interpreted and judged in the light of their concerns, experiences, and ways of life. The *Re-Reading the Canon* series by the Penn State Press in which this book is published is a good example of this endeavor. Part of this endeavor is also the retrieval of forgotten or ignored works and events of the past and, in general, the reexamination of the past in order to appropriate the history of which we may have been deprived. Though Gadamer's notion of tradition has lost its relevance, this is not true of the more general lesson of hermeneutics. That the past enables understanding is a lesson that is especially important for emancipating groups. Emancipation in the full sense requires the hermeneutic effort to uncover and understand one's past, for without the past there is no self-understanding, no sense of identity and self-respect, and no vision of the future.

In contrast to his discussion of tradition, Gadamer's account of dialogue does not completely neglect the issue of power. Here the problem is not so much the omission of the issue itself, but the failure to draw the appropriate conclusion with respect to the conditions of dialogue. Dialogue requires that we overcome something that, according to Gadamer, penetrates all human relations, namely the effort to dominate (Gadamer 1999, 360). Gadamer follows Hegel in the view that human relations are characterized by "a constant struggle for mutual recognition" (359), giving rise to the effort to dominate the other. There are many ways to dominate the other, but in the case of dialogue, direct domination—for instance preventing the other to speak—either disrupts the dialogue or makes it impossible that a dialogical relation establishes itself. Thus dialogical relations or, as Gadamer calls them, I-Thou relations exclude direct domination. That does not mean, however, that the effort to dominate the other is completely absent from I-Thou relations. As Gadamer notes, in I-Thou relations the effort to dominate the other typically takes the mediated, reflective form of (implicitly) claiming to understand the other in advance or better than she or he understands her- or himself, thereby robbing the other's claims of their legitimacy (360). The mediated, reflective form of domination refers to the well-intentioned but (slightly) overbearing attitude toward the other that is based on the presumption that we know better. In this kind of dialogical I-Thou relation the words of the other are not taken sufficiently seriously or, more precisely, the other's claims are robbed of their legitimacy.

From his observations on I-Thou relations, we can infer that Gadamer is well aware of the fact that relations of power and domination may penetrate and undermine (the possibility of) dialogue. Gadamer nevertheless does not seem to realize that the conditions of dialogue he specifies—reciprocity, respect, and openness—are insufficient in this respect. The first and most important condition of dialogue is the recognition of the other as *equal,* that is, as somebody who has the capacity and the right to participate in dialogue. Without the recognition of formal and universal equality—i.e., the recognition of the human right and capacity to participate in dialogue—the scope of dialogical I-Thou relations will remain restricted to people who already recognize each other as equals because, for instance, of their social or professional status, excluding all those whose status is considered to be inferior.

The recognition of formal and universal equality as a normative condition of dialogue is absolutely necessary if dialogue—as I argued in the last section—is to have a critical function. Long-lasting relations of domination affect the (self-)understanding of people who grow up and are socialized within these relations. In patriarchal societies, for instance, the inequality of men and women is embedded to such an extent in all aspects of life that it is naturalized. It is lived and perceived as the 'natural difference' between man and woman instead of a socially and culturally constructed and maintained state of subordination of women to men. Under these conditions the paternalistic attitude—what Gadamer calls the reflective form of domination—of men toward women is not only pervasive, it is also not perceived as such. According to their own self-understanding most patriarchal men, no doubt, do not lack respect and openness vis-à-vis women in general and their wives in particular. Pace Gadamer, this self-understanding suffices for open dialogue. But dialogue based on a paternalistic attitude toward women instead of recognition of women as equal partners in dialogue unwittingly perverts the openness of the dialogue. Consider, for instance, the following case. In the Western world, until fairly recently, marital rape was a virtually nonexistent phenomenon, not because it did not happen, but because the dominant male interpretation of sexuality had naturalized this instance of sexual abuse as a normal expression of male sexuality. It was the natural right of the husband to have sexual access to his wife's body at any time he wanted, and marital rape was condoned as an unfortunate expression of the 'uncontrollable urge' of male sexuality. The female victims either were affected in their self-understanding by the dominant male

interpretation and were thus shamed into silence, or their attempt to articulate their experience fell on deaf ears; the impact of what they said was played down, ridiculed, or simply misunderstood. It was only when women acquired equal rights and were recognized as equal part-ners in dialogue that they were able to contest the dominant male understanding of sexuality and change the legal and social acceptance of sexual abuse.

Social relations of power and domination are part of the situatedness of understanding. They unwittingly influence the way we perceive and understand ourselves and other people. In order to become aware of, and enable critical reflection on, the way power and domination have influ-enced our understanding, simple and open dialogue with others does not suffice. Nor does recognition of the other's perspective as other. Before we can even begin to recognize the otherness of the other's perspective we have, first and foremost, to recognize the other as an equal partner in dialogue. Thus formal and universal equality is a necessary condition of dialogue if dialogue is to have the critical potential to contest dominant and oppressive interpretations and evaluative standards.

Validity and Truth

The fact that understanding is always conditioned by the situatedness, the perspective, of the one who understands seems to suggest that the truth of interpretation is merely subjective truth. Though Gadamer's phe-nomenological argument concerning the nature of language has already refuted the erroneous assumption that interpretations are simply subjec-tive, this argument does not suffice to allay all the worries concerning relativism. It has not made the following question superfluous: does the conception of situated understanding not entail relativism, that is, does it not result in a mere juxtaposition of different interpretations? The answer to this question is no. Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a rather straightforward account of the distinction between valid and invalid interpretations, which more or less follows the three stages of under-standing I have discussed in the third section. As is to be expected, the account is connected to his conception of truth. I will first discuss the account of validity before turning to the examination of Gadamer's con-ception of truth.

The first rule of interpretation is to take seriously what the text has to say.[14] Thus, interpretations that consist in nothing but the imposition of the interpreter's perspective on the text are definitely invalid. Gadamer insists that one cannot really speak of interpretation in the hermeneutic sense if the interpreter fails to be addressed or claimed by the *Sache*—the subject matter or meaning—of the text (Gadamer 1999, 501). The most important criterion of the validity of an interpretation is the criterion of *Sachlichkeit*, of pertinence.[15] It refers not only to the necessary, initial condition of interpretation—being claimed by the *Sache* is the beginning of understanding—but also to its final condition of validity. Interpretations are valid insofar as they succeed in bringing out the *Sache*, the meaning, of the interpreted text (465). Between this beginning and end lies the real work of interpretation. First, the interpreter has to take stock of her hermeneutical situation, that is, the questions, expectations, and in short, the preconceptions or—in Gadamer's terminology—prejudices that govern her understanding of the text. Second, she has to distinguish between the legitimate preconceptions that allow the meaning of the text to be brought out and the illegitimate ones that make the text less intelligible. It is the otherness of the text, its different horizon, that makes the interpreter aware of her hermeneutical situation, but how does she succeed in making the critical distinction between the "true prejudices by which we understand" and the "false prejudices by which we misunderstand"? (298–99). Clearly, this question is crucial, for the distinction between valid and invalid interpretations depends on it.

The interpreter has three resources she can use to test her preconceptions. The first one is the text itself: the preconceptions have to be more or less compatible with what the text says or affirms. The most important criterion here is coherence. An interpretation is invalid if it goes against what the text affirms. The criterion of coherence does not exclude critical interpretations, for critical interpretations, like any other valid interpretation, have to bring out the meaning of the text first before they criticize the arguments or viewpoints that underlie the meaning of the text. A critical interpretation that is based on a misunderstanding of the text is misdirected or simply invalid. The second resource is tradition or, more precisely, the history of the reception of the text. Often, the text itself does not suffice as a resource for the simple reason that it is difficult to understand exactly what the text is saying. In order to understand what the text is saying and, hence, to test our preconceptions, the history of the reception of the text is indispensable, for it offers

interpretational perspectives that have proved fruitful over time. That is why they have succeeded in establishing themselves as part of the history of reception in the first place. Again, the point here is not to accept uncritically everything history has bequeathed us, but not to deprive ourselves of interpretational perspectives that might be helpful in understanding the text. But what to do in the case of contemporary texts? Here there is not yet a history of reception to rely on. In this case the interpreter can make use of the third resource that, in fact, is always available: dialogue. Dialogue enables the interpreter not only to test her preconceptions by submitting them to the judgment of others, but also to defend her opinions and revise and/or strengthen them in the give and take of discussion.

This account of validity comes very close, I think, to generally accepted rules of interpretation. When the validity of an interpretation is disputed, it is often done by showing that the interpreter offends against one or more of these rules. Though the rules may be generally accepted, what counts as an appropriate application of these rules is, of course, often a matter of dispute. And in disputes about (in)validity, critical open dialogue is essential. I am referring here not to Gadamer's conception of dialogue but to my adapted version. Without critical open dialogue judgments concerning (in)validity tend to reiterate and reconfirm the dominant viewpoint. Other viewpoints or judgments are received in one of two ways. Either they do not get a hearing because they are articulated by people who are not considered to be equal partners in dialogue; or if they do get a hearing, the otherness of their viewpoints and standards, instead of being recognized and examined on its merits, is disqualified as a misunderstanding—or as irrelevant or incoherent or worse, because they diverge from the dominant, 'self-evident' viewpoint and standards. Such has been the fate of many feminist arguments and judgments in the course of Western history. Take for example Mary Wollstonecraft's work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792): when she exposed the inconsistencies in the way philosophers and politicians of her time interpreted the Enlightenment principle of equality, and argued for the much more consistent interpretation that recognizes the equal rights of men and women, her argument, more often than not, was countered by slanderous 'ad feminam' arguments portraying her as an emotionally imbalanced, frustrated, and evil woman.

Having examined validity in interpretation, I will now turn to the question of truth. The first question here is: if valid interpretations are

true interpretations, what exactly does 'true' or 'truth' mean? A very important characteristic of the hermeneutical conception of truth Gadamer defends needs to be mentioned first: hermeneutical truth is not absolute, but relative. Hermeneutical truth is relative in the literal sense that it always is related to the hermeneutical universe of the cultural and social practices of a linguistic and historical community.[16] Relative in this sense means that hermeneutical truth is neither eternal nor one, but is changing and plural. The truth of a canonical text, for instance, the Bible, changes in the course of its history of reception, and has a different content for the various cultural-religious communities that interpret this text. Unless we want to hold on to the old metaphysical conception of truth as eternal and one, there is no need to reject changing and plural truth as relativism in disguise. Yet, exactly because of the threat of relativism, it is legitimate to ask why one still would speak of *truth* in this case. In order to answer this question I will attempt to reconstruct Gadamer's implicit conception of truth.

Hermeneutical truth unfolds in three stages that, again, more or less follow the three stages of understanding discussed above. The first stage is the stage of what could be termed phenomenological truth. The essential characteristic of phenomenological truth is that it is not produced but experienced. Phenomenological truth refers to the experience of disclosure that precedes any attempt to produce—i.e., interpret, elucidate, or verify—the truth.[17] Any such attempt cannot but rely on a preceding experience of disclosure in which something presents itself to us as meaningful. This experience is the beginning of understanding, what Gadamer calls 'being addressed or claimed by a *Sache*.' It is the initial experience of meaning, whether that is the meaning of a text, the significance of an act, the relevance of an event, or the beauty of an artifact. The initial experience of meaning is an experience of *truth* because something, as it were, lights up, becomes intelligible, and acquires a certain evidence. The experience of disclosure indicates the initial receptivity of understanding. It is only because of this initial receptivity that understanding has, as it were, something to work on and is able to proceed to the productive phase in which meaning is interpreted, elucidated, verified, and appropriated. We only can appropriate (the meaning of) something if that 'thing' has disclosed or presented itself to us. One should not forget, however, that phenomenological truth does not happen 'out of the blue.' The disclosure of meaning/truth is conditioned and enabled by fore-understanding. Because we are always already part of a hermeneutical

universe, understanding in the (initial) sense of disclosure is possible.

The second stage is that of hermeneutical truth in the strict sense. Here understanding enters its productive phase. The initial intimation of truth/meaning is articulated in interpretation. The articulation cannot but bring into play the perspective, the hermeneutical situation, of the interpreter. An interpretation, however, that simply articulates the perspective from which truth/meaning initially was experienced, is too subjective or—what is more likely to be the case—too restricted and shallow to be valid. As we have seen, the task, indeed the work, of interpretation that has to be done here is the testing of our perspectives in view of the text itself and of other interpretations. Hermeneutical truth thus consists in this sense, in the (self-)critical elucidation, elaboration—including necessary adaptations and revisions—and appropriation of phenomenological truth. Subsequently, the articulation of hermeneutical truth has to prove itself. This is the third stage in the unfolding of truth, the stage of what could be called pragmatic truth. The articulation of truth proves itself if the interpretation or text succeeds in addressing an audience. If it stands the test of time, that is, if it succeeds in addressing ever new audiences, the text will become a classic. If it does not secure an audience, the articulated truth disappears without leaving a trace. What is at stake in pragmatic truth is not the confirmation of the truth of the text by others, but the capacity of the text to address others, to be meaningful to others who, in their turn, will interpret its meaning/truth in their way. Pragmatic truth thus reconnects with phenomenological truth.

In this reconstruction of Gadamer's conception of truth, as well as in my discussion of his account of validity, I have minimized the emphatic role Gadamer accords tradition in both cases. This adaptation in my opinion only strengthens both, for reasons I have discussed earlier. I will nevertheless have to return to the critical question of truth and power that arose in the context of the discussion of tradition, as it is still relevant for what I have called pragmatic truth. Although pragmatic truth has the persuasiveness of common sense—for what is truth if only I and nobody else believes in it?—it undoubtedly connects truth with power. When the truth of an interpretation or text is tied to its success in addressing an audience, it is naive to expect that all articulations of truth have an equal chance to prove themselves in this way. They obviously have not, and though power is not the only factor—luck and coincidence also play a role—it is the only factor we might be able to do something about. Pragmatic truth is the third and last reason to plead—contra

Gadamer's injunction to share in the truth of tradition—for the critical potential of open dialogue. If what is handed down as true may be nothing more than an effect of power, if the interpretations or texts we take to be true may be oppressive both for ourselves and for others, it is only critical, open dialogue that may be helpful in separating truth from power. By this I do not mean to suggest that the point of critical, open dialogue is to get rid of pragmatic truth, or even of the connection of truth and power. Such an aim is neither realistic nor desirable. Rather, the point of critical, open dialogue is, on the one hand, to enable the disempowerment of influential but bigoted truths, and on the other hand, the empowerment of hitherto unacknowledged truths.

Conclusion

From the viewpoint of a feminist theorist who looks for a way out of the postmodern predicament, Gadamerian hermeneutics has both its strengths and its weaknesses. The strength of Gadamerian hermeneutics is that it combines an emphasis on the situated finiteness of understanding with an account of the open dialogical character of understanding, and an emphasis on the plurality of meaning and interpretation with an account of truth and valid interpretation. It is this combination that prevents the relativistic consequences of radical contextualism and the exclusive focus on difference. If all understanding is situated, then that does not imply that understanding is merely subjective or utterly particular. Understanding always relies on a—to a certain extent implicit—background of shared understanding, that is, the meanings, viewpoints, and standards of the community or communities of which we are and have been part. These communities, especially the elective ones like the feminist community, may comprise very different, and sometimes incompatible, interpretations and visions of the present and the future, but they are a community to the extent that they share their interpretation of the past. The situatedness of understanding does imply a plurality of interpretations but the fact that interpretations differ does not make them per se unintelligible nor does it make them all equally (in)valid or (un)true. Even though validity and truth are changing, plural, and disputable, they have not, for that reason, become empty categories. The least we can say is that Gadamer's hermeneutics does justice

to, and tries to explain the empirical fact that, at least every now and then, we do make the distinction between valid and invalid, true and untrue interpretations.

The weakness of Gadamerian hermeneutics is that it is both ambivalent and uncritical in its elaboration of the concept of understanding. It is ambivalent in that Gadamer's universalist Hegelian tendencies undercut the situated finiteness of understanding and disregard the plurality of evaluative standards. It is uncritical insofar as Gadamer fails to address the pertinent questions of alterity and power. The adaptations of Gadamer's dialogical model of understanding I suggest in the previous sections have shifted the focus of this model from agreement and an ever widening scope of understanding to critical reflection on the situatedness of understanding. In a way I have tried to rescue the idea of situatedness and all that it implies from Gadamer's harmonizing and universalizing tendencies. To really acknowledge the situatedness of understanding means, as I have tried to show, that one must develop the critical dimension and potential of open dialogue. For critical open dialogue is the only way along which we may become aware of the prejudices that unwittingly guide our understanding, and of the possible merits of other understandings of the world and of life. This move toward a more critical hermeneutics is, in my opinion, indispensable if Gadamerian hermeneutics is to be useful for feminist and other politically engaged theorists.

Notes

1. According to Gadamer, "[T]he self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life" (1999, 276).

2. Cf. "[U]nderstanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation" (Gadamer 1999, 308).

3. I am thinking here especially of the early work of Derrida (1972) and Butler (1993), but Lyotard's emphasis on the irreducible plurality of language games in *Le Différend* also comes to mind.

4. Cf. "Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness. . . . The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between" (Gadamer 1999, 295).

5. Cf. "There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which are to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (Gadamer 1999, 306).

6. Both the assumption that understanding is oriented toward fusion/agreement and the explanation of the possibility of fusion/agreement raise several questions that I will address later.

7. See Caputo (1987), Kögler (1999), Misgeld (1991), Schott (1991), Shusterman (1989), and Warnke (1994).

8. It will be easier to include the dimension of social relations and power than the dimension of materiality and embodiment. In the latter case a preliminary problem has to be solved, namely, the relation of body/matter and language.

9. See Dallmayr (1989, 92).

10. Translation of one language into another does of course involve interpretation and, hence, transformation. But in this respect translation differs only in degree from what happens within one language. Within one language one also has to interpret when the meaning of an utterance is not obvious. And interpretation here also involves transformation, for understanding is—as Gadamer correctly points out—always understanding differently.

11. By evaluative standards I mean those standards—but also principles and ideas—that distinguish one worldview from another, and one view of the good life from another. These will mostly, but not only, be moral, political, and religious standards, principles, and ideas.

12. For Gadamer's neglect of the critical dimension of open dialogue, see Nagl-Docekal (1997) and Kögler (1999).

13. I speak of "Western" culture because it is obvious that Gadamer means Western tradition when he speaks of tradition in *Truth and Method*.

14. For reasons of expediency I will only speak about textual interpretation but the discussion of validity and truth also applies to the case of actual dialogue.

15. It is notoriously difficult to adequately translate the German words *Sachlichkeit* and *Sache*, especially in view of the import of these words in Gadamer's hermeneutics. The most literal translation of *Sachlichkeit* and *Sache* is the one I have used before, i.e., factualness or factuality and thing. The usual connotation of these words, however—a connotation Gadamer explicitly derives from the phenomenological conception of language I discuss above—is something like pertinence or relevancy, and subject matter, topic, meaning.

16. See Jean Grondin (1990) for a very clear explication of this issue.

17. Phenomenological truth or truth as disclosure refers to the Heideggerian background of Gadamer's conception of truth. In *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger introduces his conception of truth as *Erschlossenheit*, which often is translated in English as disclosure or disclosedness. See Heidegger (1977, section 44b).

References

Arendt, Hannah. [1954] 1987. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought.* Reprint, Middlesex: Penguin.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.

Caputo, John D. 1987. *Radical Hermeneutics. Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Dallmayr, Fred. 1989. "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

Derrida, Jacques. 1972. "La différance." In Derrida, *Marges de la Philosophie.* Paris: Minuit.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. *Philosophical Hermeneutics.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1989. "Text and Interpretation." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. 1999. *Truth and Method.* 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Grondin, Jean. 1990. "Hermeneutics and Relativism." In *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work*, ed. Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Heidegger, Martin. [1927] 1977. *Sein und Zeit*. Reprint, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1977.

Kögler, Hans Herbert. 1999. *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Lyotard, Jean-François. 1983. *Le différend*. Paris: Minuit.

Misgeld, Dieter. 1991. "Modernity and Hermeneutics: A Critical-Theoretical Rejoinder." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics* ed. Hugh J. Silverman. New York: Routledge.

Michelfelder, Diane P., and Richard E. Palmer, eds. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Nagl-Docekal, Herta. 1997. "Towards a New Theory of the Historical Sciences: The Relevance of *Truth and Method*." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court.

Schott, Robin May. 1991. "Whose Home Is It Anyway? A Feminist Response To Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman. New York: Routledge.

Shusterman, Richard. 1989. "The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: A Pragmatist Perspective." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

Warnke, Georgia. 1994. "Hermeutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women." In *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

7

The Ontology of Change

Gadamer and Feminism

Susan Hekman

For many North American academics the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer first came to their attention in the context of a series of debates in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the staples of intellectual life in the 1970s was the Gadamer-Habermas debate.[1] This debate pitted Habermas, the Frankfurt School advocate of social and political revolution, against Gadamer, the philosopher of tradition. The central issue in the debate was a juxtaposition that, today, seems somewhat naive: the relationship between language and "reality." Habermas's principal argument was that language is only one of the constituents of reality and that focusing exclusively on language would lead to the hypostatizing of language and, consequently, to idealism. In his often-quoted statement on this position he asserted that "The linguistic infrastructure of society is part of a complex that, however symbolically mediated, is also constituted by the constraint of reality" (Habermas 1977, 361). Against this Gadamer questioned what it would mean to speak from a position outside linguistically constituted consciousness (Gadamer 1971). The carefully articulated argument of his

Truth and Method (1975) is that language is all-encompassing: it locates us in a world and provides the possibility of intelligibility within that world.

Habermas's objection to Gadamer's position goes beyond abstract philosophical issues. Ultimately, Habermas cannot accept a philosophical position rooted in tradition and "prejudice." For Habermas, tradition is the enemy of change. His goal is to transform society and it seems abundantly obvious to him that this cannot be done by relying on tradition. Gadamer's rejoinder is that traditions and even prejudices do not preclude critique. In fact, he asserts that the fundamental task of hermeneutics is to reveal hidden prejudices, to critically assess tradition (Gadamer 1976, 92). Gadamer takes Habermas to task for his claim that reason provides an Archimedean point from which language/tradition can be assessed. He asserts instead that reason operates within historically constituted languages. He concludes: "Social life consists of a constant process of transformation of what previously had been held valid" (Gadamer 1981, 135).

Like most debates of this nature, the Gadamer-Habermas debate was never definitively resolved. In the 1980s, however, it was superseded by another debate that once again pitted Gadamer against a popular philosopher with an enthusiastic following. In 1981 Gadamer met Jacques Derrida in Paris for an exchange of views. The Gadamer-Derrida debate did not receive the attention of the previous debate, possibly because the issues dividing the participants were difficult to define. While the disagreement between Gadamer and Habermas was relatively clear cut, that between Derrida and Gadamer was not. On the surface the two thinkers appear to have much in common. Both focus on language; both deny the metaphysical pursuit of truth that defines modernity; both are deeply influenced by Heidegger. Yet in another sense they come from different worlds indeed. Derrida, like Habermas, defines himself as a leftist philosopher devoted to criticizing existing social structures. Gadamer, as the philosopher of tradition, at least appears to be on the right. This divide is never directly addressed by either participant. Rather, the debate, in the sense that it can be called a debate at all, focused on something like the metaphysics of understanding. Derrida claimed that Gadamer's approach to understanding necessarily presupposes something like Kant's sense of good will, that is, a metaphysics of the will (Derrida 1989). In making this claim Derrida was attempting to implicate Gadamer in the metaphysics of modernity that presupposes both intentionality and Truth. Gadamer denied the charge and then leveled one of his own: everyone

who speaks, he argued, wants to be understood; otherwise why speak or write? (Gadamer 1989). Derrida, Gadamer claimed, was not seeking understanding but, rather, misunderstanding. He then went on to argue that Derrida was actually pleased that we cannot understand each other because it confirms his private experience of disillusionment and the metaphysics on which it is founded.

Despite the obliqueness of this exchange, a number of points raised in the debate are clear. Gadamer does not, as Derrida claims, appeal to a metaphysics of the will in his philosophical hermeneutics. Unlike traditional hermeneutics, Gadamer's hermeneutics rejects the very idea that there is a single, true meaning of a text. But Derrida is correct in his claim that Gadamer's aim is to seek understanding. The underlying assumption of his philosophical method is that we do understand each other and that his task is to define how that is possible. What is not clear, however, is how Gadamer's pursuit of understanding differs from Derrida's approach, which, Gadamer claims, pursues misunderstanding.

In the following, I will argue that these differences are important for a feminist understanding of Gadamer's work. But the beginning of a feminist analysis of these issues must be to note the total absence of feminist concerns from both of these debates. This absence is particularly egregious in the case of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. The issues defining that debate were directly related to feminist concerns: the relationship between language analysis and social and political revolution. Yet the debate took place entirely outside the orbit of feminist analysis. Although subsequent to the debate several feminist theorists developed a feminist approach to critical theory, the debate itself ignores feminism altogether.[2] The absence of feminist concerns from the Gadamer-Derrida debate, on the other hand, is more easily explained. The second debate did not receive the attention of the first, and the issues it raised were more difficult to define. It is hard to comment on a debate if the points at issue are uncertain. Yet the absence of feminist concerns is significant here as well. Derrida and postmodernism are intensely debated issues within the feminist community. The questions raised in the debate are germane to feminism, especially because many feminists have rejected the modernist search for "Truth" that both Gadamer and Derrida eschew. Yet, again, a feminist perspective is absent.

Several factors are responsible for the silence on feminist issues in both of these debates. It is indicative of a phenomenon that characterizes contemporary feminism as a whole: its marginalization from mainstream

philosophical concerns. Like many other issues that have captured the attention of the philosophical community in recent decades, these debates are devoid of feminist analysis. What this reveals is that feminist concerns do not count in mainstream philosophy, and even in a sphere of philosophy—postmodernism—that is itself marginal, feminism is largely ignored.

Another reason has its origins within feminism itself. Gadamer's hermeneutics seems, on its face, to be antithetical to feminist concerns. How can a philosophy rooted in authority, tradition, and, indeed, prejudice, speak to feminism? Feminists have not been drawn to Gadamer's hermeneutics and thus have seen no reason to participate in either of these debates.[3] It is the goal of this chapter to challenge that judgment. I contend that Gadamer's emphasis on tradition offers feminism an opportunity to explore its greatest contemporary challenge: how to effect change within the existing set of meanings that constitute society. My argument is that it is precisely the element of Gadamer's approach that has seemed most antifeminist—tradition—that is the most useful tool for feminist analysis.

The best place to begin an argument for the relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics for feminism is with the subject of his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*. This book addresses a controversy that was prominent in the 1970s and was also one of the principal components of the Gadamer-Habermas debate: the antipositivist critique of the social sciences. Like many other antipositivist critics of positivist social science, Gadamer argued that positivism's adherence to a single method leading to a unitary Truth is not appropriate to the human sciences. But Gadamer's approach also departs from the antipositivist critiques of his day in significant ways. Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical theory, ordinary language analysis, and symbolic interactionism focused their attention almost entirely on the social sciences, arguing that these sciences required a different method from that of the natural sciences. Theorists of these schools defined their goal as the articulation of that method. These critiques were partial in the sense that they divided knowledge into two spheres—the natural and the social sciences—and addressed only the latter. They did not, however, address the question of knowledge itself nor, consequently, question the conception of knowledge informing the natural sciences.[4]

Gadamer's work transcends these partial critiques. As he repeatedly insists in *Truth and Method,* his goal is not to offer a methodology for the

human sciences but, rather, to explore the nature of understanding itself. His aim is to link the human sciences with the "unbroken tradition of rhetorical and humanistic culture" that positivism has broken (Gadamer 1975, 23). While other antipositivist critics identified "understanding" as the distinctive method of the human sciences, Gadamer rejects this formulation as too narrow. "Understanding," he claims, "is the original character of the being of human life itself" (230). This insight places the problems of the human sciences in an entirely new light. He puts the significance of this most succinctly in a different context: "If *Verstehen* is the basic moment of human *in-der-Welt-sein*, then the human sciences are nearer to human self-understanding than are the natural sciences. The objectivity of the latter is no longer an unequivocal and obligatory ideal of knowledge" (Gadamer 1979, 106).

Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics, then, involves nothing less than a reconceptualization of human knowledge itself. The task of hermeneutics, he claims, is "to bring everything knowable by the sciences into the context of mutual agreement in which we ourselves exist" (Gadamer 1981, 137). The radical reconceptualization of knowledge at the root of Gadamer's hermeneutics sets it apart from the partial antipositivist critiques of the 1970s. But today the distinctiveness of Gadamer's work takes on another significance. Gadamer's critique of modernist knowledge is at the forefront of what many have characterized as a paradigm shift that defines the intellectual life of the 1980s and 1990s. In the context of these discussions the radical nature of Gadamer's criticism aligns it with two other movements that are also central to this paradigm shift: feminism and postmodernism. These three approaches exhibit a crucial similarity: all argue that in order to move beyond the epistemological strictures of modernism in general and positivism in particular, it is necessary to reconceptualize knowledge not just in the social/human sciences, but knowledge as a whole. In Gadamerian terminology, all three schools of thought argue that the connection between the method of the natural sciences and a unitary and absolute Truth must be rethought. They concur that we must define multiple truths rather than "Truth."

That these three approaches are strange bedfellows is obvious to anyone conversant with the intellectual patterns of recent decades. Although feminism and postmodernism have entered into an uneasy alliance, Gadamerian hermeneutics has been left out of their discussions almost entirely. This is unfortunate. Gadamer has made a significant contribution to the contemporary debate over knowledge that is relevant to feminist

concerns. Specifically, his attack on the modernist/positivist conception of knowledge offers a feminist resource: it deconstructs the masculinist/modernist conception of knowledge as the single product of rational reflection. This affinity between feminism and Gadamerian hermeneutics has been obscured, however, because his references to tradition, authority, and prejudice have alienated most feminists, and rightly so. These concepts represent much that feminism is committed to overturning. But if we explore the theory of knowledge and ontology informing these concepts, that affinity can be defined and can serve as the basis of a closer connection between feminism and Gadamerian hermeneutics.

In order to establish this possibility I will assert what may seem, on the face of it, to be an indefensible thesis: that Gadamerian hermeneutics is more compatible with many feminist goals than is its recent ally, postmodernism. More specifically, I will argue that on the key issue of change, Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a clearer strategy than do the postmoderns. The relationship between feminism and postmodernism is under attack in many aspects of contemporary feminist thought. Some feminists are beginning to argue that we should return to a version of modernism in order to avoid the nihilism implicit in much postmodern thought. Gadamer's thought offers another alternative that avoids both modernist absolutism and postmodern nihilism. By looking at four issues that have troubled the relationship between feminism and postmodernism and suggesting a Gadamerian alternative, I hope to demonstrate that his work offers a positive possibility for feminist theory.

First, one of the key elements of postmodern thought is a position commonly labeled "social constructionism." For postmodern thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, both the world in which we live and our subjectivity itself are constructed by the discourses that we employ. This position is both the basis of the attraction between postmodernism and feminism and the source of much of the tension between them. It has been abundantly obvious to many feminists that women are, indeed, products of the discourses that define "femininity" and "woman." Much fruitful feminist work has resulted from this insight; the construction of "woman" has become a theme of much recent feminist work. But the emphasis on social construction has also created problems for feminism. If we are all products of social discourses, how can we explain the individual variations from the subjectivities these discourses construct? If we abandon the modernist concept of the autonomous, agentic subject, how

can we account for acts of resistance such as feminism? Why don't we all evolve with cookie-cutter sameness, as social dupes?

Postmodernism's answer to this question is that discourses contain "slippage," that they do not determine all of us absolutely but, rather, allow for variations within discursive formations. Postmodernists also argue that there are gaps between discourses—"interstices"—that allow for further variations. But these answers have not satisfied many feminists. The emphasis of many postmodern feminists has been on the monolithic, nearly inescapable influence of the discursive formations of gender. The work of Judith Butler, for example, has made many feminists uneasy because it seems to leave women with no avenue of escape from the determination of gender constructions. In *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler argues that gender constructions are so encompassing that they even structure the resistances that we formulate to oppose them, thus negating their force.

Gadamer's position on social constructionism appears to accord with that of postmodernism. Like the postmoderns, Gadamer rejects the autonomous agent of the modernist tradition. For him language is "I-less" —it is not "I" who speaks, but "we" (Gadamer 1976, 65). Also, along with the postmoderns, Gadamer asserts that language constructs the world for us: "Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world" (3). But the conclusions Gadamer draws from this position differ significantly from those of the postmoderns. While the postmoderns emphasize our enclosure in language, Gadamer argues that language *gives* us a world, it does not enclose us in that world: "Precisely the experience of finitude and particularity of our being—a finitude manifest in the diversity of languages—opens the road to the infinite dialogue in the direction of ontological truth" (15–16). Language, thus, both defines our finitude and provides us with the possibility of the infinite: "The phenomenon of understanding, then, shows the universality of human linguisticality as a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it—not only the 'culture' that has been handed down to us through language, but absolutely everything—because everything (in the world and out of it) is included in the realm of 'understanding' and 'understandability' in which we move" (25).

This difference is more significant than a mere matter of emphasis. What Gadamer is doing here is taking an insight that is central to the

paradigm shift in knowledge—the claim that language constructs our world—and interpreting it in a positive rather than a negative light. While the postmoderns define our enclosure in language in negative terms, Gadamer argues that it provides us with infinite possibilities—it *gives* us a world. It provides us with the intelligibility that makes human social life possible. This amounts to more than a stress on one side or the other of the same coin. Rather, it represents a profound difference in outlook that sets Gadamer apart from the negativism of much postmodernism.

A second issue that has problematized the feminist-postmodernism alliance is closely related to social constructionism: the position of the social analyst. If we are all constructed by social discourses, then the position of the analyst who reveals this fact to us raises difficult questions. How does she/he gain the position of observer? Is she/he positioned in another discourse—that of social analyst? Or is she/he removed from discourse altogether? These are particularly vexing questions for postmodernism because one of its central tenets is the rejection of the Archimedean point of disinterested knowledge that informs modernism. Without an answer to the question of the position of the social analyst, postmodernism is in danger of recreating this Archimedean point in another guise.

Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a sharp contrast to the postmodern confusion on the issue of the position of the social analyst. Indeed, an in-depth analysis of the position of the interpreter/social analyst is an integral part of Gadamer's philosophy. Embodied in his concept of the "horizon" is a comprehensive analysis of how meaning is constituted from the perspective of the interpreter. Far from forgetting the position of the interpreter/analyst, Gadamer places it at the center of his thought. Meaning, Gadamer argues, is always interpreted from a particular horizon. "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 1975, 269). Thus everyone, including the interpreter/analyst, necessarily has a horizon of meaning because everyone must be situated somewhere. The concept of horizon is the core of Gadamer's description of historical understanding. When we understand the thought of another period we fuse the two horizons: ours and theirs. We do not and cannot simply report the "meaning" of a historical text or event. A constitutive element of historical understanding is, of course, the attempt to understand the horizon of meaning of another historical period. But Gadamer emphasizes that the interpreter's particular horizon is also constitutive. The two horizons fuse

into a new entity—the interpretation. As Gadamer puts it: "But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by placing ourselves within a historical situation. Rather, we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within a situation" (271).

Another way of putting this is that the concept of the horizon is a necessary function of the situatedness of knowledge. The concept of something like a horizon is necessary to an approach to knowledge that seeks to avoid the abstraction of modernism. It provides a clear understanding of what is entailed by this situatedness and renders unintelligible the concept of disembodied knowledge. It also allows for the possibility of different horizons of meaning that will produce different interpretations. Gadamer notes, "Horizons change for a person who is moving" (Gadamer 1975, 271). The person—feminist—who inhabits a feminist horizon of meaning will inhabit as well a different interpretation of a text; the fusion of horizons will produce another, quite different, result. This goes a long way toward explaining how it is that feminists quite literally see a different world. That postmoderns cannot explain this phenomenon, conversely, constitutes a serious liability of their approach.

The third issue that has troubled the relationship between postmodernism and feminism is the allegedly nihilistic character of postmodern thought. Critics have charged that it obviates the possibility of a feminist politics, that postmodernism is concerned solely with word-play and, thus, lacks the possibility of social critique that is the foundation of feminism. Rejecting the foundationalism of modernism, postmodernism offers nothing to replace it: no meaning, no truth, and, most important, no politics. Whether these charges apply equally to all theorists labeled "postmodern" is not my concern here.[5] My point is rather that the perception of postmodernism as nihilistic has been a major stumbling block to the formation of a postmodern feminism.

The aspect of Gadamer's work that provides a counter to postmodern nihilism is his emphasis on ontology. Gadamer's concept of ontology defines his distinctive approach to hermeneutics. For Gadamer, understanding necessitates ontology: to be situated, to have a horizon, is to *be* somewhere. In *Truth and Method* he identifies his project as the attempt to determine if Heidegger's ontological radicalism can contribute to the construction of a historical hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975, 232). This question is answered with a strong affirmative. Gadamer claims that Heidegger's ontology supplies hermeneutics with the universal framework that it requires. Specifically, by removing the "ontological obstructions"

of the scientific concept of objectivity, Heidegger's ontology discloses the forestructure of understanding, that is, the unexamined presuppositions that make all understanding possible (234–35).

Gadamer's turn toward ontology is not likely to appeal to many feminists. Ontology, like metaphysics, is associated with all the masculinist baggage of modernism that feminism has repudiated. Further, most of the discussions of theory and method within feminism have been couched in terms of epistemology; little attention has been paid to ontology. Thus there has been no incentive for feminists to embrace a theory that focuses on ontology. But Gadamer's ontological perspective is worthy of close analysis, even from a feminist perspective. Gadamer's ontology is not a modernist concept. His discussion of Being does not involve an appeal to a universal, abstract concept that transcends human existence. Rather, Gadamer's ontology is a function of the necessary situatedness of human knowledge: "Being that can be understood is language" (Gadamer 1975, xxii). This simple statement encapsulates Gadamer's conception of the indissoluble connections between Being, language, and understanding. Understanding is an ontological event and also—necessarily—a linguistic event. If all understanding is linguistic and Being that can be understood is language, then the distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears. Gadamer is not replacing epistemology with an abstract, quasi-mystical ontology but, in Linda Alcoff's terms, defining an "ontology of truth" (Alcoff 1996).

A more positive way of putting the case for Gadamer's ontological perspective is that a linguistically articulated ontology defines the situatedness that feminism requires. Gadamer's emphasis on ontology provides an alternative to what Teresa Ebert has defined as the "ludic" tendency of postmodernism (Ebert 1996). But, and most important, he does so in a way that does not reinstate modernist absolutism. Understanding, Gadamer claims, is ontological because it is always from somewhere. This "somewhere" is not an abstract and transcendental "being." Nor is it the free-floating play of the postmodern. Rather, it is language: "Language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized" (Gadamer 1975, 350). Thus language, ontology, and understanding merge; comprehending one takes in all three: "we are seeking to approach the mystery of language from that conversation that we ourselves are" (340). It is only through language that we have a world, or even an "I" or "we."

Gadamer's linguistic ontology, thus, far from resurrecting modernism, is a manifestation of a concept that has appeared in the work of several

twentieth-century philosophers: the ungrounded ground. The most notable parallel is to the work of Wittgenstein and his understanding of the "riverbed" of meanings that construct social understanding. Wittgenstein's riverbed is a set of linguistic understandings that, although not fixed or universal, provides the possibility of meaning and understanding for an ongoing society. Gadamer's ontology provides a similar ungrounded ground. Understanding is always from somewhere; hence the necessity of ontology. But that somewhere is always changing, it is never fixed. Horizons shift; situations and, hence, meanings, change. But there must always be a place from which meaning is possible; we must always be somewhere in order to have a horizon.

The fourth issue that has problematized the relationship between postmodernism and feminism is change—the question of what strategies feminists should use to alter a social reality that subordinates women. This issue is closely related to that of the "social dupe" that I discussed above, but raises a wider set of problems. If, as the postmoderns claim, social reality is constituted by its discursive formations, then where does change come from? If there is no Archimedean point from which to define reality and truth, how do we go about changing those discursive formations?

Postmoderns are at best vague on this issue. Foucault's work is a good example of this vagueness. Foucault claims that there are gaps and silences between discourses; subjugated knowledges can rise to the surface, breaking the hegemony of established discourses of knowledge. But exactly how this occurs is not specified. In Foucault's accounts change appears to be serendipitous—it just happens, and how or why is unclear. How social reformers might foster change or influence its direction is equally unclear.

A superficial analysis of Gadamer's theory leads to the conclusion that his approach is equally vague. Worse, his focus on authority, tradition, and, most notably, prejudice, seems to preclude change altogether. But this is not all there is to the story. The key to an understanding of Gadamer's approach to change is his concept of prejudice, yet this concept is the most problematic aspect of his hermeneutics for feminism. His use of the term is, in many ways, misleading. Although the term occupies a position in his theory that is very similar to Wittgenstein's concept of the language game, the connotations of the term "prejudice" obscure this similarity. If Gadamer had employed another terminology, the barrier to a feminist interpretation would likely be considerably less. But he did not, and so Gadamer's thought is unavoidably linked to the

concept of prejudice. There is even some evidence that he employed the term to be deliberately provocative. In "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," he defines his use of prejudice as a "provocative formulation" that he is using to "restore to its rightful place a concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and English Enlightenment" (Gadamer 1976, 9).

Despite the centrality of prejudice for Gadamer's thought, his treatment of it is not without ambiguity. Some of his discussions of prejudice describe it as beyond our consciousness, a force over which we have no control: "We are always dominated by conventions. In every culture a series of things is taken for granted and lies fully beyond the explicit consciousness of anyone, and even in the greatest dissolution of traditional forms, mores, and customs the degree to which things held in common still determine everyone is only more concealed" (Gadamer 1981, 82). He identifies his use of prejudice as deriving from German legal terminology in which a "prejudice" is a provisional legal judgment rendered before a final verdict is reached (Gadamer 1975, 240). This legal definition is central to Gadamer's objection to the Enlightenment's redefinition of prejudice as "unfounded judgment." It reveals, for him, the necessity and legitimacy of prejudice. It also reveals another aspect of the similarity between Gadamer's approach and that of Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein argues, "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (Wittgenstein 1958, §242). Gadamer's prejudice and Wittgenstein's agreements in judgments both define a necessary and unavoidable aspect of human knowing.

For Gadamer, then, prejudice gives us a world of understanding and, precisely because of this, is beyond us—but not entirely. One of the dominant themes of Gadamer's hermeneutics is his claim that prejudices can be both revealed and examined and, indeed, that it is the purpose of hermeneutics to do precisely this. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer refers frequently to the "tyranny of hidden prejudices" (Gadamer 1975, 239); the overcoming of this tyranny is the stated goal of the work. At the very end of *Truth and Method* he declares: "Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed toward escaping their thrall" (446). We can and must, he asserts, isolate prejudices and thus suspend their validity for us (266). This is made possible by "our human experience of the world." Our faculty of judgment "consists precisely in the possibility of taking a

critical stance with regard to our every convention" (496).

But we must look beyond *Truth and Method* for an analysis of the role of hidden prejudices and, most important, the method by which they are overcome. In "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," Gadamer claims that "[t]o denounce something as a prejudice is to suspend its presumed validity; in fact a prejudice in a strict sense of that term cannot get hold of us unless we are sufficiently unconscious of it. But we cannot successfully take a prejudice into account so long as it is simply at work; it must be somehow provoked" (Gadamer 1979, 157). Gadamer defines this provocation as the fruit of a "renewed encounter with tradition," a complex phenomenon that he analyzes at length. Such an encounter necessarily involves self-understanding and the readiness of self-criticism. Without this, "historical understanding would be neither possible nor meaningful" (107). But this self-understanding and criticism, in turn, depend on a preunderstanding that is "prefigured" by the "determinate tradition" in which the interpreter lives (108).

Gadamer's paradoxical conclusion, then, is that our ability to suspend and examine prejudices is a product of our preunderstanding of our historical situatedness, which is in turn a product of the tradition in which we live. The explanation for this seeming paradox is found in Gadamer's concept of historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is the "privilege of modern man to have a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions" (Gadamer 1979, 110). In other words, what makes it possible for us today to take a reflective stance toward our traditions is itself the product of a tradition that has evolved in our time: historical self-consciousness. By employing historical self-consciousness we can avoid the sanctimoniousness of the interpreter who uncritically listens to a voice reaching out from the past and, instead, embrace a reflective posture toward tradition and, consequently, toward ourselves (111).

Another aspect of Gadamer's explanation of the phenomenon of the provocation of prejudices lies in his concept of "experience." Every experience, he claims, is a confrontation—it sets something new against something old (Gadamer 1979, 108). The disruption of a new experience, in particular, can reveal a previous opinion to be untenable (Gadamer 1976, 92). The constant juxtaposition of tradition and new experiences, understood in the context of the historical situatedness of all understanding, provides Gadamer's hermeneutics with its critical possibility. Against the critics who label his approach conservative Gadamer states: "It is a grave

misunderstanding to assume that emphasis on the essential factor of tradition that enters into all understanding implies an uncritical acceptance of tradition and sociopolitical conservatism" (Gadamer 1979, 108). Hermeneutics, in Gadamer's definition, is positioned both inside and outside tradition, but the "outside" is a function of the tradition itself. At one point he defines this as a position "between strangeness and familiarity" (Gadamer 1988, 76). By asking critical questions of traditions we suspend their validity while never stepping entirely out of that tradition.

The aspect of this critical stance that is particularly relevant to feminism is Gadamer's concept of true and false prejudices. We must, Gadamer asserts, be able to distinguish between blind prejudices that thwart understanding and those that illuminate—between false and true prejudices (Gadamer 1979, 156). In *Truth and Method* he asks: "What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?" (Gadamer 1975, 246). Although it is clear that Gadamer sees his task as making this distinction, he also cautions that there is no easy formula by which this is accomplished. The interpreter cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that make understanding possible from those that hinder it. Gadamer's answer to how this difficult separation is accomplished is to appeal once again to historical self-consciousness. The interpreter, aware both of her own historical situatedness and that of the tradition she studies, can assess the validity of the tradition because of the temporal distance that separates her from it (263–66).

The fact that Gadamer draws a distinction between true and false prejudices reveals that his concept of prejudice, far from precluding the possibility of change, incorporates change/critique into the very definition of the concept. Specifically, Gadamer's concept of prejudice explores the difficult topic of how change can occur in the context of situatedness. Once we abandon the Archimedean point of modernist rationality, this problem looms large, particularly for those, like feminists, who want to effect social and political change. Gadamer's emphasis on social situatedness appears to lead to the social determination that is the flip side of modernist rationality. His assertion that Being is language, that the linguisticality and situatedness of our knowing constitutes us, seems to preclude the possibility of change. But his concepts of historical consciousness and new experiences suggest another conclusion. His theory explains how change can occur within the context of situated knowledge. The conversation that we are is always in motion, in flux.

What I am arguing, then, is that a significant advantage of Gadamer's perspective is that it provides concrete strategies to effect change. By contrast, the postmoderns' theories lack substantive proposals. The best that Foucault, for example, can do is to assert that discourses do indeed change and that this has something to do with subjugated knowledges. Derrida does not even offer a theory. Judith Butler, the most prominent postmodern feminist, has been widely criticized for advancing a theory that appears to preclude change altogether. It is ironic, then, that the "conservative" Gadamer offers a theory that is more substantive than any of these theorists.[6] His concepts of historical self-consciousness, horizon, and true and false prejudices provide, as it were, the skeleton on which a theory of change can be fleshed out. He tells us *how* change occurs, not just that, somehow, it does.

Another advantage of Gadamer's approach is that he roots his theory of change in the linguistic sphere of understandability in which we move. If, as Gadamer argues, our linguistic situatedness gives us a world and meaning, then it must be from this situatedness that change occurs. In other words, there is no place outside the conversation that we are that a new world of meaning can be constructed. To attempt to do so would be to abandon intelligibility. But, in Gadamer's view, the conversation/horizon in which we move is not fixed. It changes with new experiences, with our understanding of historical consciousness. We change *from somewhere* and within the intelligibility that alone constitutes meaning.[7]

Perhaps the best way of summarizing the contrast I am suggesting between postmodernism and Gadamerian hermeneutics is to return to a point mentioned briefly above: that Gadamer's position avoids the negativism implicit in much postmodern thought. This difference was highlighted in the 1981 exchange between Gadamer and Derrida. One of the charges leveled by Derrida was that Gadamer was seeking the "truth" of the text and hence replicating modernist metaphysics. That this charge is unfounded is obvious to anyone who has studied Gadamer's work. Gadamer's hermeneutics repudiates traditional hermeneutics' insistence on a single, unitary truth of the text. But in a sense not intended by Derrida, this charge is significant. Although Gadamer is not seeking *the* truth of the text, he is nevertheless seeking truth. The basic presupposition of his hermeneutics is that when an interpreter approaches a text he/she presupposes that the text transmits truth to us and that it is his/her job to uncover that truth (Gadamer 1979, 154). The interpreter further assumes that the text is an element of the tradition that constitutes our

understanding. For both of these reasons the interpreter approaches the text with a positive attitude. The hermeneutic circle for Gadamer is not vicious but, rather, the positive possibility of all understanding. "Hermeneutics must proceed with the assumption that whoever wants to understand has a bond with the subject matter that is articulated and handed down and is, or becomes, connected with the tradition out of which what is handed down speaks" (Gadamer 1988, 75). In other words, "A person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something" (Gadamer 1975, 238).

The contrast between this attitude and that of Derrida could not be more stark. Derrida assumes the impossibility of meaning and understanding and defines the task of deconstruction as linguistic play. Since there is no situatedness that anchors meaning, deconstruction can spin in any direction; any interpretation is as valid as any other interpretation. By denying the possibility of meaning or understanding, Derrida denies the legitimacy of the activity of interpretation itself. While Gadamer's hermeneutics does not impose a final meaning, by positing the possibility of meaning per se it avoids the negativism of Derrida's approach.[8]

This difference between Gadamer and Derrida is both elusive and significant. What feminism has been about from its inception is a protest against the meaning assigned to "woman" and an argument that that meaning must be changed. Gadamer's hermeneutics allows feminism to talk about meanings and change in a way that, although not absolutist or foundationalist, nevertheless does not deny the possibility or desirability of establishing meaning. A Derridean postmodernism, by denying both, makes it impossible for feminists to articulate their goals. Feminism is not about linguistic play, but about changing meanings and hence changing society. This cannot be articulated in the context of Derrida's theory.[9]

It has been my argument in the foregoing analysis that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a concrete and useful theory of change that is relevant to feminism—an ontology of change. Gadamer repeatedly argues that it is the task of hermeneutics to critically assess the tradition that situates and defines us. I have argued that this provides a blueprint for how feminist change can and does take place. But I also recognize that many feminists will find this argument unconvincing. From a feminist perspective Gadamer's statement of purpose seems grossly to underestimate what fem-

inism is up against. The "we" that Gadamer continually refers to is a category that women find problematic. It describes the understandings that constitute the masculinist establishment against which feminism is struggling. This also true of Gadamer's frequent references to "the tradition." From a feminist perspective, a central aspect of Gadamer's "tradition" is a set of assumptions about gender that grounds Western thought, extending from the inception of that tradition to the present, in which it is robustly healthy. Declaring that feminists should employ Gadamer's hermeneutics to "critically assess" this monolith seems almost laughable.[10]

These reservations are significant; feminists are right to be wary of an approach rooted in tradition. What I am arguing is that what appears to be a liability can be converted into an asset, that is, that Gadamer's theory can provide a description of how feminists approach the task of criticizing and changing tradition. If, as Gadamer argues, this tradition is what we "are," then it is only through conversation with it that change will be effected. A key element of Gadamer's theory describes how that conversation proceeds: the fusing of horizons. Gadamer argues that the interpretations of texts change as the horizon of the interpreter changes. Although both the text and the interpreter inhabit a horizon—this constitutes their ontological situatedness—as the horizon of the interpreter changes, the interpretation, and, hence the "truth" of the text, changes with it. The perspective of changing horizons provides a fruitful way of explaining how feminists approach the texts of the tradition. These texts constitute the background in which meaning is constituted in our culture. It is therefore both unavoidable and necessary that feminists examine these texts. But the horizon of feminist analysis yields a new interpretation of those texts; the fusing of the two horizons produces a new truth. Reading the "classics" of the Western tradition as a feminist reveals hitherto hidden aspects of those texts. It exposes their patriarchal prejudice by isolating and suspending it; it reveals this prejudice as false. But, as much as the feminist horizon differs from that of the masculinist tradition, it is still a reflection on the texts of that tradition rather than the creation of a truth out of nothing. The language of our tradition gives us the possibility of meaning and understanding. It is from within that tradition, not from an Archimedean point of feminist truth, that we change it.[11]

From a Gadamerian perspective, we could define what the feminist movement has been working toward since its inception as the isolation and suspension of prejudices, the uncovering of false prejudices. The well-

known consciousness-raising movement of the 1960s is a good example of this. One of Gadamer's descriptions of hermeneutics is "between strangeness and familiarity." This description fits the consciousness-raising movement very aptly. The women in this movement were, in Gadamer's terminology, isolating aspects of the prejudices that constitute women's inferiority and, consequently, suspending their validity. These familiar prejudices, once isolated, were first interpreted as strange, and then judged to be false rather than true prejudices. And it was these insights that led feminists to reject those prejudices and attempt to replace them.

Interpreting feminist practice in these Gadamerian terms provides a way of dismissing the reservations that feminists have had with regard to Gadamer's reliance on tradition. But another set of reservations is in order concerning Gadamer's theory. Changing horizons and suspension of prejudices do, indeed, describe feminist practice, but it is dangerous to lose sight of the tenacity of the tradition and prejudices that feminism opposes. Feminists can and do shift horizons and isolate prejudices, revealing the workings of patriarchy as false rather than true prejudices. But it would be misleading to suggest that when feminists expose the falsity of a prejudice it simply disappears. On the contrary, what feminists have discovered is that the prejudice assigning an inferior status to women is one of, if not the, central tenets of the Western tradition. It is so deeply rooted that its isolation and suspension would call into question the entirety of that tradition. Feminists have discovered, in other words, that it is a prejudice that will not be erased overnight.

But feminists have also discovered that the Western tradition provides them, as well as other marginalized groups, a point of entry into the tradition that can be the basis for critique. Elements of the Western tradition, most particularly arguments for the equality and dignity of all human beings, offer a means of exposing the falsity of prejudices that are also part of that tradition. Another way of putting this is that there are internal contradictions within the tradition that can be exploited for feminist purposes. Furthermore, as Gadamer himself points out, the Western tradition is self-reflective—it allows us to see ourselves as products of an ongoing tradition that is not fixed, but changing. This self-reflection allows feminists to place their critique within the tradition while at the same time transcending it.

This interpretation of the elements of Gadamer's theory leads me back to the thesis that I stated at the outset: the Gadamerian ontology of

change offers feminism a more viable strategy than the currently popular perspective of postmodern feminism. The two approaches, despite their radically different origins, share certain basic assumptions that facilitate comparison. In particular, there is an odd convergence between Gadamer's theory and that of Judith Butler's postmodern feminism. Gadamer argues that language constitutes our world and our being; Butler that discourses, particularly the discourses of gender, constitute our subjectivity. Butler argues that our gendered beings are constituted by our actions, and that the speech acts that constitute gender constitute us. This theory has been the basis of much fruitful feminist analysis. But it has also raised serious problems. Chief among these is the problem of how anyone, and particularly feminists, can escape this gendered constitution of subjectivity. Butler is adamant in her assertion that opposing the discourse of gender with its opposite is as much controlled by that discourse as is conformity to it. This leaves her with few options for resistance. She argues that "gender performativity involves the difficult labor of deriving agency from the very power regimes that constitute us, and which we oppose" (Butler 1995, 136). She talks about disrupting the discourse from within, about subversion, again from within, about being "critically queer." But these are vague prescriptions. Even within a sympathetic feminist community, many regard them as inadequate. They leave us in the uncomfortable position of attempting to effect change without having the means to do so.

It has been the point of this paper to argue that Gadamer's description of how the traditions that constitute us can be changed from within surmounts the problem of how to "derive agency from the very power regimes that constitute us." His theory of the isolation and suspension of prejudices, discerning true from false prejudices, and changing horizons offers a positive theory of change that is precluded by the negativism of theorists such as Butler and Derrida. Gadamer describes how we can both be constituted by language/discourse and critically assess it. This is an important insight for feminists as they try to redefine the goals of feminism in the context of the antifoundationalism of contemporary thought. The absolutist foundations of modernism have been overturned in both epistemology and ontology. Contemporary theorists emphasize the constitutive role of language and the universality of linguistic understanding. That this paradigm has created both opportunities and problems is evident in recent feminist theory and practice. My argument has been that Gadamer's hermeneutics offers a way of negotiating the antifoun-

dational paradigm in a way that is useful for feminism. What I call his ontology of change reveals that presupposing the situatedness of knowledge does not preclude but, rather, necessitates critique.

Notes

1. For the key writings in this debate see Gadamer (1975), Habermas (1970), and Apel (1971).

2. Warnke mentions the debate in her 1987 book, but her book is not written from a feminist perspective.

3. The exceptions to this are Warnke (1993), Buker (1990), and Bowles (1984). The 1986 (Wachterhauser, ed.) collection, *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy,* contains no references to women, gender, or feminism. The 1991 (Silverman, ed.) collection, *Gadamer and Hermeneutics,* has one brief (7 page) feminist response to Gadamer's hermeneutics (Schott 1991).

4. I elaborate this argument in Hekman (1983).

5. I have argued that this charge applies to Derrida but not Foucault (1995).

6. The position I am taking here is consistent with Linda Alcoff's "left Gadamerianism" (1996).

7. I elaborate this theory with regard to Wittgenstein in Hekman (1999, 2000).

8. For a compatible argument, see Hoy (1987).

9. I do not think this criticism applies to Foucault, however. His theory of discourses establishes clear rules for defining truth. And, although his theory of change is not well articulated, it is nevertheless clear that political change is the goal of his analyses.

10. See Schott (1991) for a version of this argument.

11. For an interesting example of this, see the work of Fiorenza (1983, 1991). She develops a feminist Biblical hermeneutics based on the assertion that "our heritage is our power."

References

Alcoff, Linda. 1996. *Real Knowing.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Apel, Karl-Otto, ed. 1971. *Hermeneutik und ideologiekritik.* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Bowles, Gloria. 1984. "The Uses of Hermeneutics for Feminist Scholarship." *Women's Studies International Forum* 7: 185–88.

Buker, Eloise. 1990. "Feminist Social Theory and Hermeneutics: An Empowering Dialectic." *Social Epistemology* 4:1: 23–39.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble.* New York: Routledge.

———. 1993. *Bodies That Matter.* New York: Routledge.

———. 1995. "For a Careful Reading." In *Feminist Contentions,* ed. Seyla Benhabib et al. New York: Routledge.

Derrida, Jacques. 1989. "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

Ebert, Teresa. 1996. *Ludic Feminism and After.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler. 1983. *In Memory of Her.* New York: Crossroads.

———. 1991. "Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation." In *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge,* ed. Sunja Gunew. New York: Routledge.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg 1971. "Rhetorik, hermeneutik und ideologiekritik." In *Hermeneutic und ideologiekritik*, ed. Karl-Otto Apel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

———. 1975. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward.

———. 1976. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. David Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1979. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." In *Interpretive Social Science*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1981. *Reason in the Age of Science*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1988. "On the Circle of Understanding." In *Hermeneutics Versus Science?*, ed. John Connolly and Thomas Keutner. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press.

———. 1989. "Reply to Jacques Derrida." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1970. *Zur logik der sozialwissenschaften*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

———. 1977. "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*." In *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press.

Hekman, Susan. 1983. "Beyond Humanism: Gadamer, Althusser, and the Methodology of the Social Sciences." *Western Political Quarterly* 36: 98–115.

———. 1995. *Moral Voices/Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

———. 1999. "Backgrounds and Riverbeds: Feminist Reflections." *Feminist Studies* 25:2: 427–48.

———. 2000. *The Future of Differences: Truth and Method in Feminist Theory*. Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell.

Hoy, David. 1987. "Jacques Derrida." In *The Return of Grand Theory*, ed. Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Michelfelder, Diane, and Richard Palmer, eds. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Schott, Robin. 1991. "Whose Home is it Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In Silverman, *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*.

Silverman, Hugh, ed. 1991. *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. New York: Routledge.

Wachterhauser, Brice, ed. 1986. "Introduction: History and Language in Understanding." In *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1987. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

———. 1993. "Feminism and Hermeneutics." *Hypatia* 8:1: 81–98.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1958. *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan.

8

Toward a Critical Hermeneutics

Robin Pappas and William Cowling

In "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," Hans-Georg Gadamer tells us that hermeneutics is a "technical skill" *(Kunstlehre)* that, in a manner similar to "rhetoric . . . can designate a natural capacity of human beings . . . for intelligent interchange with one's fellows" (Gadamer 1989, 328). In this view, hermeneutics is not merely the ability to render a text understandable through a set of well-defined rules, but is, rather, a practical and foundational exercise in community. Thus delineated, hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, marks a rich and vast enterprise within which human beings are positioned as inescapably entangled with one another in communicative action.

Ideally, for Gadamer, participants would bring individual and complex histories to bear on the conversation that gathers members of the community together in an ongoing exchange the character of which is always evolving. The aim of such a project culminates in what Gadamer refers to as a "fusion of horizons." This "fusion of horizons" that ensues when human beings engage in the "intelligent interchange" that marks the

event of genuine hermeneutic understanding is, as Georgia Warnke notes, "a transformation of the initial positions of both 'text and interpreter'" and is "a consensus over meanings that reveals new dimensions of *die Sache* (the "matter at hand") and issues in a new stage of the tradition of interpretation" (Warnke 1987, 107). If, however, the idea of consensus is construed too narrowly (as Warnke seems to believe is the case in the critiques of Gadamer offered by Habermas and Apel), the fundamental sense of the fusion of horizons as Gadamer intends it is lost. In other words, if consensus is defined as a systematized reproduction of universal, established ideologies and political relationships, it (consensus) forecloses the possibility of the kind of "interchange" Gadamer describes. Warnke argues that, for Gadamer, the fusion of horizons is a constitutive act of communication that is both *partial* and *situated* (107). We share Warnke's opinion that Gadamer characterizes communication within a context that responds to real, interpersonal relationships. Additionally, Gadamer's extensive and innovative revision of the classical philosophical concept of *phronesis* (practical knowledge) centers on an account of communication that resists privileging autonomous reason over emotion and social interaction. We suggest, therefore, that Gadamerian hermeneutics is congenial to certain aims and practices in feminist theories. Specifically, he rejects methodologies predicated on transcendental epistemological positioning and is suspicious of ethical projects that privilege autonomous subjects. He writes: "I can only consider it a fatal confusion when the dialectical character of all reflection, its relation to the pregiven, is tied to an ideal of total enlightenment. To me that seems just as mistaken as the ideal of fully rational self-clarity, of an individual who would live in full consciousness and control of his impulses and motives" (Gadamer 1989, 572). Gadamer's suspicion of transcendental and autonomous positioning derives from his conception of the fusion of horizons. According to the dynamics of intelligent interchange, speaking subjects relinquish their nominal claims to autonomy in order to understand one another.

However, even though the act of communication is necessarily partial and situated, the fact that Gadamer does not qualify or modify his description of the interaction with "one's fellows" is, we believe, notable. To be sure, Gadamer grounds the "act of understanding" (Gadamer 1989, 544) in the everyday, lived experience constitutive of *phronesis*. Following Aristotle, Gadamer establishes *phronesis* as the mode of knowing within which hermeneutical consciousness emerges and which makes ethical

life possible. Nevertheless, Gadamer does not develop in concrete ways the political potential at stake in an interchange involving the "transformation of initial positions" noted by Warnke. As Lorraine Code has observed, "Gadamer does not take power into account, either as a given or as a goal" (Code 1991, 201). Moreover, he consistently avoids demonstrating the ways in which such communicative events arise within actual contexts of implicit and explicit systems of political hierarchy that constrain the expression of a so-called natural capacity (Gadamer 1987, 328), contexts that, historically, are further marked by gender difference. Thus, the possibility of instantiating intelligent interchanges is not fulfilled in Gadamer's project alone. Gadamerian hermeneutics, which does not take gender into account, requires feminist critique to address this lacuna.

Although the potential community emerging in hermeneutical inquiry described by Gadamer is indebted to "classic" Western philosophical thought for its lexicon and methodology, this debt to tradition figures as precisely the problem (*Fragestellung*) at the heart of Gadamer's own project. The issue of what to do about the Other, and specifically woman, with respect to tradition goes unanswered in Gadamer. As William Cowling notes in "The Presence and Absence of the Feminine in Plato's Philosophy," the male philosopher does not self-consciously discern the role of difference in discourse. Ultimately, his training, for all its critical rigor, risks reproducing the same. In this case, Gadamerian hermeneutics risks marginalizing feminist discourse as an unsuitable partner in the intelligent interchange at the outset. Cowling writes, "If I speak alone I risk losing the power of connection that arises from the interplay of voices. . . . But I discover very quickly that combining my voice with hers is difficult. I have not been trained to work with *her*; my training has reinforced the many guises of autonomy" (Tuana and Cowling 1994, 244). Possibilities for establishing and maintaining any viable philosophical, social, ethical community of men and women necessarily arise within intransigently gendered paradigms. While Gadamer's revision of the concepts of *phronesis* and prejudice are useful for thinking about feminist ethics, his project will respond to concrete experience only when it is read according to a strategy that foregrounds gender and politics. Consequently, we propose to synthesize aspects of Gadamerian hermeneutics with feminist philosophy in an effort to expand Gadamerian hermeneutics in a way that enriches feminist discourse.

In this chapter we initiate a feminist critique of power dynamics that remain unthematized and potentially invidious in Gadamer's account of

the act of understanding. In particular, we will explore possibilities for revealing the kinds of understanding and community that Gadamer adumbrates, in light of the political and social considerations raised by feminist discussions of epistemology and ethics. We call this project of extending Gadamerian hermeneutics to incorporate gendered, political, and social aspects of understanding a "critical hermeneutics."[1]

The task of developing a critical hermeneutics involves an analysis of the concrete and specific ways in which the formal character of conversation arises. We argue that a critical hermeneutics provides a much needed corrective to Gadamerian hermeneutics by locating conversation in the material, embodied agents who participate in the dialogue.[2] We show that "the matter at hand," the conversation itself, responds to the explicit situatedness of the participants in the conversation, situatedness that accounts for gendered and material components constitutive of the experiences they bring to conversations. Although Gadamer highlights the significance of experience within the context of hermeneutical consciousness, he does not attend to the real, lived frameworks according to which such experience is constructed and that, to some extent, predetermine the scope and end of conversations. As Joan Scott and others argue, the grounding of knowledge claims in "experience" as an uncontested category is tantamount both to universalizing experience and to eliding the constructed and mediated nature and, so, the very particularity that the term insinuates (Scott 1991; Bellamy and Leontis 1993). Thus, Scott, for instance, warns against foundational claims for experience because these tend to devalorize "[q]uestions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place" (Scott 1991, 777). The potential for this elision of the genealogy of difference has consequences for explicating the Gadamerian concept of *phronesis*, which we develop below. Furthermore, to the extent that we revise the role of experience within knowledge production, we show that it also becomes essential to conceive of ways in which to reconfigure the basis for communities that can develop by practicing "genuine" dialogue.

We argue that much of recent feminist theory concerning the nature and viability of "community" prefigures our discussion as a lively, ongoing conversation that actualizes precisely the sense we mean to convey in "genuine." Inasmuch as many recent articles by feminist authors have drawn attention to apparently incommensurable discrepancies among approaches to ethics, knowledge, and practice, we believe that such dis-

cord contributes a necessary vitality and methodological stimulus to the inquiry in which feminists are engaged. Within the context of this shared inquiry, continuing efforts to test ideas about feminisms specifically, and human interaction more generally, make up the rhetorical framework of the community we are describing, and perform the project we are call-ing critical hermeneutics.

In our effort to advance critical hermeneutics, we ask what kinds of com-munication does hermeneutics, as Gadamer develops it in *Truth and Method,* anticipate within communities of differently situated persons, some—perhaps even most—of whom will not be privy to the most funda-mental "conversations" that define the life of a particular society and the production of meaning within it. We question the extent to which Gadamerian hermeneutics provides a means of evaluating understanding as an explicitly ethical and epistemological practice with social, political, and moral consequences. We do believe that Gadamerian hermeneutics offers a powerful model of communicative practice that promises to develop both understanding and awareness of the personal and intersubjective dynamics underpinning the process. Nevertheless, we will show that there are political and material constraints that Gadamer does not address.

Critical hermeneutics engages these practices as a feminist project that emerges at the intersection of Gadamer's writings and the work of such feminist authors as Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, and Lorraine Code.[3] We show that, in *Truth and Method,* Gadamer provides a necessary but nevertheless insufficient account of communicative practice that criti-cal hermeneutics radically transforms. Furthermore, we show that a crit-ical hermeneutics is required to anticipate and illuminate the limitations of Gadamerian hermeneutics that, we believe, ultimately render mute the conversations of marginalized voices within a society or group.

The nature of the society within which hermeneutical praxis occurs is a central concern for the critical hermeneutics we are developing. The speaking subjects who undertake to understand one another have the obligation to consider both their own situatedness and that of the per-son(s) with whom they speak. What is at stake for the ethical dimension of the community derives, in part, from the historical situatedness of each participant in the conversation, because epistemologies that fail to attend to sociohistorical positioning necessarily attenuate the validity of mar-ginalized voices. Thus, we agree with Lorraine Code when she observes that "[t]he epistemological narratives in which such subjectivities are implicated are about power and empowering, and about accountability

not just *to* the evidence, but *for* the positions from which knowers speak, and to the society or social group where knowledge is circulated or with-held, and differentially distributed" (Code 1995, 174). We also develop our thesis by reading Gadamer's hermeneutics, in part, through the lens of Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges," which are always embodied and, thus, historical and material (Haraway 1991, 187; see also chap. 8).

Furthermore, we demonstrate how a critical hermeneutics, understood in Haraway's account as a critical tool that exploits and embraces an "openness" toward the materiality of actual bodies engaged in conversa-tions, also opens up the possibility for "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universal-ity is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway 1991, 195). We show as well that the Gadamerian notion of historically-effected consciousness as a process of developing a politically sensitive epistemology of positioning allows us to reconstrue his con-ception of *phronesis*, in order to reveal the significance of affect in devel-oping judgment about what one claims to know about the world and in contributing to one's decisions based on that knowledge. The Gadamerian concept of historically-effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichliches Bewusstein*) also allows us to demonstrate ways in which critical hermeneu-tics maintains, as a constitutive component, philosophical and pragmatic opportunities to disobey the cultural and social "rules" that constrain attempts to secure political agency for socially and intellectually mar-ginalized people. In this way, we hope to account responsibly for the material presented in this chapter, by virtue of which we participate in our intellectual community, and that we recognize to be, as Code has termed, "a commodity of privilege" (Code 1991, 266).

Our argument provides a link between Gadamer's hermeneutics and feminist practice. We argue that this process of interreading results in a critical hermeneutics that (1) understands the role of intellectual tradi-tions as they manifest themselves in the actual practices of lived, bodily experience; (2) establishes conditions for the possibility of dialogue that embraces the radical nature of engagement between historically situated speakers whose materiality is brought clearly into view through genuine conversations; and (3) not only disrupts the authority by which Western philosophical tradition asserts epistemologies as autonomous productions of universalized (masculine) subjects, but also directs our attention to the physical, emotional, and social processes constitutive of the very bod-

ies whose conversations figure at the core of this disruption. Thus, critical hermeneutics begins with Gadamer but is not satisfied to remain inattentive to the lived, embodied experiences of the community of participants in the conversation, as we will argue that Gadamerian hermeneutics ultimately must. We will show that the living materiality of historically-effected bodies, whose presence in any authentic conversation defines the actual limits of that conversation, emerges most clearly through a critical hermeneutics.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer demonstrates that hermeneutics is not merely an "art of understanding" but has a richer and more complex trajectory: an ontological significance that plays itself out in the authentic conversations of actual human lives. One of the more important ontological consequences of Gadamerian hermeneutics grows out of a realization that the presumed relationship between subject and object will no longer be the sort of Cartesian dichotomy that confers authority on the fractured perspectives imposed by idealism and realism (see Bernstein 1985, esp. 109–18). Gadamer notes, for instance, that "it is the knower's own being that comes into play" (Gadamer 1989, 490–91). In this way, subjectivity participates in knowledge production as a variable, rather than as a universal given. In rendering autonomous subjectivity a suspect position, Gadamer invites us to reconsider the ways in which our presumed standpoint for understanding comes into play in the production of knowledge.

   Furthermore, Gadamer critically reevaluates the traditional notion of "prejudice."[4] Understanding, Gadamer claims, is not possible until we have taken seriously the role of prejudice in every moment of the communicative act that emerges from hermeneutical inquiry. Due to the superabundance of meaning generated during the process of understanding, Gadamer insists upon the importance of developing an acute awareness of one's prejudices. Developing this awareness is necessary so that one may participate in a dialogue with another by engaging with and admitting the other's claims to truth. Deliberation about one's prejudices results in conversations and subject positions that are necessarily provisional. Thus, as Gadamer notes, "a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (379). To the extent that the truth revealed in dialogue with a text or during a conversation exerts a claim on us according

to its historical specificity, we must interpret its meaning into our own understanding so that our very self-concept is transformed. Consequently, we must consciously and continuously reappropriate our prejudices and offer them up both as grounds for recognizing the truth in the dialogue and as aspects of ourselves that may be acted upon and changed by new knowledge. This process delineates the transformation implicit in historically-effected consciousness. As Gadamer demonstrates, this transformation requires "play." "To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us" (397). In this sense, appropriation involves not merely a seizure, in the form of a claim to knowledge of the text or the Other, but a release, a relinquishing of self. Here lies the ethical component of hermeneutical consciousness. As Gadamer notes, play is not meant "in the sense that the person understanding playfully holds himself back and refuses to take a stand with respect to the claim made on him [*sic*].[5] The freedom of self-possession necessary for one to withhold oneself in this way is not given here, and this, in fact, is what applying the concept of play to understanding implies" (490). The subjectivity that emerges in Gadamerian hermeneutics is neither universal nor transcendental. Rather, it is intersubjective and relational. In order to engage in a conversation that has the potential to produce understanding, one may not "refuse to take a stand with respect to the claim made on him." Therefore, one must analyze and voice one's prejudice.

Although one cannot will understanding, the demands of an authentic dialogue bring to bear those preconceptions that would otherwise preclude the other's claim to truth. So-called objective knowledge, then, becomes impossible since we are never disengaged from our particular and community histories that constantly inform dialogue. Nor do we ever claim foreknowledge of the Other and his point of view. "The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance" (359), and ultimately forecloses the other's claims to truth. This idea of "historically-effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichliches Bewusstein)* (357) further problematizes the Cartesian disruption between body and mind, subject and object. In particular, Gadamer recognizes that partners in hermeneutical experience exert claims on one another that alter their relationship. Gadamer indicates this special relationship constituted in dialogue by referring to a partner in dialogue as a "Thou." He remarks, "the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us. . . . Since here the object of experience is

a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon—as is the knowledge acquired through experience, the understanding of the other person" (358). His notion of historically-effected consciousness raises the possibility of an "authentic conversation" between persons who share, or desire to share, a cooperative space in which understanding emerges.

Clearly, though, the nature of this conversation will depend heavily upon the extent to which these conversation partners address the political underpinnings of the community. This point is especially important when we consider Gadamer's construction of practical deliberation at the heart of all genuine dialogue. Drawing the idea of practical deliberation *(phronesis)* from Aristotle, Gadamer notes that *phronesis* differs from *techne* and *episteme*.[6] Neither technical skill *(techne,* which is the sort of knowledge that, once learned, might eventually be forgotten) nor scientific knowledge *(episteme)* provides adequate grounds for the evolution of genuine conversation. Missing from these terms, states Gadamer, is the idea of "reflective awareness" that is crucial to any true dialogue; and reflective awareness as a component of *phronesis* changes the terms of any dialogic relationship. Reflective awareness alters the terms of the relationship by deepening it through an "ethical know-how" that "unlike that of a technique *(techne),* is not a 'particular thing' or product but rather the '*complete* ethical rectitude of a lifetime'" (Bernstein 1985, 147). *Phronesis,* therefore, emerges not only from a position of de-centered subjectivity, but also through a process of deliberation that produces a relational awareness. In this way, *phronesis* figures in hermeneutical consciousness as the modality according to which understanding functions as an ethical practice. Thus, any authentic conversation will always find itself already situated in a context that reflects and responds to the history and current conditions of the community within which the dialogue emerges.

Understanding, though, requires that each participant in the conversation be held accountable for those prejudices inasmuch as they, as they manifest themselves, are unavoidable and indeed necessary components, which constitute the main feature of the "logic of the question" that informs the conversation. Hermeneutics is, we claim, practical philosophy *(phronesis)* precisely to the extent that participants in a conversation thematize their reflective attentiveness to their situatedness. In other words, people engaged in ethical practice who would avoid misunderstanding one another must both voice their prejudices, even as these shift

and change throughout the conversation, and submit these prejudices to scrutiny. In this way, historically-effected consciousness frames the "dialectic of question and answer" that, as Gadamer notes, "is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but that, as a question, it is related to the answer that is expected . . . [a]nticipating an answer itself presupposes that the questioner is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it" (Gadamer 1989, 377–78).

The "logic of the question" foregrounds inquiry in dialogue as a means of knowledge production derived from nonautonomous and historically situated discursive practice. Moreover, dialogic inquiry establishes knowledge itself as a site of permanent contest. For instance, Gadamer writes: "To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be underdetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. . . . The sense of every question is realized in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question" (Gadamer 1989, 363). Prejudice emerges in conversation to the extent that it plays a somewhat determinative role in the kinds of questions participants will ask and, so, in the issues—and people—that the participants will thematize. However, as Gadamer states, the process of dialogue repositions speakers with respect to these prejudices by exposing both the provisional character of prejudices and the indeterminacy of "the matter at hand."

The determinant character of prejudice is limited when the participants become aware of and then scrutinize the constitutive underpinnings of their prejudice. As the dialogue progresses, speakers revise their prejudices, reframe their questions, and anticipate new answers. Understanding implies a moral demand entailing that participants recognize the performative overflow of their prejudices, in that these determine the participants' capacity to discern not only the information and attitudes they bring to the conversation, but also the participants' role in the reification of alterity, a by-product of the phallocentric social and language systems within which they conduct their conversation. As a result, participants develop a nascent awareness of the extent to which their conversation contributes to condemning nonparticipants to a place outside the dialogue. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutics is a dynamic and polyvalent process of knowledge production.

It is at this point that Gadamerian hermeneutics reveals certain limitations that will, we argue, require a critical hermeneutics to explicate. For instance, given Gadamer's emphasis on the role of historically-

effected consciousness in the "fusion of horizons," we wonder whether or not hermeneutical inquiry will be able to account for the horizons of meanings for those persons who are constantly marginalized within a society. Indeed, can hermeneutical inquiry guided by prejudgments that arise within a historically-effected consciousness play any role at all in a genuine conversation between groups marginalized on the basis of such socially operative categories as gender, race, religion, and sexuality? A more critical approach to hermeneutical inquiry reveals that it is essential to explore the material and embodied nature of these conversations. The demands of *phronesis* that Gadamer locates at the core of hermeneutical inquiry would seem to require such a consideration. As we note above, Gadamerian hermeneutical consciousness resists conceiving of understanding as autonomous knowledge production. Gadamer offers ways of reading the Western philosophical tradition that invalidate many of the traditional philosophical claims to self-sufficiency and transcendental positioning. Proper to hermeneutical consciousness is the prejudice or position constituted through practical deliberation, where participants sketch out the limitations of their perspectives.

Gadamer, however, does not require that participants anticipate the political consequences in the application of their understanding according to these prejudices. That is, Gadamer's construction of *phronesis* emerges in praxis as merely a nod to the ethical component of the applicative mode of hermeneutical consciousness. In this way, Gadamerian hermeneutics can ultimately work to undermine the scope and possibility for subversive political reorientations for those whose disadvantageous positions are simply reinscribed as such. A critical hermeneutics, on the other hand, provides the material, embodied, and situated impetus that initiates and helps delineate the construction and maintenance of an ethical bond between partners in a conversation who might otherwise remain indifferent to the social and political implications of hermeneutical practice.

The critical hermeneutics we are developing attempts to account for those actual persons who have limited or no access to the power structure that is critical to the authentic conversation Gadamerian hermeneutics aims to establish. Gadamer, it seems to us, too often overlooks the extent to which meaning is concretized and so effected as power. Moreover, despite Gadamer's claims that meaning never exists as unmediated by experience or personal history (for instance, in his account of *phronesis*), he does not thematize the body itself as the crucial site of

mediation. But the social bodies that emerge as a consequence of *phronesis* are always gendered bodies. Gadamerian hermeneutics does not attend to the ways in which its account of understanding is necessarily gendered. A philosophical hermeneutics that fails to reveal its debt to a tradition categorically predicated on the privilege of masculine position merely reinscribes both that privilege and the exclusion of its dichotomous Other, the feminine, as given categories and prerequisite determinants of participation in that tradition.[7] A critical hermeneutics, then, provides the necessary link between the unthematized material realities of actual persons engaged in a conversation and the still too socially and politically naive nature of Gadamerian hermeneutics. Even though Gadamer rejects "[t]he standpoint that is beyond any standpoint" (Gadamer 1989, 376), he remains entangled in what we believe is an unacceptable rejection of the role of the material nature of history and historically-effected consciousness. He retains to an extent a version of what Donna Haraway calls the "god-trick." Critical hermeneutics shows that anything that is historically experienced in the manner that Gadamer describes in *Truth and Method* will necessarily be embodied. Even when using language that refers to "partners" (378), Gadamer nonetheless fails to account for the complexity of power differentials constitutive of lived, material experience, which determine possibilities for participating in authentic conversations.

Critical hermeneutics begins by attending to the concern feminists have raised in recent years regarding the extent to which their projects are continuous with those characteristic of Western philosophical tradition that tend to privilege ideals such as autonomous and even adversarial modes of knowledge production, as well as hierarchical relationships among members of philosophical communities. Indeed, many authors have wondered if the trajectories of traditional and feminist methodologies are even mutually exclusionary.[8] For instance, in her consideration of the feminist philosophical investigations produced during the interval between the first and second editions of *The Man of Reason*, Genevieve Lloyd encourages feminist authors to continue projects critiquing the ideals of that tradition. Lloyd asserts that "a good feminist critique of our inherited ideas and ideals of reason is not only consistent with, but demands, a strong commitment to rigorous and imaginative philosophical reasoning" (Lloyd 1993, xv). By subjecting the philosophical tradition to feminist critique, feminists accomplish both a revi-

sion of traditional epistemological frameworks and an undermining of the category "tradition" itself.

The problem that Judith Butler identifies with respect to such categories as woman and queer is applicable to this approach to traditional inquiry. For example, as historically constituted categories, woman and queer function as foundational only insofar as they are applied without analysis of the stereotypical and subtle power dynamics that their use invokes. As categories subject to reinterpretation and reinscription, however, they are no longer simply descriptive of totalized and static groups. As simply descriptive categories, Butler argues, they perform violence, for the terms homogenize subjects' experiences under a generalized typology. This process manifests itself politically and socially, through laws and cultural practices that confine subjects to essentialized and effectively marginalized positions from which to assert any claims to power. However, it is possible to mediate the force of this violence by appropriating the categories within a critical (and, as we show, a critically hermeneutical) context, thereby performing what Butler refers to as reiteration of those categories. Thus, Butler writes, "To ameliorate and rework this violence, it is necessary to learn a double movement: to invoke the category, and, hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest" (Butler 1993, 221). In the same way that Butler's "double movement" unsettles "woman" and "queer" as categories indicative of essential marginalization, we argue that such a rhetorical strategy can successfully de-center "tradition" as a foundational ground of masculine epistemological authority. As a contested category, it is possible (and we agree with Lloyd, necessary) that feminists respond to the "inherited ideas and ideals" embedded within this tradition.

With respect to Gadamer's implicit insistence upon deriving awareness of one's prejudice against the framework of philosophical tradition,[9] critical hermeneutics determines the possibilities both for revising and for incorporating the significant contributions of that tradition. Hence, as Butler avers, "[t]hat the term is questionable does not mean that we ought not to use it, but neither does the necessity to use it mean that we ought not perpetually to interrogate the exclusions by which it proceeds" (221–22). For Gadamer, the provisionality of conversation and text is instantiated by means of historically-effected consciousness, as we note above. Indeed, the provisionality of text functions within hermeneutical consciousness to the extent that, as Gadamer maintains,

a text is "progressively corrected" (Gadamer 1975, 149). This is the point at which tradition emerges through the conversation (in dialogue either with the text or with another person), and is always mediated by the force of prejudice. Nevertheless, the force through which this "correction" occurs remains unarticulated by Gadamer. Butler demonstrates the need to apply critical scrutiny even as we invoke problematic terms. Only the "double movement" (Butler 1993, 221) will perform a "progressive correction" that does not simply essentialize difference or reinscribe political hegemony.

Gadamer conceptualizes understanding as a process of translation and interpretation that culminates in application. Notably, his account of application reflects concerns about the social effects of discourse. Gadamer states, "but for philosophy too I take care to tell my students: you must sharpen your ear, you must realize that when you take a word in your mouth, you have not taken up some arbitrary tool that can be thrown in a corner if it doesn't do the job, but you are committed to a line of thought that comes from afar and reaches on beyond you" (Gadamer 1989, 548). Despite this brief acknowledgement of the impact of philosophical work, Gadamer falls short of explicating the nature and extent of this impact. In this way, his conception of understanding effectively ignores the material conditions that prefigure the conversation and that determine the practical outcome of the conversation. It is through the nonabstract character of application that hermeneutic consciousness can become historicized. Gadamer reminds us that the sense of application appropriate to understanding cannot be actualized apart from its historical effectiveness. In particular, he determines that application is the "central problem of hermeneutics" (307), as integral a part of the process as interpretation and translation. As he remarks, "understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation" (308). To the extent that hermeneutical consciousness concretizes understanding in history, it is an event; to the extent that this event transforms one's horizon of experience in such a way that one discovers new possibilities for action, that event is performative. The act of understanding performs, then, by determining the boundaries of what matters, what historically constitutes matter for consideration,[10] and, consequently, what delimits possibilities for social and political transformation.

What Gadamer does not state, however, is that the field of historically-effected consciousness is always the material: the hermeneutical moment

has material consequences that overflow the dialogue constituting it. Gadamer realizes that hermeneutical consciousness cannot predict the "end" of understanding, or the outcome of the conversation. "Not just occasionally," he writes, "but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author" (Gadamer 1989, 296). Moreover, as a structure inherently dependent on a reciprocal relationship of listening and speaking, dialogue as the vehicle for understanding implicitly promises a "hearing" for marginalized voices that cannot be fulfilled. According to a sympathetic reading, the moral demand of the fluid mode of understanding that Gadamer delineates seems to require the participant to recognize the performative overflow of her prejudices. These determine not only her capacity to learn and derive reflexive awareness of these prejudices, but also her role in the reification of alterity constitutive of linguistic performance as a place outside the very dialogue that must instantiate the validity of a voice before it can be admitted to speak. As Gadamer maintains, "For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted its own validity" (299). As merely a descriptive comment regarding a precondition for engaging in conversation, Gadamer's remark recalls an epistemological "truth." However, establishing validity within an epistemological framework involves far more than a person's intellectual capacities. Contrary to the experience of the hermeneutical subject who can already locate his experience within the phallocentric text of Western history, the historicity of a subject (necessarily marked through history by her gender) accounts for her belonging to the traditional text of culture and assures her place on the margin of the "horizon" Gadamer sketches, and the fact of her experience at the margins of this text does not secure her a voice that will be heard. From this perspective, Gadamer fails to characterize the ethical implications at stake in a dialogue among knowledge-producing agents whose experiences have thus far not afforded them the awareness of their own phallocentric prejudice.

In this sense, by retaining this abstract position, Gadamer also retains an irreducible distance from the lived experiences of fleshed and gendered participants in the conversation, and can never account for the extent to which knowledge is concretized and so effected as power. Code explains that epistemologies that ignore politics necessarily overlook issues like "the availability of knowledge and knowledge-acquisition processes" (Code 1991, 266). It is not enough that Gadamer's account of the intelligent interchange does not explicitly exclude women, let alone

intellectually and economically disenfranchised "welfare women" such as those Code describes. The experience from which practical deliberation arises is not opaque and uniform, but implicated in mechanisms of power and politics. In offering a reading of Foucauldian conceptions of power and politics as a corrective measure for this Gadamerian oversight, Code argues that "[t]hese mechanisms are visible as much in the kinds of knowledge that an epistemological position legitimates or finds worthy of analysis, contrasted with those it excludes, as in assumptions about the people who qualify as knowers" (267). The work of the critical hermeneutics emerging through feminist work focuses on the nature and location of this exclusion by bringing to light the necessarily material and gendered situatedness of actual knowers. More important, by exposing the phallocentric lacuna in philosophical discussions of prejudice and experience, critical hermeneutics brings into sharp relief social and political discourses through which women produce meaning. Thus, it initiates possibilities for their resistance to (and revolutionizing of) the infrastructures that blindly reproduce women's subjugation.

Moreover, despite Gadamer's claims that knowledge never exists as unmediated, the body itself is never thematized. As a result, Gadamer's account of historical effectiveness risks misunderstanding the ways in which mediation is a real, lived fact of experience. Knowledge claims grounded in experience cannot secure a proper sense of historical mediation without the body as mediator, because the body itself counts as part of the material evidence of the historicity of experience, and gendered experience in particular. Moreover, *my* body mediates *my* experience and the knowledge I derive from it. That is, the conception of bodies we mean to discuss maintains them as insufficient grounds for universal claims to shared experience that subsumes difference. Knowledge production embedded as a reconstruction of the same forecloses the dialectic of question and answer. Thus, the task of opening and rearticulating the question cannot be accomplished as long as Gadamerian hermeneutics refuses to account for the possibility of the collapse of dialogic horizon into ideological force, thereby failing to secure the priority of the question. Despite its insistence upon application and concretization, Gadamerian hermeneutics alone cannot perform the critique of ideology that feminist theory rightly demands. It is up to critical hermeneutics to direct hermeneutic consciousness toward a self-understanding that more rigorously accounts for the prejudices by which it produces knowledge, and according to which they determine its possibilities for material actualization.

Many of the material, embodied aspects of a critical hermeneutics are also at work in Donna Haraway's essay, "Situated Knowledges." There she notes that "we need to learn in our bodies . . . how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not . . . [thus] objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment" (Haraway 1991, 190). With respect to Haraway's revision of objectivity, the possibility of a critical hermeneutics that might provide a methodological nexus for feminist conceptions of ethics can begin by revising Gadamer's notion of hermeneutical inquiry based in the epistemological indeterminacy constitutive of the logic of question and answer. Gadamer states, "Every true question requires this openness." He then acknowledges, "[t]he openness of a question is not boundless . . . [i]t becomes a question only when its fluid indeterminacy is concretized into a specific 'this or that'" (Gadamer 1989, 363). It is the "specific 'this or that'" of the question that, we claim, is never adequately accounted for in *Truth and Method*. It remains abstractly characterized as merely the "question" in all of its various guises (Gadamer's notion of the "slanted question," for instance). As long as the question remains a formal "openness" (simply an epistemological/ontological construct) whose specificity is never clearly articulated (in the manner noted by Warnke above), and whose boundedness is limited by its "own horizon," the very real problem of how the question is actually and finally engaged (if only momentarily) in an authentic conversation cannot be properly understood.

It is at this point—where the perpetually abstract nature of the question problematizes Gadamer's account—that Haraway's "situated knowledges" can help to ground us in the embodied, fleshy, material experience of the question properly located in the "partial perspectives" of real, material, embodied knowers. In our understanding of situated knowledges, the openness of the question underlying true dialogue is bounded in practice through concrete limitations imposed by the historically and socially constituted self-awareness of participants in conversations. Although Gadamer acknowledges that the openness of the question is constrained by prejudices, he does not anchor the question or, for that matter, the possibility of the continued openness of the question, in specific material, embodied, gendered conversations. Gadamer's discussion of interaction, with tradition underpinning his conception of intelligent interchange where question and answer takes place, does not explicitly preclude women's participation. Nevertheless, he does not address the

political contexts (at work at the very least in philosophy department hiring policies) that continuously foreclose the openness of any dialogue held by men unaware of the privilege of their gendered position, and who are perhaps unwilling to cede this culturally constituted political advantage. Such foreclosure prohibits the "transformation of initial positions" without which understanding cannot take place. In this way, Gadamer continues to posit a notion of the question that is suspiciously detached and abstracted from the embodied, fleshy realities of conversations that emerge in the partial and situated knowledges of actual human beings.

Haraway's account of situated knowledges, like the "double movement" Butler advocates (in addition to the feminist revision projects we have noted), provides a necessary correction for Gadamer's failure to locate conversations in the way that feminist theories rightly demand. Haraway writes that "[p]ositioning implies responsibility for our enabling practices. . . . That is, admitted or not, politics and ethics ground struggles over knowledge projects . . . [o]therwise, rationality is simply impossible, an optical illusion projected from nowhere comprehensively" (Haraway 1991, 193–94). It is positioning (materiality, gender, race) that opens up the possibilities of partiality and situatedness linking the concrete experiences of actual persons in authentic conversation. This is the basis for responsible knowledge production.

Responsible knowledge, for both Gadamer and the feminist authors we take to be central to the development of a critical hermeneutics, is both situated and utterly partial; "pure" knowledge, in this sense, requires an articulation of prejudice. Prejudice, then, determines the orientation of one's knowledge. Such directionality forms the very basis from which one may derive meaning. But for Haraway, "even the simplest matters in feminist analysis require contradictory moments and a wariness of their resolution, dialectically or otherwise" (Haraway 1991, 195). Apart from the position of political privilege (also material, financial, racial, and so on) from which Gadamer's representatives of "tradition" speak, situated knowledges as Haraway maps them out make possible precisely the unveiling of the political component inherent in any determination of meaning. Situated knowledges are "always marked knowledges; they are re-makings, reorientatings, of the great maps that globalized the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism." We must, according to Haraway, account for the fact that descriptive practice "can never simply be innocently available; descriptions are produced" (111). In the same way, experience and conscious-

ness must be revealed for their hidden intentionality. Haraway's account revises experience such that it functions as precisely the problematized (and not essential) category that Scott calls for. For Haraway, "[w]hat counts as 'experience' is never prior to the particular social occasions, the discourses, and other practices through which experience becomes articulated in itself and able to be articulated with other accounts, enabling the construction of an account of collective experience, a potent and often mystified operation" (113). It is precisely the manner in which this "mystified operation" is rendered "potent" that a critical hermeneutics can begin to disclose. And this disclosure is linked explicitly to the specific terms of the authentic conversations that demarcate the possibility of community.

Furthermore, these authentic conversations occur when the discursive limits of objectivity have been problematized. Indeed, Haraway notes that "objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about." Knowledge production is an act that takes place in the conversations of agents who are embedded in the partial and concretely located intersection of the subject/object dyad. There is no "view from everywhere," nor could there be. Haraway tells us that there is an imperative to privilege "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway 1991, 195). Articulation, from Haraway's view, and in particular the articulation of meaning, occurs in and through the body; the historicity of an idea, concept, and revelation projects meaning into the future according to its physical, material, and political consequences.

Inasmuch as the feminist ideas we have included demonstrate the extent to which meaning production plays out through the construction and reification of gendered typologies, this is not specifically Gadamer's focus; however, the function of this mechanism must be the concern of a critical hermeneutics. Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" forces us to take seriously both the provisionality of meaning and the concrete and embodied locations of an "authentic conversation." Gadamer seems open to such a rereading when he writes that "[o]ur task, it seems to me, is to transcend the prejudices that underlie the aesthetic consciousness, and the hermeneutical consciousness that has been restricted to a technique for avoiding misunderstandings and to overcome the alienations present in them all" (Gadamer 1977, 150). Prejudices, then, are preconditions that establish the possibility of understanding that attends to

epistemological and ethical concerns. In particular, we argue that Gadamer's emphasis upon the development of self-awareness with respect to one's prejudices, as an activity simultaneous with the dialogue that produces understanding, resonates with the kind of project Code envisions in *Epistemic Responsibility*. Code maintains that epistemic responsibility emerges as a position that focuses less on end-states than on efforts to achieve them via an examination of their constitutive processes, with the effect of opening the cognitive subject herself to scrutiny and resisting the determinative or final sense attributed to end-state-focused epistemological considerations. Based on its tendency to disrupt the facade of fixedness that constitutes identity by thematizing the subject's historical situation in all its lived contingencies, Gadamer argues, hermeneutical reflection "renders every ideology suspect in that it makes prejudices conscious" (Gadamer 1990, 283). Thus, Gadamer seems to say, it is only through hermeneutic consciousness that one can make prejudices conscious because it alone occurs apart from "consciousness of application or an intention directed at application." The "problem of application" that Gadamer notes (and that we address in this chapter) then emerges where theory meets practice. Critical hermeneutics challenges Gadamer's ultimately abstracted conception of application while demonstrating the extent to which his account of hermeneutical consciousness may be a useful resource for feminist thought.

Gadamerian hermeneutics is not entirely separate from feminist projects, nor, we argue, is it desirable that it should be so. Above all, Gadamer's extensive discussions of *phronesis* and attention to practical philosophy demonstrate a strong *hope* that the interaction constitutive of hermeneutical consciousness will contribute to a sense of well-being for the participants. More important, by constructing practical deliberation within the context of historically-effected consciousness, Gadamer points to lived experience as a vital source of disruption and reorientation of prejudice and cognitive activity. The feminist commentary we have introduced, however, provides a useful corrective measure to his omission of the constitutive conditions of this experience. Lorraine Code warns against placing too much emphasis on conservative definitions of the role of *phronesis* in cognitive practice. Too much attention to one's limitations, she argues, leads to an epistemic life concerned more with "avoidance of error than with creativity and exploration of new possibilities. There must be room within the larger sphere where good know-

ers *live* . . . for those who take outrageous stances to keep the epistemic community on its toes, to prevent it from settling into complacency or inertia" (Code 1987, 55). Gadamer locates the responsibility of initiating "outrageous" revelatory experiences at the margin of lived-through experience. He claims: "It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked" (Gadamer 1989, 299). In this way, Gadamer's notions of contemporaneity and historically-effected consciousness seem to echo feminist calls for a more conscious and conscientious brand of critique. Such a "method" answers demands for resistance to theoretical fixedness, and anticipates the revision of methodological approaches with relationship to the very tradition they undermine as they draw from the tradition and rearticulate it. Gadamer, unlike his predecessors, takes special care to remind us of the opportunities for creating—and in his later works takes more to task those that impede—understanding, which always involves a material and epistemological transformation.

Critical hermeneutics provides precisely the disloyal conversation demanded by this reading of philosophical tradition, in dialogue with Gadamerian texts, by dint of a method never made explicit and, at the level of affect, in the articulation of a mechanism that produces the event: the real, lived, bodily, engendered experience of understanding. Moreover, this intentional disruption of proper form is, we hope, indicative of the kind of sociopolitical potential produced by a commitment to the ethos and struggle that are constitutive of inviting and maintaining such a material and embodied dialogue. To this extent, a critical hermeneutics is, as is a Gadamerian hermeneutics, specifically an ethical and political undertaking. As Gadamer explains, "A philosophical hermeneutic, as I have attempted to develop it, is 'normative' to the degree that it aims to replace a bad philosophy with a better one. But, it does not propagate a new praxis, and it is certainly out of the question to think that at times hermeneutic praxis, in the concrete, is guided by a consciousness of application or an intention directed at application, let alone application directed at the conscious legitimation of an accepted tradition" (Gadamer 1990, 282). The mystery of hermeneutical consciousness lies in the event during which you and I speak and listen to one another, become convinced of a truth (emerging from "our" conversation while belonging to neither of us), and part, able to engage in another dialogue. Thus, we discover that we are repositioned, in temporal, intellectual, and physical distance, and re-equipped, so to speak, with

that provisional "truth," newly contextualized and belonging to that moment alone, which will arise in the next dialogue, as it relinquishes its prior context when we seek it out and give it up to the new dialogue with our new partners.

Critical hermeneutics, by attending carefully to the partial, situated, and provisional character of meaning, adumbrates a context for dialogism that produces viable, accountable, and politically invigorating discourse. A basic tenet, therefore, of critical hermeneutics is that it open up the possibility "for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard" (Haraway 1991, 195). With respect to gender, it aims to secure an undeniable sense of accountability about the processes through which such classification proceeds.[11] Where such classification fixes the speaking subjects in their categories, misunderstanding inevitably occurs. Consequently, critical hermeneutics cannot satisfactorily name or finally determine the "rules" that make possible its accountability. We come to discover that whereas *techne* applies mind to body, *phronesis* applies body to mind. That is, *techne* achieves its end through a system of preconceived rules, transcendental in source and authority, which mediate, and so determine, what and how the body articulates. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, produces knowledge by mediating the mind, constructed as a transcendental ego, with the body, such that what it is capable of articulating can only ever be provisional and particular, and can produce only a partial consciousness of its relation to the specific kind of "universal" knowledge to which it relates. In this way, the practical or moral aspect of *phronesis* accounts for its material ("real") application because the knowledge it produces, and even the process of such production, undermines the body/mind borders, must undermine them in order to effect itself. As such, critical hermeneutics unravels the very fabric that cloaks binary constructions as infinitely applicable or insurmountable.

The resolution that takes place in hermeneutical consciousness is not an assimilation of Other into Subject, or a subsumption of the particular into the universal. In the dialogue that produces understanding, both are transformed, their relative positions unfixed, and their relationship renegotiated. The interiorization of the foreign, then, does not reproduce a homogeneous subject of homologous knowledge. Rather, it instantiates the very possibility for application of new knowledge within a present situation defined precisely by its heterogeneous character. For feminism, then, as well as for critical hermeneutics, Gadamer reveals to us the per-

petual opening and reinterpretation of questions, the "relentless reading" of which is vital to feminism (Butler 1997, 69). But a critical hermeneutics supplies the missing components in Gadamer's account, which include materiality, performativity, sexuality, and gender itself. Gadamerian hermeneutics alone cannot do the work of locating authentic conversations within the partial and situated character of embodied agents. This is the task of a critical hermeneutics.

Notes

1. See Paul Ricoeur's "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in Ormiston and Schrift (1990); esp. Part II, "Towards a Critical Hermeneutics," in which Ricoeur posits the useful notion of a "hermeneutics of the power-to-be" as a "critique of ideology." While the ideas expressed in this section have certain resonances with the critical hermeneutics we are developing, they nonetheless leave open the specific embodied, material, and gendered aspects of the hermeneutical project that we deem fundamental.

2. For the purpose of this chapter, we will use the words "conversation" and "dialogue" interchangeably. We are aware of the recent and important work about the potential value of implementing one word in favor of the other; however, those debates are tangential to this analysis. For excellent discussions about dialogue and conversation, see also Dale M. Baier and Susan J. McKinstry, eds. (1991) and Jürgen Habermas (1990a).

3. We do not mean to suggest that these are the only feminist authors engaged in such a project. Space prohibits our explication of each contribution. See also Merchant (1990); Fraser (1989); and Harding (1986); as well as the contributors to the volumes in the *Re-Reading the Canon* series.

4. "Prejudice" in the form of "pre-judgment" (*Vorurteil*).

5. Gadamer's language is, of course, masculinist.

6. For an excellent discussion of *phronesis* see Coltman (1988); esp. pages 11–24. Coltman provides a link between Gadamer and Haraway when he notes that "[a]n important aspect of the *techne/phronesis* distinction is whether one can be taught moral knowledge in the same way that one can be taught a technical skill. Gadamer balks at this idea and points to the priority of being situated . . . *[P]hronesis*, in other words, is not in the least objective in the sense of something that stands apart from a subject" (19–20).

7. For excellent discussions of this problem, see also Bordo (1987); Harding (1986); Lloyd (1993); and Merchant (1980).

8. Cf. Sherwin (1988, 13–28); Code (1995, 185–207); Benhabib (1987, 77–95); and Lloyd (1993, 45–76).

9. Which emerges in his re-readings of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Dilthey, Hegel, Heidegger, and so on.

10. We are indebted to Judith Butler's re-vision of materiality for our claim. See especially Butler (1993, 32).

11. Code's conception of epistemological altruism might be useful in future analysis of this idea. See Code (1987).

References

Addelson, Kathryn Pyne. 1983. "The Man of Professional Wisdom." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy,* ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Baier, Dale, and Susan J. McKinstry, eds. 1991. *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. 1977. "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness." In *Feminism and Philosophy,* ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston, and Jane English. Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield Adams.

Bellamy, Elizabeth J., and Artemis Leontis. 1993. "A Geneaology of Experience: From Epistemology to Politics." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6:1: 163–84.

Benhabib, Seyla. 1987. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gillian Controversy and Feminist Theory." In Benhabib and Cornell, *Feminism as Critique.*

Benhabib, Seyla, and Drucilla Cornell, eds. 1987. *Feminism as Critique.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bernstein, Richard J. 1985. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bordo, Susan. 1987. *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays in Cartesianism and Culture.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York: Routledge.

———. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* New York: Routledge.

Clark, Suzanne. 1995. "Julia Kristeva: Rhetoric and the Woman as Stranger." In *Reclaiming Rhetoric: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition,* ed. Andrea A. Lundsford. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Code, Lorraine. 1995. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations.* New York: Routledge.

———. 1991. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 1988. "Credibility: A Double Standard." In Code et al., *Feminist Perspectives.*

———. 1987. *Epistemic Responsibility.* Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England.

Code, Lorraine, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall, eds. 1988. *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Coltman, Rod. 1988. *The Language of Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Heidegger in Dialogue.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.

Fraser, Nancy. 1989. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1990. "Reply to my Critics." In Ormiston and Schrift, *The Hermeneutic Tradition.*

———. 1989. *Truth and Method.* 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

———. 1988. "On the Circle of Understanding." In *Hermeneutics Versus Science?: Three German Views: Essays,* trans. and ed. John M. Connolly and Thomas Keutner. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

———. 1987. "Hemeneutics as Practical Philosophy." In *After Philosophy: End or Transformation,* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1984. "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion." In *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects,* ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

———. 1977. "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem." In *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1975. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." Trans. Hans Fantel. *Graduate Faculty Journal* 51: 67–98.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1990. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality." In Ormiston and Schrift, *The Hermeneutic Tradition.*

———. 1990a. "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method.*" In Ormistan and Schrift.

Haney, David P. 1999. "Aesthetics and Ethics in Gadamer, Levinas, and Romanticism: Problems of Phronesis and Techne." *PMLA* 14 (1): 32–45.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.

Harding, Sandra. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Jaggar, Alison M., and Susan R. Bordo, eds. 1989. *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Kristeva, Julia. 1997. *The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans. Leon Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lloyd, Genevieve. 1993. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. 2d ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Merchant, Carolyn. 1980. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Michelfelder, Dianne P., and Richard Palmer, eds. 1989. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mullett, Sheila. 1988. "Shifting Perspective: A New Approach to Ethics." In Code et al., *Feminist Perspectives.*

Nussbaum, Martha. 1999. *Sex and Social Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ormiston, Gayle, and Alan D. Schrift, eds. 1990. *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Albany: The State University of New York Press.

Palmer, Richard E. 1969. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Scott, Joan. 1991. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17:4: 773–97.

Sherwin, Susan. 1988. "Philosophical Methodology and Feminist Methodology." In Code et al., *Feminist Perspectives.*

Tuana, Nancy, and William Cowling. 1994. "The Presence and Absence of the Feminine in Plato's Philosophy." In *Feminist Interpretations of Plato,* ed. Nancy Tuana. University Park: The Penn State University Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1987. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 1987. "Impartiality and the Civic Public." In Benhabib and Cornell, *Feminism as Critique.*

Part II

Feminist Issues: Enlisting Gadamerian Resources

9

Gadamer's Feminist Epistemology

Linda Martín Alcoff

Feminist epistemology has generally been an Anglo-American affair: the most central work—as done, for example, by Lynn Hankinson Nelson, Sandra Harding, Helen Longino, Elizabeth Potter, Naomi Scheman, Lorraine Code, and Genevieve Lloyd—is solidly, though not exclusively, based within the analytic tradition. This is understandable given that "epistemology" itself is largely an analytic preoccupation. Without question, serious philosophical theories about knowledge are also developed in Continental philosophy, but "epistemology," as the term is actually used, does not mean so much "philosophical theories about knowledge" as it signifies a specific philosophical paradigm for approaching and framing questions about knowledge alongside various assumptions about what can count as a "theory."[1]

My title, then, is meant to be provocative on two counts: claiming that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics constitutes an epistemology even while it is critical of the dominant paradigm of epistemology, and that Gadamer, the conservative Christian who argues that tradition has

intrinsic value, can have a philosophy that is feminist. I am not claiming that Gadamer is a feminist in any intentional sense, but for Gadamer, intentions are always relatively inapplicable anyway. I shall argue that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics—that is, his epistemology—is very useful for feminist theory, and that even more than this, some of his central positions are nascently feminist. In regard to whether or not his account of understanding can be called an epistemology, I make this claim partly on the basis of a broad definition of epistemology that includes work outside the analytic paradigm. If we take epistemology to be concerned with theories of knowledge, and if we leave open all other stipulations for theories of knowledge such as, for example, whether one must engage with the problem of skepticism, many more approaches can be included.[2] A broad definition has the potential advantage of bringing the framing assumptions in one tradition into contact with the contrasting assumptions in other traditions, forcing both to acknowledge their character *as* assumptions and challenging them to become more critically reflective.[3]

Gadamer's account of justification and truth has several original and valuable features. He offers us a way to conceptualize the inevitable locatedness of knowers, not as detriments but as necessary conditions for knowledge. In his account, the act of knowing is modeled on an I-Thou relationship, and in such a relationship the goal is not to eliminate the "I" but to develop a creative and coherent fusion with the position of the Other. Gadamer gives this feature of relatedness ontological primacy, and to the extent discrete subjects and objects figure in his account at all they are derivative upon the prior relation. Thus, subject and object are never pure; these terms denote useful constructs rather than fundamental entities. Gadamer also develops a plurality of types of knowing, and emphasizes the play of movement without closure that characterizes belief-formation and the discernment of meaning. He portrays a more realistic, and less alienated, conception of reason, one that is more easily reconcilable with a recognition of reason's finite contours and historically situated foundations.

Many of these features are in accord with feminist tendencies. In what follows I will explore four of the central features of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics that are particularly useful for feminism: the openness to alterity, the move from knowledge to understanding, holism in justification, and immanent realism. These features are useful for feminism for several reasons, but one of the most important is that they credit

some traditionally *feminine* characteristics as epistemically valuable. I will then address the issue perhaps most problematic for feminists in Gadamer's work: his valorization of tradition. Two initial points must be discussed before I begin.

First, Gadamer's approaches take on some decidedly feminine characteristics in regard to one culturally specific but familiar version of traditional femininity, involving openness, passivity, a tendency to dialogue rather than command, and a heightened awareness of the interdependence and relationality of all properties. To some extent, the arguments below may seem to make Gadamer out to be more "feminine" than "feminist," terms that are taken by many to be in opposition. At least since Beauvoir, to be a feminist has often required transcending and critiquing traditional femininity. Although such feminine characteristics are often prized in women (and correspondingly less often prized in men), they play a significant role in women's general epistemic disauthorization. Considered overly sentimental and weak, we are taken to be inadequate to the hard task of pursuing truth. Emotional connectedness makes us disinclined to entertain hurtful hypotheses, passivity makes us weak in defending our claims against opposition, and the tendency toward dialogue, though it may be helpful at times, has no *necessary* purchase on truth-tracking. To the extent that Gadamer's work discredits the epistemic assumptions behind these claims, it helps to open the field of debate about the kind of intellectual virtues most valuable for achieving reliable knowledge.

Of course, we should not *assume* that either traditionally masculine characteristics or traditionally feminine characteristics are epistemically advantageous, or disadvantageous; my argument is that too often claims about intellectual virtues have been made on the basis of unreflective assumptions and masculinist chauvinism. What we need now is to attempt a fairer assessment of all potential virtues, without ranking them on the basis of their historical association with either masculinity or femininity. This chapter will focus only on some of the feminine characteristics that I believe have the potential to constitute intellectual virtues in regard to practices of knowing.

In representing these characteristics as feminine, I do not mean to imply that femininity is innate to all women, absent in men, or the same across cultural and class differences. I intend for this list of characteristics to refer to the set of socially constructed meanings and practices that have been associated in certain delimited cultural and class contexts more

with women than with men, and that have been more a part of girls' socialization than boys'. Thus, I am not referring to innate features of gender dimorphism, given the variability in femininity across cultural difference and the fact that feminine ways of being in the world are not exclusive to women. Nonetheless, the epistemic discrediting of these characteristics has been a cornerstone of sexism, used to justify the view that women are incapable of complete self-determination. Through a more accurate assessment of these characteristics' advantages, those individuals who have these characteristics should receive a better epistemic standing, whether they are male or female.

Some feminists, of course, believe that our first battle must be to disengage these associations or to decolonize women by desocializing them from characteristics such as passivity and relationality. I do not deny that such battles are necessary in some cases and can have good effect. But there is another battle that is at least as important, and that is to counter the overwhelming cultural denigration of anything and everything tainted with femininity as trivial, subjectivist, irrational, silly, weak, unnecessary, insignificant, and so on. Femininity may be prized, but it is not respected: the men who purport to like feminine women very rarely would actually like to be one.

Thus, whether traditionally feminine characteristics will remain linked to women in the future is beside the point here; my concern is to show that at least some of these characteristics have been misdescribed as without merit and even as an obstacle in the difficult job of seeking the truth. I believe that the reassessment of these characteristics will help us to achieve the goal Genevieve Lloyd expressed some years ago, to develop in the future what is nowhere to be seen in either the past or the present, that is, a reason that "knows no sex" (Lloyd 1984, 107). Gadamer, surprisingly enough, will turn out to be a useful ally in this project.

The second point I need to explain is that my arguments will be advancing an avowedly "left-wing Gadamerianism." No less than Hegel, Gadamer's work spawns multiple political interpretations. There is a tension in Gadamer's work between his invocation of the permanent truth of tradition on the one hand and his insistence on the impermanence, change, context-dependence, and historical mobility of meaning on the other. Without doubt, conservative impulses in Gadamer's work remain manifest in the former tendency. But I would argue that if we follow Gadamer's definitions of tradition and of meaning carefully, and of the productive relationship between interpretation and tradition in particu-

lar, it is the mobile and impermanent side that must win out, even if this contradicts some of Gadamer's own pronouncements. In other words, we can best maximize the coherence of Gadamer's account by emphasizing the changing and impermanent nature of tradition, and in so doing we minimize the conservative aspects of his hermeneutics.

Openness to Alterity

Let me begin with an overall characterization of Gadamer's approach. The task of hermeneutics is "not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place" (Gadamer 1991, 295). Gadamer thus takes some pains to distinguish a hermeneutics that focuses on understanding from the attempt to develop a methodology for knowing (xxiii, xxviii–xxix, 295–96). Methods make sense given a certain metaphysical conceptualization of knowing as a process that can be initiated and largely controlled by the knower. The search for method is in part a search for control, for the development of a tool by which to make reality yield its secrets. Part of the rationale behind the search for method comes from the dualist metaphysics endemic to modernism, in which the active subject confronts an essentially passive object. Moreover, this object is thought of as over and against the subject itself, across an abyss or chasm, or behind a veil, but always wholly separable. The "method" that epistemology seeks is then imagined to be a bridge or pathway the subject must follow to get to reality.

Gadamer's phenomenological descriptions of knowing demonstrate the weird inaccuracy of this picture. Understanding, he insists, is not a method but an event. It is not something one can appropriate and utilize within a specified time period, as one might pick up and use a magnifying glass, but is rather an event over which one has only partial control. *Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition*" (Gadamer 1991, 290, emphasis in original). When reading a text, understanding occurs when one places oneself within the tradition of which the text is a part, thus opening oneself up to what the text has to say. Gadamer reads Heidegger as suggesting that such openness can be likened to a "movement of transcendence, of moving beyond the existent" (260). It is not simply moving toward the object of knowledge, toward an absolute identification or coextensiveness as

the limit of perfect knowledge. Experientially, the character of insight feels like a sudden lucidity, less a feeling of power or mastery than of simply being present for an occurrence, as when the fog lifts and things fall into place.

Openness is not about loss of self or a denial of one's own critical consciousness:

> [O]penness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. . . . A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental foremeanings [prejudgments], ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own foremeanings and prejudices. (Gadamer 1991, 268–69)

Compare this approach with Donald Davidson's influential description of radical interpretation, the imagined encounter of a field linguist with a people so foreign that not a single word of their language is intelligible and no translators exist. In such a situation, according to Davidson, the linguist will have only their groups' gestures and practices from which to determine what statements the speakers believe to hold true and thus to construe the meaning of their statements. Davidson describes the process as follows:

> [I]f all we know is what sentences a speaker holds true, and we cannot assume that his language is our own, then we cannot take even the first step toward interpretation without knowing or assuming a great deal about the speaker's beliefs. Since knowledge of beliefs comes only with the ability to interpret words, the only possibility at the start is to assume general agreement on beliefs. We get a first approximation to a finished theory by assigning to sentences of a speaker conditions of truth that actu-

ally obtain (in our opinion) just when the speaker holds those sentences true. The guiding policy is to do this as far as possible, subject to considerations of simplicity, hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course our common-sense, or scientific, knowledge of explicable error. The method is neither designed to eliminate disagreement nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible, and this depends entirely on a foundation—*some* foundation—in agreement. (Davidson 1984, 196–97)

This statement of the Principle of Charity includes no reflective acknowledgment concerning one's own prejudgments or the effects of one's own "social conditioning," even in regard to judgments about our cultural Others. Davidson understands such a linguist to be acting charitably to the foreign group by assimilating their belief system as closely as possible to the linguist's own, by assuming, in other words that, given that *he* knows a great many truths, *they* must know at least some of these truths as well. The possibility that the linguist's own belief system is rife with problematic prejudgments is nowhere taken into account. And thus there is no counsel given to be open to the alterity of the other and to the possibility that the other has access to some truths beyond what we might consider initially plausible, rational, or even sane. Davidson's epistemology is indeed charitable in the contemporary sense, a form of noblesse oblige, both disrespectful and uninterested in changing the conditions that make the Other *need* charity.

Part of Davidson's reasoning involves the view he shares with Alasdair MacIntyre and others, that only against a background of shared agreement can differences become apparent, and only when we assume the overarching validity of the other's claims can we identify error and falsehood. A condition of absolute incommensurability precludes the communication of both shared and different views; a condition of complete falsehood precludes the possibility of understanding.

Gadamer agrees with the rejection of incommensurability, but he develops this point in a different way from MacIntyre or Davidson. Gadamer follows the Heideggerian tradition of acknowledging that our beliefs and assumptions emerge out of a preconscious orientation to the world that is culturally specific and value-laden (this is the collection of foremeanings or prejudgments). It is not simply our beliefs that are charitably projected onto the text or set of utterances we are interpreting,

but our prejudices or prejudgments. These prejudgments are not suscep-
tible to rational analysis and critique in the same way that our conscious
beliefs are, and thus Gadamer acknowledges the limitations that cultural
and social location always place on rationality, both ours and others. By
contrast, Davidson's view might easily be read as a form of imperialist
anthropology in which "we" take ourselves to be the civilized, enlight-
ened culture whose own belief system has been exhaustively put to the
test of reason and is thus entirely rational, and who will therefore accept
only those beliefs of other cultures that fundamentally conform to our
own. Because Gadamer does not assume that from any location one can
make such assumptions about the uniquely correct character of one's own
beliefs, his injunction to be open to the alterity of the Other can more
effectively work to render our beliefs open to revision. The multiplicity
of located horizons yields a multiplicity of possible coherent fusions, and
thus a multiplicity of truths, which means that the other's beliefs may
have some truth even if different from our own. We are not stalemated
by a relativism of truth here, however: in the experience of the *encuen-
tro* with the Other, our horizon will expand and thus call for a new fusion,
and this is especially likely if we cultivate an attitude of genuine epis-
temic openness.

Gadamer's account of interpretation constitutes a more receptive
approach than someone like Davidson's, who seems to hold his own
beliefs entirely stable through the process of interpretation. There is no
discussion for Davidson of learning from the other culture, or of altering
one's own beliefs, in his description of the process of radical interpreta-
tion. Gadamer's description is, it seems to me, not only more politically
palatable, but also more plausible as an account of what actually happens
in interpretative encounters where, if interpretation is successful, the self
is changed in the process. Learning a new language and assimilating, even
in part and even temporarily, to a new culture always makes visible
assumptions that had previously gone without notice, and introduces
novel ways of being, feeling, and thinking, novel aesthetic perceptions
and novel modes of comportment. Feminine receptivity, then, better pre-
pares one for what is necessary for learning and growth than an attitude
of mastery or method-fetishism.

For Gadamer, the necessity of assuming the truth of the tradition of a
text has an ethical dimension as well as an epistemological one, for it
involves an attitude of openness and receptivity to what the Other—in
the sense of a partner in dialogue, a text, or a contrasting tradition—has

to say. Richard Palmer characterizes this as a particular form of the experience of relationship between self and other, or I and Thou.

> This is the relationship that does not project the meaning from the I but has an authentic openness which "lets something be said.". . . It is the kind of openness that wills to hear rather than to master, is willing to be modified by the Other. . . . This consciousness consists of a relationship to history in which the text can never be fully and objectively "other," for understanding is not the passive "recognition" of the otherness of the past but rather a placing oneself so as to be laid claim to by the other. (Palmer 1969, 193)

For Gadamer, understanding necessitates an openness that implies and is built on common ground. It is on this basis that Gadamer can claim that the hermeneutic account of knowledge is not based on domination and does not enact a kind of appropriating gesture, unlike the Enlightenment approach to knowledge (Gadamer 1991, 311).

Thus, Gadamer construes openness in a strikingly "feminine" way, as a willing passivity and receptivity that will then allow the truth of alterity to appear: "to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid" (Gadamer 1991, 367). It is a counsel to a kind of listening that holds one's own views in abeyance long enough to hear a possible truth. It is a counsel to let down one's epistemic guard.

From Knowledge to Understanding

Gadamer uses the term understanding *(Verstehen)* rather than knowing in describing inquiry. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, the translators for the second edition of *Truth and Method,* suggest that this is because Gadamer stresses the close connection between *Verstehen* and *Verständigung,* the latter meaning "coming to an agreement with someone" (Gadamer 1991, xvi). Thus Gadamer's preference for the term understanding should be understood to connote the dialogic character of knowing that he consistently emphasizes. It is also true that in both German and English there are similar differences in the way we use the

terms understanding and knowing, or *Verstehen* and *Wissen*. Knowing and *Wissen* are more easily associated with the knowledge of information and facts, or science, whereas a synonym that could be used for both understanding and *Verstehen* is "to realize."

It is interesting to note the difference caused for English speakers by the use of the word understanding in discussing epistemic concerns in place of the more common word knowledge. The term understanding incorporates a broader conception of cognition than the term knowledge. For example, it is a common way of speaking to say that I may *know* a great deal about childbirth from reading about it, but that I only come to *understand* childbirth from an experience of it, direct or indirect. Here the term understanding indicates an appreciation for something beyond mere factual (and objective) information, and implies a deeper, richer, and more comprehensive epistemic state that subsumes the category of knowing within it.

One of the principal problems with contemporary epistemology and epistemologies of science has been the tendency to equate knowledge with sets of statements. Joseph Rouse has developed an interesting critique of accounts of science that presents it as a "field of practices rather than a network of statements" (Rouse 1987, 26). He suggests that the work of Thomas Kuhn among others represented a positive trend in the philosophy of science away from "representationalist, theory-dominant" accounts, in favor of accounts that highlight its practical and experimental everyday character. To distill science into the set of truth-claims in statement form collected in journal articles and textbooks, or to equate the latter to the entirety of "science," is not only phenomenologically inadequate, but also responsible for many egregious mistakes in the epistemologies of science, since such distillations present distorted images of the actual processes by which theories are chosen, and which required the ethnographic work such as that by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, for example, to correct.

Using Gadamer's approach, one could make a broader claim about epistemology as a whole similar to Rouse's claim about philosophies of science. To distill the amalgam of knowing practices into a string of propositions to which one can give or withhold mental assent is a mistake begun with Descartes, and mystifyingly persistent in contemporary epistemology. Aristotle did not assume that propositional knowledge was the only kind of knowledge there is or that it is the most important, nor did Ryle or Wittgenstein or the American pragmatists. I suggest that work

in feminist epistemologies and in recent Continental accounts of knowledge are also more cognizant that knowledge is, as Rouse describes science, a field of practices only some of which can be translated into propositional form and represented in a logical schema (see esp. Code 1987).

Catherine Elgin argues that the better term to denote such a wide array of knowing practices is understanding. Knowledge implies facts, which can be stated in propositions, and traditionally knowledge is considered absolute and not subject to degree or variability. One of the problems caused by this approach is that "nonpropositional elements" that play a role in judgment are "traditionally excluded from knowledge because of their logical form; at best, they are granted instrumental value in the epistemic quest" (Elgin 1996, 122). Elgin suggests that if we simply redefine knowledge to avoid these problems we risk retaining the historical associations of the term. The better move is to make understanding, rather than knowledge, the cornerstone of epistemic achievement. "Not being restricted to facts, understanding is more comprehensive than knowledge ever hoped to be. We understand rules and reasons, actions and passions, objectives and obstacles, techniques and tools, forms, functions, and fictions, as well as facts. We also understand pictures, words, equations, and patterns" (123). Thus, the switch to understanding will accord better with common connotations of meaning, but this will require altering epistemology's conceptualization of its objects of inquiry.

Gadamer's move to understanding shares this agenda to broaden our epistemic horizons, and he has developed extensive accounts of understanding in relation to the arts. But his account is also motivated to emphasize the dialogic character of understanding and to bring in the element of lived experience. It is much less meaningful to say that we 'know' another person, which means simply that we are acquainted with her or him, than to say that we 'understand' her or him. To understand another person is to gain a sense of her or his own subjective life through the narratives of meaning that shape that person's views and feelings. And to 'come to an understanding' with another person is to engage in a dialogue in which each participant has agency. Understanding thus better captures the actual process of knowing, which always involves the complex process of interpretation and the achievement of a fusion between one's own prejudgments and those of the dialogic partner, text, or text-analogue.

There are three possible modes of understanding the other, Gadamer tells us, whether the other is another person, a tradition, a natural object,

or a text: (1) treating the other as an object, i.e., as predictable and devoid of its own horizon of meanings; (2) claiming to know the other in advance, prior to any contact; and (3) having an openness to the other as a Thou, while maintaining an awareness of one's own prejudices (Gadamer 1991, 359ff.). The first mode is typical in the natural sciences. The second mode is characteristic of an authoritarian attitude that would presume to know the welfare of another before asking them. Gadamer accepts neither of these modes as defensible even in specialized spheres. Understanding will be achieved only with the third mode, in which one puts aside the arrogance of believing in one's epistemic invincibility and accepts a more humble position that acknowledges one's limits and the need to learn from the Other. The lived experience of understanding does not involve mastery over a method, but an engagement with an Other in which, at times and without predictability, one will experience a moment of insight. All inquiry, not simply the sort of understanding that involves other persons, should be characterized in this way, through a dialogic model.

Following Heidegger, for Gadamer understanding is a world-disclosing event and thus inherently relational. "Our line of thought prevents us from dividing the hermeneutic problem in terms of the subjectivity of the interpreter and the objectivity of the meaning to be understood. This would be starting from a false antithesis that cannot be resolved even by recognizing the dialectic of subjective and objective. To distinguish between a normative function and a cognitive one is to separate what clearly belong together" (311). Meaning is the goal of inquiry and the referent of "true," but is an object in the sense of a thing-in-itself whose meaningfulness for me is only attached, as it were, after my encounter with it. Meaning is neither absolutely subjective or objective: there can be no dialectical interplay between an interpreter and the intrinsic meaning of the text or object because there is no such intrinsic meaning. Likewise, there is no pure subject because the subject shares a common tradition with the text, and therefore cannot be conceptualized as totally autonomous and apart, capable of complete freedom in choosing an attitude toward the text. This suggests that the world that is the object of epistemic inquiry is not conceived by Gadamer as containing intrinsic *meaning* or, alternatively, as drained of all human presence. For Gadamer, meaning is not a feature of a world that exists apart from humanity, but a feature that comes into existence through the fusion of its constituent elements. This is the significance of his acceptance of Dilthey's concep-

tion of *Erlebnis*, which posits the most basic level of experience as containing meaning. For Gadamer, then, all knowing is a kind of interpretation, replete with the knower's own prejudgments as well as the constitutive significance of her or his historical and cultural location, as the (moving) horizon from which the world is disclosed in its meaningfulness for us. Thus, the knowing of facts and the understanding of art are not epistemically distinct.

This account has important advantages for feminists and, arguably, for women in general. Women's traditional knowledge has generally been in the netherworld of the epistemic domain: practical knowing or knowing how, nonpropositional knowledge, and the amorphous understanding that has been named, and disparaged, as "women's intuition" (see Code 1995, esp. chap. 7). But if the knowledge of facts expressible in propositional form is no longer the centerpiece of epistemology, a space is opened for serious epistemic consideration of a wider range of doxastic practice. In Gadamer's account, science is displaced as the unique site of knowledge-gathering and also presented as not so different from other ways of knowing, which involve practical engagements with the world in meaningful, dialogical, goal-directed activity. Epistemology can then correct its historically narrow focus and encompass a wider array of human activities. Women's extensive "knowledge" may then finally become visible to philosophy, paradoxically when we move from knowledge to understanding.

Holism in Justification

Another feature of femininity involves our relational orientation: a feminine view tends to see things in their relations rather than as entirely separable from each other. Thus we want rules to conform and adapt to contexts, rather than to be given contexts in which rigid rules must be applied. Andrea Nye recounts her initial resistance to logic in this way:

> She opens to the first page of Quine's *Methods of Logic*. Even this first week of class there are exercises to be handed in: "Which of the four cases: Jones ill, Smith away; Jones not ill, Smith away; Jones ill, Smith not away; Jones not ill, Smith not away, make the statement 'Jones is not ill or Smith is not away,' come out true

> when 'or' is construed exclusively?" 'Jones away,' 'Smith not ill':
> the phrases jangle in her mind. Nonsense syllables. Was Jones
> often ill? Not ill today for once? And why? And Smith so often
> gone. Why? (Nye 1990, 1)

The problem is not that Nye misunderstands the logical rules, which
counsel her to forget the meaning and attend only to the form, to cease
questioning the contextual conditions, causes, and motivations behind
the bare particular facts in the example. Rather, the problem is that these
rules would seem to require her, she feels, to stop thinking: "once she
thinks she is lost" (Nye 1990, 2). The very disposition that inclines her
toward philosophy in the first place must be fought against or she will
fail. If one were to generalize from such an account, one might surmise
that women's "gut" ontology, or that which serves as our initial pre-
sumption, will be process-based rather than particular, fluid rather than
solid.[4] Neither facts nor events are ultimately separable from the con-
tinuum within which they exist.

Gadamer's account of epistemic justification conforms to this orien-
tation and, as I shall suggest in the following section, his metaphysics
does as well. Gadamer argues for a constitutive relationship between the
object of knowledge and the process of knowing: both emerge in lin-
guisticality. Epistemic success occurs when there is a coherent fusion of
elements, a harmonious relation, rather than a discernment of the intrin-
sic or independent features of a real conceptualized as distinct from us.
For Gadamer, the relation is always primary: truth emerges from rela-
tions, and things are themselves not actually encountered as separate,
but always in relations of involvement. The project of philosophical
hermeneutics is to develop an epistemology in accordance with this pri-
macy of relations.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutics was based on the idea that the goal in
explicating ancient texts is to provide an exact reproduction of the his-
torical context and historical meaning of the work (Gadamer 1991,
166–67). As we've already seen, Gadamer holds that even this will be
done in relation to one's own horizon. Understanding is not a simple
process of discerning the meaning that lies there on the page, but one of
actively interpreting and applying the text in relation to one's own hori-
zon. Understanding, interpretation, and application are Gadamer's holy
trinity; he argues that they comprise "one unified process" (308).
"Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to under-

standing; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding" (307). When we read a text seeking understanding, a kind of translation occurs, the translation of the text into something that we can understand given our own horizon of background assumptions and knowledge. Gadamer argues that the act of translation is "fundamentally the same" as the act of interpretation (387). A translator must "bridge the gulf between languages" to recreate a "new" text that is intelligible within a different linguistic context than the original. Similarly, an interpretation requires the development of an agreement between disparate points of reference, embedded in reader and text, out of which will emerge something new. The historical horizons of text and reader are fused in the act of interpretation (328).

Obviously then, for Gadamer, to understand a text does not mean to appropriate the singular, uniquely true interpretation that captures the "real" or essential meaning intrinsic to the text. As he puts it, "the meaning of a text is not to be compared with an immovably and obstinately fixed point of view that suggests only one question to the person trying to understand it" (Gadamer 1991, 388). To the extent that there will be different interpretations of the text, which represent the fusion of different horizons, a certain degree of relativism must inevitably enter in: that is, there will be a number of different "correct" interpretations. Not *all* interpretations will be considered correct or equally defensible on epistemic grounds, but there will not simply be one correct interpretation of a text for all time given that the reader's horizon is a "decisive" constitutive component of any interpretation.[5] In explaining Gadamer's account, Georgia Warnke points out that we ordinarily assume that interpretations of artworks or literature can differ, and "that these differences stem from different experiences and sources of understanding." Moreover, we can learn from these differences, incorporating aspects of other interpretations into our own. "To this extent," she explains, "differences among interpretations of texts can be as valid as the different perspectives from which we might view a landscape, for example, each of which might reveal the whole of it from the point of view of concentration on a different aspect of it" (Warnke 1999, 14). However, Warnke goes on to suggest that although we allow for a multiplicity of valid interpretations, we don't accept all attempts as equally successful or equally valid. We appeal to standards of various sorts, depending on the domain, in assessing the success of interpretive attempts.

Thus, if we dispense with the pursuit of an intrinsic meaning, and the

belief in a textual or authorial privilege over meaning, the result will not be an anarchy of interpretation in which anything goes. But we must overcome the idea that meaning is something that we *discover*. As Gadamer explains:

> Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of the text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always codetermined by the historical situation of the interpreter. . . . Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. (Gadamer 1991, 296)

The best way to characterize Gadamer's account of justification, or how valid and invalid interpretations are distinguished, is as a coherentist account. Valid interpretations are not those that correspond to the intrinsic meaning of the text, but those that represent comprehensively coherent fusions between the historical horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text (and coherence, unlike correspondence, easily admits multiple successful formations). Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics involves a coherentist account of justification in two ways: in the actual procedure consciously used by the knower, and in the implicit effect of the background meanings or tradition present. I will call the first of these Gadamer's procedural argument for coherence and the second his ontological argument.

The process of interpretation consists in an attempt to achieve (a) a coherent reading of the text, and (b) the reading that establishes the most comprehensive coherence possible, or that includes as many elements of the text as possible in its account. Our prior expectations of meaning move back and forth from part to whole in a process of revising and re-revising, until both parts and whole are understood in the maximally unified and harmonious way. This goal of maximum comprehensive coherence is the epistemic criterion for an adequate understanding. Thus the test of validity that will be used to evaluate an interpretation, or its criterion of justification, is its achievement of coherence.

Coherence is not merely a characterization of the process of interpreting a text, but also an ontological component of understanding. Gadamer's ontological claim is that understanding involves a mediation of elements. It is not possible for us to assume an independent position outside the developing tradition: we engage in the process of interpreting and understanding always from within a tradition. Traditions are themselves constantly in the process of revision, they are never static, and our attitude toward them can be one of negation. But even as our attitude is a negating one, it is from the inside; it is impossible for us to stand outside the tradition and negate it in its entirety (Gadamer 1991, 270–71, 276).

In the concluding section I will discuss the worry this veneration of tradition might cause for feminism. But Gadamer's account of justification has at least two significant advantages for feminism. The first is that it allows us to make sense of instances like Nye's distress in her logic class without viewing her as simply being "soft," or "sentimental," or otherwise devoid of epistemic virtue. One way to construe Nye's discomfort would be to say that she recognized the relevance of the background conditions for making an actual judgment about the relationship between Jones's frequent illnesses and Smith's tendency to be away, and thus the epistemic relevance of contextual conditions. She recognized that an actual judgment (as opposed to what is asked for in logic questions) in the kind of case she was being asked about is a matter of interpreting and applying a rule within a complex constellation of elements, rather than a simple deduction, and that many contextual elements may come into play. In a more general sense, then, we might say that Gadamer's coherentist approach to justification allows us to see that women's (purported) reticence to decontextualize decisions, and to ignore horizontal relations to relevant background conditions in the pursuit of a linear deduction, is an epistemic virtue rather than a defect.

The second advantage that this account of justification has is that it allows us to explain the ways in which political beliefs and commitments can enter into theory choice in the sciences, or belief formation in everyday life, without a reductionist account that would reduce rationality to ideology. Truth emerges from a fusion of horizons within which a wide range of beliefs, commitments, and prejudgments can contribute to the production of coherence. Philosophers of science have generally accepted the claim that metaphysical and normative background assumptions are operative in and indispensable to all forms of inquiry. Feminists have

expanded on this to claim to show that the collection of assumptions and values with which any given individual works can be connected in interesting ways to that person's social, cultural, and political identity. They have also claimed, and shown in some case studies, that the normative background assumptions operative in theory choice in the sciences exceeds the usual list philosophers of science give—e.g. "simplicity" or "elegance"—and can include more typical political commitments, such as that there must be a "head of the family" for it to function successfully (Longino 1990). The influence of these assumptions and values cannot be restricted to the so-called context of discovery because they have an important impact on the formulation of hypotheses, on which hypotheses are taken to be plausible, on the kinds of analogies and models that get seriously entertained, and on the determination of the kind of evidence considered necessary or sufficient to justify theories. Gadamer's account of justification goes beyond most typical analytic coherentist accounts in incorporating just these sorts of elements into the process of justification through his concept of horizon. For him, the coherent web does not merely include sets of beliefs, but also includes prejudgments that emerge from the orientation of the individual to the object of inquiry within the context of their shared tradition and her or his specific social identity. Gadamer's concept of truth is also and necessarily affected by this heightened social and historical awareness, and this too has an interesting congruence with some important trends in feminist metaphysics, as I shall discuss in the next section.

Immanent Realism

Gadamer's ontology of inquiry can be read as the development of a new metaphysics or ontology of truth, which might be called an immanent metaphysics of realism. I will describe this new metaphysics and then explain its relevance for feminism.

Gadamer poses an interaction between knower and known out of which truth is produced, and thus truth is immanent to the domain of lived reality rather than completely transcendental to any human practice or context. Because it posits a human-independent reality that exerts constraints on the "true," such that what is true is not arbitrary or under the complete control of the knower, Gadamer's account is not strictly

subjectivist. But selection based on the knower's horizon goes on at every instant, as does an interaction with the knower who is historically contextualized. In Kuhn's famous example of the astronomers before and after Herschel, each is constrained by the human-independent world to see an incandescent globule in the sky, and each is also directed by their respective paradigms to see that globule as a star or a planet. This means that our "true" propositions are neither wholly false nor wholly true in the sense of correspondence to the intrinsic features of a reality imaginatively drained of all human input. To the extent they are said to refer wholly to human-independent reality, there is no absolute sense of correspondence. Of more concern to us is the mediated reality of the human context within which truth is an event. Let me develop this conception a bit further.

How would such a view apply to clear-cut propositions such as "This table is two meters long"? Is not the length in meters of this table an intrinsic fact about it? Even this, however, involves mediation since the unit of measurement is human-constructed. And the case is even more obvious for such propositions as "Black holes exist," "Neutrinos are colored," "Electrons have no mass," "Capitalism causes famines," "Women have second-class status," and "All knowledge is expressible in propositional form." These claims are more clearly products of interpretations, and Gadamer's argument is that the interpretations we make will be connected in significant ways to our historical context.

One possible way to understand Gadamer is to conceptualize knowledge as existing along a continuum from a human-independent reality to human contexts. Particular propositions fall at particular points along this continuum, some closer to the human-independent reality and some closer to the human. Most of the really interesting propositions—those we fight about the most, those on the frontiers of the natural sciences, and perhaps the whole body of those in the social sciences—exist somewhere near the middle of the continuum, as products of an interaction between human beings and world. The propositions on the frontiers of the natural sciences also exist near the middle because they are so highly theoretical: we must borrow heavily from our conceptual apparatus and theoretical commitments for their construction, and our perceptual data are heavily dependent on our experimental, conceptual, and theoretical constructs.

In this view, all knowledge is contextual to some degree and the truth of a proposition is never simply a matter of correspondence to human-

independent reality. What are the implications of such a continuum of knowledge for philosophers' propensity toward basing their epistemologies on propositions that express simple perceptual beliefs and that exist on or toward the human-independent end of the continuum? Such an approach guarantees that the resulting epistemologies will be applicable only within a relatively small range of propositions, and perhaps not applicable at all to the most interesting and troubling propositions. Such propositions as simple perceptual beliefs should therefore not be used as decisive test cases for fundamental questions in epistemology. Gadamer's epistemology, on the other hand, is focused toward the broad middle of the continuum of knowledge, that is, those beliefs in the human and social sciences.

To say that beliefs like "Women have second class status" or even "Neutrinos are colored" are *approximations* of an intrinsic truth about reality because they are the product of interpretation is misleading. For Gadamer there is no uniquely true interpretation that captures the intrinsic meaning of a text, and so there is no absolute standard by which approximations can be measured. There just *are* interpretations, or events of mediation. Instead of forcing all of our beliefs toward the human-independent end of the continuum (or trying to prove to ourselves that is where they now reside), we should accept their position in the middle. The important point here is that when we say that propositions about a mediated reality are not discoveries about human-independent reality, but are interpretations open to practical judgment, we are not committed to saying that such propositions are arbitrarily selected. We can still devise criteria, standards, and methods for correctly generating these propositions, though these methods may be historically bound, and the propositions that result will still be eligible for the honorific title of truth.

If we let go of the "discovering human-independent reality" conceptual picture, do we open a Pandora's box of subjectivism? Will foolproof arguments against racist genetic theories or other pernicious falsehoods no longer be possible? Such worries may be caused both by the grip of the old metaphysics and its false dilemmas, and the unfamiliarity with the new. We can still argue against false truth-claims on epistemic grounds. From Gadamer's interactionist view, there is not an infinite number of ways to characterize an event (contra Goodman or the constructivists), but there is more than one. These ways will be constrained by reality but given form by the knower and by her historical context. Context may be seen as a particular level of conceptual and theoretical

development—the knower will borrow from that context, or seek to transcend it, but ultimately be constrained within it. Thus truth, in the interactive sense, is contextual. Why must we reserve the term truth for intrinsic truth, for truth at the human-independent end of the continuum?

The realism that emerges from Gadamer's approach I call immanent, because it refuses to define the real as transcendent of human interaction or truth as drained of human interpretation. Such a quest for transcendence is noncoincidentally related, so a number of feminists have argued, to the corresponding disposition of philosophers to denigrate the realm of immanence, including all things related to the body and to perspective (see Lloyd 1984, Schott 1988, Bordo 1987 and 1993, and Scheman 1987). Ethics has also been defined as the ability to transcend one's particular interests and specific, bodily based connections to others. What if the body, with its particular concerns, its emotions and feelings, were not seen as an obstacle to truth? What if our inability to transcend our social location in history were not seen as a drag on inquiry? Gadamer's work, I am suggesting, provides us with an initial foray into thinking past the epistemic denigration of immanence. Moreover, Gadamer points past a bifurcation of immanence and transcendence, and criticizes Romanticism for its reliance on Cartesian-based dualism even in its celebration of all that is beyond Cartesian rationality. In our anger at the devaluation of the body, of nature, and of the realm of women's particular concerns, feminist theorists sometimes have a tendency to go the romantic route and reject rationality, truth, and epistemology. Gadamer's incorporative approach, in which the realm of immanence retains rational processes and epistemic demarcations, is much the better route.

Tradition

As Tevye, the patriarch in "Fiddler on the Roof," well understood, respect for the inherent value of tradition conflicts with women's aspirations to self-determination. Feminism has required the overturning of traditions regarding women's roles in marriage, families, public spaces, and religious practices. Feminism is often portrayed as wanting to overturn traditional social practices that have kept civilization going, children fed and cared for, and families together, and as propelling us recklessly toward an

unknown future. Sometimes it is also argued that feminism is simply unrealistically utopian in its belief that we can just choose to repudiate all that we have been. And we are often charged with rejecting the inherent value of tradition. To deny that it has inherent or a priori value has the same effect as disallowing it any value, because the fact that a belief or practice is traditional will then add no value to its assessment: traditional ways of doing things are given no presumption in their favor as we assess the merits of alternative beliefs and practices and, in fact, may have a presumption against them given women's persistent subordination in the past.

Gadamer, by contrast, insists that the value of tradition lies beyond our ability to assess; it is inherent. Each text we seek to understand presents us with a tradition, or comes to us out of a tradition, that we must be open to if we hope to achieve an understanding. In this sense, we give presumption to the tradition, since to be open to something is for Gadamer to be open to the possibility of its truth even in alterity. This is not, however, quite the same thing as Kierkegaard's blind leap of faith in regard to the subjective certainty of Christianity, where Kierkegaard argues that reason can play no role in determining religious belief if we accept the presumptive authority of God. If reason were to decide the matter, it would transform the presumption of truth we should accord to God into an attitude of skeptical objectivity in which there is no presumption of truth. For Kierkegaard, as soon as we begin to question the tradition, we cease to respect it insofar as it is tradition, and treat it like any other possible belief system.

Gadamer understands this aspect of respect for tradition, and the consequent critique of Enlightenment concepts of rationality such as Kierkegaard was making. But Gadamer, unlike Kierkegaard, refuses to bifurcate rationality into such sharply divided categories as "subjective certainty" (a-rational acceptance) and "objective certainty" (skeptical questioning before acceptance). Gadamer has a monistic account of rationality that incorporates an acknowledgement of our constitutive relationship to tradition as part of rational epistemic behavior. The Enlightenment presumed a capacity to question from a perspective that was itself outside all traditions, and it defined questioning itself as an autonomous act; an act that both manifests and guarantees our autonomy. But by sacrificing effective historical consciousness, or the acknowledgment that we are always already within a tradition, this approach undercuts our ability for autonomy since it diminishes our self-awareness.

Even more important, Gadamer describes understanding as a fusion of horizons that requires the capacity to take up a tradition into the present, into one's own consciousness, and to present to it a set of questions that are alive for one at the moment of questioning. Such an account involves an acknowledgment that the questioner is situated in time and place such that some questions will be alive to them and others will not be (see esp. Gadamer 1991, 369–79). Habermas explains Gadamer's account in this way: "The interpreter is a moment of the same fabric of tradition as his object. He appropriates a tradition from a horizon of expectations that is already informed by this tradition. For this reason, we have, in a certain way, already understood the tradition with which we are confronted. And only for this reason is the horizon opened up by the language of the interpreter not merely something subjective that distorts our interpretation" (Habermas 1977, 343). The presupposition that the reader's historical horizon yields a subjective interpretation that distorts inquiry is part of the Cartesian ontology of inquiry. Gadamer, as Habermas shows, gives a metaphysical answer to the epistemological objection about the influence of "subjective" elements. Our subjectivity, including our rational capacity, is not separated or autonomous from the object of inquiry, from tradition, or from the horizon of the text. Unlike Cartesianism, not only is knowing always an act of interpreting meaning, but it is always also a projection from the horizon of meanings of the knower.

Such an account yields a very different notion of tradition, and one that will help feminists out of both the "antihistory" charge and the complaints that we are against all that is in the past or that we are so unrealistic as to propose that we can completely transcend the past. Tradition is not, in Gadamer's view, either an object separable from us that must be revered or a set of unchangeable meanings and practices. "Historical tradition can be understood only as something always in the process of being defined by the course of events." Tradition exists only because we in the present bring it into existence through our interpretations, but these interpretations are not indeterminate to the point of undecidability at any given point in time: historical events themselves alter the horizons from which questions are prompted and answers made possible. Traditions are dynamic and within history, not controlling it from outside or above. "[I]t is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. By being re-actualized in understanding, texts are drawn into a genuine course of events in exactly the same way

as are events themselves" (Gadamer 1991, 373). Feminism's relation to tradition is not, then, able to be characterized as an either/or, but as a set of questions that are posed from our historical moment. This moment itself is "included within the horizon that embraces us as questioners who have been encountered by the traditionary word" (374). The question is not one of adopting or rejecting tradition, since neither is a true option, but always one of interpretation and application.

What of rupture, then, or revolutions in thought as well as in deed? Why do we have to resign ourselves to reinterpreting the meanings of the cultural past rather than seek radical disruptions that might pry open cracks from which a new imaginary could perhaps be born? There are two answers to this question, one from Gadamer and one that will take us necessarily beyond Gadamer.

Gadamer's answer, I suggest, would go something like this: An attitude toward tradition and our embeddedness within it that is based on a realistic account of what traditions are does not preclude us from creative movement or change. Rather, the effective historical consciousness that Gadamer is calling for is an awareness of cultural and temporal locatedness as we move into the future, an awareness that requires us, like the angel in Benjamin's metaphor of history, to face backward as we inexorably move forward (see Ambrosio 1986). And doesn't it make sense to look toward where we are moving from, rather than facing the blankness of the future and become willfully blind to who we are in attempting to escape the past? Gadamer's view is less pessimistic than Benjamin's, however, because by facing backward we are not merely compelled to witness the unceasing carnage of human history but are also in a position to develop effective historical consciousness, which can then become the basis of critique and reconstruction. Moreover, to face always and exclusively toward the future is a gesture of assumed mastery and control, as if we are "in the driver's seat" and able to chart our own path. To turn to the past is to recognize our embeddedness, locatedness, and embodiedness in space and time.

Women's critical attitude toward tradition is especially threatening, because we have often been the primary conveyers of tradition across generations through rituals of family and home that impart the meanings of our cultures. We have more often been aware of the importance of cross-generational connection and repetition. But this does not require, nor have women always understood it to require, a kind of mindless repetition. To keep tradition alive is, as Gadamer understands, to keep it

alive to the questions and experiences of the present, which means to interpret it anew in light of the changing conditions of our lives and those we care for. Thus, an awareness of tradition and a respect for its power and truth necessarily incorporates rather than excludes change, since tradition cannot be kept alive and thus honored without a willingness to pull it into the present. Subversion itself occurs within the space left behind by that which has been negated, a negation that always leaves a determinate shape of possibilities. We do not need to seek the means to a complete and total transformation, nor feel doomed to historical repetition if we cannot find it. Gadamer thus shows us how to understand subversion and change as compatible with our historical and cultural embeddedness.

The weakness of Gadamer's account does not lie in its inability to enable change and even disruption, in my view, but in another direction altogether. Gadamer imagines a confrontation between a historical text and a contemporary interpreter in which each exists within an essentially coherent horizon of meanings and all participate in an ongoing tradition that is created out of successive fusions of horizons. One imagines a development by increments, especially as he claims that we (in the present) are embraced by traditional texts, as if we are their rightful heirs. Such a picture fits well with the history of philosophy (by a certain reading, anyway), as the texts of Plato and Aristotle, for example, receive successive interpretations by Western philosophers, each of which incorporates and responds to previous interpretations as well as interpreting in light of their own contemporary horizons. Does it fit as easily, one might wonder, with the multicultural and global expanse of conflicting horizons structurally differentiated by power? Or, to consider a picture that is even more accurate to present realities, would it fit an interpretive situation in which interpreters are each constituted by multiple and conflicting horizons themselves, in which they are able to see on more than one level?

As Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and others have pointed out, the Western tradition of hermeneutics is itself monotopic and monologic: presupposing a single, coherent tradition. A phenomenological hermeneutics grounded in such a conception cannot claim descriptive adequacy over the multiplicities and incoherences of interpellations in postmodern life. A pluritopic hermeneutics is needed to recognize the multiple traditions at play in the formulation of foreknowledges in a postcolonial world. We need a "colonial semiosis," as Mignolo calls for, to

map such complex horizons. "The crux of the matter is that when cultural differences go beyond common memories expressed in different languages, we have no alternative but to understand the differences in relation to our own identity and to look at ourselves as others" (Mignolo 1995, 23). Moreover, we need a way to map the means by which truth is created out of power as much as by explanatory value.

Thus, the limitations of philosophical hermeneutics for feminists have less to do with its valorization of tradition than with its homogenizing of horizons and apolitical account of how fusions come into place. Despite the work that there is yet to do, however, Gadamer's epistemology remains a very useful and suitable site for feminist interpretive work.

Notes

1. The rubric "continental philosophy" is increasingly acknowledged as having limited utility, given the extremely different philosophical orientations that are included within it, from Husserlian phenomenology to Derridean deconstruction. This is also, however, a problem with the term "analytic" or the category of Anglo-American philosophy. On the topic of epistemology, however, the internal differences within each of these categories are especially meaningful. For example, to include Husserl's project to revive and reconstruct Cartesianism with the extreme anti-Cartesianism of the Heideggerian and Derridean approaches, and to then include Habermas's largely linguistic-based epistemology, seems more than a little strained. However, see my own entry on "Continental Epistemology" in Alcoff (1992) for an attempt to find common threads.

2. See Merold Westphal on this.

3. Rorty takes Gadamer's hermeneutics to be a replacement for epistemology because he restricts epistemology to the Cartesian tradition, in which skepticism plays a central role, and to the pursuit of methodology and a focus on truthful representations of the real, where the real is drained of all human input (Rorty 1979). This allows him to leave, in effect, the Cartesian tradition behind, in all its heterogeneity, as he makes the move to hermeneutics. Why do this? Descartes's legacy is increasingly understood to be complex and multi-faceted; from a feminist point of view, we must take into account his unfortunate dualisms and method-fetishism (as Gadamer calls it) along with his courageously comprehensive challenges to conventional and familiar beliefs (cf. Bordo 1999). Why not understand hermeneutics, as Gadamer himself does, as a universal account of the conditions of possibility for all understanding, and thus certainly within the range of a philosophical debate over knowledge? Why not understand skepticism to be a central problem within some of the paradigms that have emerged in this wide-ranging debate but not in all? The advantage will not only be a sharpening of the critical debate, but a solution or resolution of some of the persistent problems through contact with a wider frame of possible positions. So I have argued in regard to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the coherence theory of knowledge (Alcoff 1996).

4. Lest I be misunderstood, this is only a hypothesis from a stereotype: I don't purport to have empirical certainty for a claim of women's inclinations toward process metaphysics. There are numerous women who like and excel at logic, of course, but then these individuals are more likely to excel in philosophy and so should not be taken as a representative sample either. Nor am I suggesting that process metaphysics is in conflict with logic. What I take Nye to be suggesting, with which I would

concur, is that the formal and decontextualized reasoning process we learn in logic classes is not the sole way to "think," that is, to reason.

5. In the context of philosophical hermeneutics, "epistemic grounds" would still refer to grounds for believing that a claim is true, but truth refers to the most comprehensively coherent fusion of horizons.

References

Alcoff, Linda Martín. 1992. "Continental Epistemology." In *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Ernest Sosa and Jonathan Dancy. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 1996. *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Ambrosio, Francis. 1986. "Dawn and Dusk: Gadamer and Heidegger on Truth." *Man and World* 19: 21–53.

Bordo, Susan. 1987. *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1999. *Feminist Interpretations of Rene Descartes*. University Park: The Penn State University Press.

Code, Lorraine. 1987. *Epistemic Responsibility*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England.

———. 1995. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations*. New York: Routledge.

Davidson, Donald. 1984. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." In *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dussel, Enrique. 1993. "Eurocentrism and Modernity." *Boundary 2*, 20:3: 65–76.

Elgin, Catherine. 1996. *Considered Judgment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1991. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum

Habermas, Jürgen. 1977. "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*." In *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred Dallmayr and Tom McCarthy. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press.

Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. 1986. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, 2d ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lloyd, Genevieve. 1984. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Longino, Helen. 1990. *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mignolo, Walter. 1995. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Nye, Andrea. 1990. *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*. New York: Routledge.

Palmer, Richard. 1969. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Rorty, Richard. 1979. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rouse, Joseph. 1987. *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Scheman, Naomi. 1987. "Othello's Doubt/Desdemona's Death: The Engendering of Skepticicm." In J. Genova, ed., *Power, Gender, Values*. Edmonton, Alberta: Academic Printing and Publishing.

Schott, Robin. 1988. *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Warnke, Georgia. 1999. *Legitimate Differences: Interpretation in the Abortion Controversy and Other Public Debates*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

10

The Hermeneutic Conversation as Epistemological Model

Silja Freudenberger
Translated by Melanie Richter-Bernburg

From this conversational community is excluded, not a single experience of the world.

—Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Reply to Hermeneutics and Critique of Ideology"

I talk to myself often. I talk to myself and to the things that surround me. I comment on events, I praise and console and scold. That may seem rather strange, but it probably accounts for my fascination with a philosophy that places the conversation with oneself, with others, with other things—such as texts—in the middle of its observations. From my own initial being-spoken-to by Gadamer's texts, questions and ideas have developed into a research project that I will outline in this chapter.

My task will be to show what it is in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics that is of interest to feminist epistemologies and that requires more exact examination. First, I would like to show what points of contact exist between Gadamer's writings and Anglo-Saxon feminist epistemology; as we will see, positions very close to Gadamer's have frequently appeared in feminist research. I will also examine the direc-

tions that further development of Gadamer's ideas could take. Finally, I will touch on problems of the scope of these ideas and the strength of support they lend to feminist epistemologies. In this context, I will pay particular attention to the tension that exists between the methodological demand for openness and the necessary limitation placed on this openness by one's situatedness—a tension that exists for Gadamer and feminists alike.

One of the goals of this chapter is to show what Gadamer can contribute, *nolens volens*, to the project of a 'feminist epistemology'—in spite of his skepticism toward the enterprise of epistemology in general.[1] Gadamer's critical view of epistemology seems outmoded in any case in some of its essential points. It is based on a now-outdated concept of the area covered and the tasks undertaken by epistemology. It has not been the (only) task of epistemological research for a long time "to enquire into the grounds of the possibility of the fact that our ideas are in agreement with the 'external world' [*Außenwelt*]" (TM 196 [WM 226]) and to create for the humanities a methodological foundation that emphasizes their claim to scientific equality with the natural sciences—as did, in Gadamer's opinion, the too-limited program of the neo-Kantian theory of knowledge.[2] Gadamer distinguishes himself from *this* kind of (historically specific) epistemology with his program of philosophical hermeneutics, the central questions of which logically precede both the sciences and epistemology. The kinds of questions dealt with there (for example, the situatedness of the subject and the reflection on one's own approach and interest in knowledge) have by now been drawn into the field of epistemology itself, thanks not least to feminist efforts (cf., for example, Harding 1991/1994, Haraway 1991/1995, and Hartsock 1983). Against this background as well, then, an epistemologically oriented reading of Gadamer seems justified.

At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the terminology of hermeneutics and of epistemology do not translate well into one another. Hermeneutic *understanding* is not the same as *knowledge*. From the beginning, *understanding* has been something other than a concept that focuses on propositions. That Gadamer speaks of *understanding* (*Verstehen*) and *communication* (*Verständigung*) and not of *knowledge* (*Wissen*) or *cognition* (*Erkenntnis*) has its background in history: in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century, a debate developed over the tasks, objects, and methods used in areas outside the natural sciences, for which Dilthey developed the concept of the 'humane sciences,' or humanities. The con-

cept of 'understanding' is of central importance to it: the task of the humanities is to 'understand'; the task of the natural sciences is to 'explain.' From the beginning, 'understanding' applied to the singular and the unique, while 'explanation' subsumed a single occurrence under a general law. The field of history stands as a paradigm of the 'understanding' type of science. 'Understanding' was initially a basic methodological concept in the humanities, which were in the process of constituting themselves.[3] However, Heidegger, drawing on Husserl, expanded this concept of understanding based on methodological questions and interpreted it existentially as "a way of being of Being insofar as it is Can Be and 'possibility.'" In the interpretation of Gadamer, who was a student of Heidegger, "understanding is the original character of the being of human life itself" (TM 230 [WM 264]). This expanded and explicitly antimethodological concept of understanding resists translation into a classical concept of propositional knowledge. But perhaps it can be seen in relation to questions raised by feminist epistemology precisely because this epistemology has shifted the focus of its efforts away from questions of the possibility and justification of propositional knowledge: instead, "epistemology becomes a project of understanding how people know" (Code 1992, 140). Feminist concerns thus intersect initially with Gadamer's work in the area of critique: both view as too narrow the classic propositional concept of knowledge (S knows that p if *a*] S believes that p; *b*] p is the case; and *c*] S is justified in her belief that p), and reject the methods and ideals of modern science as the direct path to this knowledge (see Dalmiya and Alcoff, and Code, in Alcoff and Potter 1993; Gadamer 1957).

Philosophical hermeneutics and feminist theories of epistemology converge at other significant points as well:

1. In the demand for a nonpatronizing and true recognition of others and their views. The other is not to be subjected to one's own standards (TM 272 [WM 310]; Gadamer 1985, 5).
2. In the recognition of the fundamental (historical, cultural, social) situatedness of persons. Linked to this is the rejection of a god's-eye view, that is, the 'view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986).
3. In that differing voices and diverse opinions are not conceived of as a weakness. Gadamer's concept of philosophical hermeneutics allows for differing voices, for equally valid readings of the same 'text.' The potential for differing voices is a function of the different starting

points of the interpreters; it is therefore not mere arbitrariness. "Situated knowledges" are necessarily not in unison.

4. In the reflection on one's own positioning and one's own vested interest in cognition. Gadamer calls for bringing one's own prejudices and prior opinions into play and putting them at risk in each hermeneutic situation. In relation to questions of scientific research, this means, for example, that one lays bare the interests that determine one's own approach (the issue of the 'context of discovery').

Before going into these intersecting points and junctures, I will briefly sketch the concept of the hermeneutic conversation and the dialectic of question and answer that are central to an understanding of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Going beyond the points in common that are thus defined, I will plead for seeing the hermeneutic conversation as a model for epistemological processes as such (which is suggested, in part, in the work of Donna Haraway). I do not expect to reach a solution in this way, but I do hope to avoid some of the pitfalls into which the debate over 'social constructivism' has fallen. Finally, I will turn to the question of whether or not Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gives us a tool for distinguishing between correct and incorrect interpretations, between understanding and holding an opinion, between understanding and thinking that one has understood. For if it should emerge that on the foundation to be defined here, sexist, racist, and class-based interpretations of the world must be admitted as valid, then the question of the value of a feminist reading of Gadamer must be asked once again.

The Structure of the Hermeneutic Conversation and the Preeminence of the Question

The central motif in Gadamer's work is the concept of the hermeneutic conversation, and the emphasis is on the preeminence of the question. A conversation between two people is the model according to which understanding *(Verstehen)* and communication *(Verständigung)* are introduced.[4] If it is a matter of understanding texts, or rather, of understanding the "things . . . under discussion" (Gadamer 1985, 6), then these things, with some modifications, take on the role of the other person in the conversation. For understanding to take place at all, openness to the

other is a necessary condition, as is a willingness to let oneself be told something. This means that I have to take seriously the claim to truth of what is being said to me. Where agreement between one's own and the other's opinion does not already exist, a suspension of one's own judgments and prejudices is required (TM 266 [WM 304]).

This temporary relinquishing of the validity of our own opinion has, according to Gadamer, the logical structure of the question (TM 266 [WM 304]). To go even further, experience itself thus acquires the structure of the question, for having experiences assumes openness: "There is no experience without the activity of questioning. Recognition that things are thus and not so, as at first believed, evidently presupposes passage through the question of whether it is thus or so. The openness that lies in the nature of the experience is, in logical terms, this openness of the thus-or-so. It has the structure of the question" (TM 325 [WM 368]). But the "thus-or-so" also structures the question, whose openness cannot be "limitless" if it is to be meaningful. Thus, questions have a "horizon of the question," within which certain answers are meaningful and others are not (TM 327 [WM 369]).

From a feminist perspective, it is interesting for two reasons to imagine that experience is the result of a question addressed (usually implicitly) to the world, to a text, or to another person. For one thing, it sharpens the awareness that we are always bound in our actions—as when we ask explicit questions—by certain conditions, and that we have a certain expectation or question horizon that defines the spectrum of what appears to be a reasonable 'answer' in a given situation. In doing their research, people obtain answers to particular questions that are asked in a certain way and no other.[5] The openness that the authentic question demands, on the other hand, has a potentially antiauthoritarian dimension, for it demands that one listen even against one's own preconceived opinions and prejudices. This amounts to according one's conversation partner the same right to be right as oneself. No one can lay claim, a priori, to an interpretive privilege; no one may exempt her or his own opinions and judgments from critical examination.

The demand for openness includes a demand that the side taken by the other be made as strong as possible, and that the sense of what is said be maximized "not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said" but "in bringing out its real strength" (TM 331 [WM 373]). This is not only what we try to teach as 'charity' to our students, it goes to the essence of what feminists, in their criticism of the "adversary method"

of philosophizing, have sought to set in its place (Moulton 1983, 149).

Still, Gadamer's concept of the hermeneutic conversation contains even more: it implies a *reciprocal* relationship even when the 'conversation partner' is not a person but, for instance, a text. This has interesting consequences for the way in which reciprocity is conceptualized: "Thus it is quite correct to speak of a hermeneutical conversation. But from this it follows that the hermeneutical conversation, like real conversation, finds a common language. . . . Even between the partners of this 'conversation,' a communication takes place, as between two people, that is more than mere adaptation. The text brings an object into language, but that it achieves this is, ultimately[,] the work of the interpreter. Both have a share in it" (TM 349–50 [WM 391]).

This means that the process is understood here as the result of an interaction that takes place under certain conditions and rules. Both 'conversation partners,' or simply the human one if it is a dialogue with a text, must observe certain rules of caution so that they don't understand only that which they knew before, thus closing themselves to the new and the other. At the same time it is clear that understanding can be based only on what one knew before, and that the demand for openness cannot, in the end, be fulfilled.

Openness to Otherness

The most significant consequence that arises from the concept of the hermeneutic conversation is, initially, the epistemological and ethical demand for openness and respect for one's counterpart. Gadamer argues without reservation for the independent right of the other to be right, for the 'Thou' in the hermeneutic situation (whether it is a person or a text) with which an understanding is to be sought: "A conversation is a process of two people understanding each other. Thus, it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on the subject" (TM 347 [WM 389]). In this, the other is not to be subject to one's own standards; the other's differentness is

not to be leveled but maintained.[6] Thus, the need arises to listen carefully to what the other says and not to assume that one already knows what it is. Since the conversation between persons provides the model for the relationship between interpreter and text, the following rule can also be applied to dealings between persons:

> If a person is trying to understand something, he will not be able to rely from the start on his own chance previous ideas, missing as logically and as stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text [of the other], until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through the imagined understanding of it. Rather, a person trying to understand a text [an other] is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's [the other's] quality of [otherness]. . . . The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text [the other] may present itself in all its [otherness] and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own foremeanings. (TM 238 [WM 273–74])

This methodological demand that one respect the right of the other to be right almost makes Gadamer appear, his own intentions notwithstanding, to be an antiauthoritarian theoretician. This is also the impression that arises from his warning that "nothing . . . stands more in the way of true understanding between the 'I' and the 'Thou' than if someone lays claim to understanding the other in his being and opinion. Preempting others in 'understanding' all their counterclaims serves no other purpose, in truth, than to hold off the claims of the other. It is another way of not letting yourself be told anything" (Gadamer 1943, 35). One would be hard-pressed not to interpret this warning as a criticism of a paternalistic stance and therefore applicable as criticism to conversations in which there is a disparity in power.

Gadamer's concept of understanding between the 'I' and the 'Thou,' from its inception lacking in the element of force, is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, it strengthens a traditionally more femininely coded virtue, the ability to listen carefully. Second, it shows that Gadamer clearly distinguishes between understanding and being convinced that one has understood. And finally, 'openness' designates an epistemological virtue that, from a scientific point of view, might be able to lead to a better understanding not only of the current object of research but of

contributions by the informal hierarchies in science. For instance, one is constantly being asked to question one's own prejudices and preconceived opinions. In addition, a limit is set to the claim to validity of one's own beliefs by the fact that the same claim is recognized for others. The possibilities that one's own initial beliefs were inappropriate and that the other may be right accords the other the right to be right. From a sexist, racist, classist, or any other chauvinistic point of view, this recognition is exactly what must be withheld.

With this antiauthoritarian reading of the demand for openness, I am surely going beyond what Gadamer had in mind. Nevertheless, his texts are open to this interpretation if one does not share his positive relation to authority and tradition, which would prevent just such an interpretation. Gadamer's constant demand for openness toward the opinion of the other does exist, however, in a necessary tension with prejudices of one's own that collide with the opinion of the other. I will now examine these prejudices and their function in the process of cognition more thoroughly.

The Role of Prejudices

"Prejudices," according to Gadamer, are "conditions of understanding," and the concept of prejudice is in need of a "fundamental rehabilitation," as are those of "authority and tradition" (TM 245–46 [WM 281]). What is expressed here so apodictically, and what probably triggers resistance in many readers, is initially not that different from feminist concepts of the situatedness of all knowledge. Thus, the concept of 'prejudice' refers initially only to the fact that we do not encounter other persons, texts, or objects in the world from 'nowhere,' but always bring with us historically, socially, culturally, and biographically determined preconceptions and expectations in the light of which we understand and interpret. These preconceptions or expectations can be revised and changed; our "horizon," as he puts it, can be expanded. But there is no avoiding the fact *that* everyone has a specific horizon, that everyone has a certain preknowledge and perspective. This is, in fact, the condition of all understanding: there is no view from nowhere. This is initially nothing more than what Donna Haraway, for example, has called "situatedness" (Haraway 1991).

Gadamer's concept of prejudice becomes controversial at second glance: If what is meant are beliefs resulting from situatedness or positioning, why should they be called prejudices? Here, Gadamer is using rhetorical exaggeration to draw attention to the fact that there are, in principle, no differences between beliefs arising from a person's situatedness and a person's prejudices as the term is ordinarily used. Nevertheless, we sense a certain equivocation: Surely preconceptions and prejudices aren't the same thing? Gadamer counters this objection by distinguishing between justified prejudices (that allow one to understand) and unjustified prejudices (that cause one to misunderstand). The fact that, in principle, they cannot be distinguished—that they are, so to speak, two sides of one coin—is an insight that is also taken into account in feminist theories of knowledge that draw positively on the 'strong program' in the sociology of knowledge. Sandra Harding, for instance, calls for "symmetrical interpretations" of both 'good' and 'bad' science, and stresses that it is a question of "identifying the social causes of good beliefs, not just those of the bad ones" (Harding 1994, 166). In this instance—to use Gadamer's terminology—she is calling for nothing other than an identification of the prejudices by which we understand, not just the prejudices by which we misunderstand.

But how can we distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' prejudices? Gadamer asks this question as well:

> What is necessary is a fundamental rehabilitation of the concept of the prejudice and a recognition of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices, if we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being. Thus we are able to formulate the central question of a truly historical hermeneutics, epistemologically its fundamental question, namely: wherein is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones that it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome? (TM 246 [WM 281–82])

Unfortunately, Gadamer does not answer this 'basic question' except in a few vague references to 'tradition' and 'authority' (TM 247 [WM 282]). Here things get even more complicated: 'Tradition' and 'authority' are heavily implicated in the restriction of the social, political, and imaginary spaces available for women, so feminists might well have some

difficulties embracing these concepts as furthering their cause. I, for one, am very uncomfortable with the idea of their rehabilitation. However, from a feminist point of view, tradition and authority cannot simply be condemned lock, stock, and barrel. That beliefs can also be justified *through* tradition and the authority of those who mediate it, and that the usual condition for justifying knowledge does not allow this and thus excludes many kinds of knowledge (among them much traditional woman's knowledge), has convincingly been put forth by feminists with an emancipatory intent (Dalmiya and Alcoff 1993 and TM 247 [WM 283]). Thus, questions such as "Whose tradition?" and "Whose authority?" must be asked before we reject concepts in which tradition and authority are automatically equated with the tradition and authority of the fathers. To be sure, Gadamer himself links the prejudicial charge of all understanding with a positive connection to tradition and patriarchal authority. He deduces that, because we are always marked by prejudices and are subject to certain constraints, every radical antiauthoritarian project is condemned to failure—for reasons based in *theory* (see, e.g., Gadamer 1972, 469). He argues that we cannot free ourselves from all constraints since we can never become fully conscious of them. Yet, "the dissolution of all constraints of power must be the goal of the fundamentally emancipatory consciousness, which means that an anarchistic utopia must be its final guide. Yet this seems to me to be a *hermeneutically* false consciousness" (Gadamer 1967, 250). In other words, because we cannot free ourselves of every constraint and prejudice, the theoretical hope of a utopia free of all sorts of restraints is in vain. This conservative tendency in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is counterbalanced by other, more progressive ones, however, so we cannot speak of his work as thoroughly conservative. After all, according to Gadamer, "the will of our knowledge must be directed towards . . . escaping the thrall [of our prejudices]" (TM 446 [WM 494]). And with regard to the contradictory trends toward conservation and change, he admits: "This does not mean at all that a revolutionary will toward change, in contrast to the confirmation of tradition, is incapable of legitimation. Neither the one nor the other belief is capable or in need of theoretical legitimation by hermeneutics" (Gadamer 1971, 269). In the end, Gadamer recognizes without reservation the productive potential of a revision of prejudices: "that the shattering of hard and fast prejudices holds the promise of scientific progress is self-evident" (Gadamer 1967,

248).

Finally, the role that prejudices play in Gadamer's thought must be understood as a contrast to his demand for openness toward the other. Openness and prejudice exist in a dialectical relationship: prejudices constitute an expectation of meaning. In this sense, they are necessary to all understanding. Nevertheless, one must not simply give one's self up to them since otherwise neither understanding nor the making of experiences is possible. Prejudices must be brought to consciousness as much as possible and suspended in the hermeneutic situation. Prejudices limit the openness of the question situation and the receptivity for the answers given. Openness as the ability to understand others in what they mean is thus always limited, and the demand for openness cannot be finally realized. Nevertheless, it is indispensable for making us conscious of the danger of always seeing our own prejudices confirmed in 'understanding.' The assumption here is that we cannot know all our prejudices and that we notice one only "when it is, so to speak, stimulated" (TM 266 [WM 304]). From a feminist perspective, this realization has practical consequences. In the interests of a consciousness of prejudices in science that is as comprehensive as possible, the prejudices at work must be 'stimulated' as systematically as possible. This call is made operational in Sandra Harding's demand that people from marginalized social groups be increasingly integrated into scientific research. Only they would be able to identify the prejudices at work in a scientific community that has been dominated thus far by white males. Prejudices that are shared—and therefore not stimulated—remain invisible (see Harding 1994, 160; Harding 1993, 57). On the question of prejudices, it is particularly noticeable that Gadamer's discussion is often not concrete and that it lacks evidential support. Later I will examine whether Gadamer provides criteria for his distinction between justified and unjustified prejudices. Here we must simply note that he indicates neither which prejudices he considers justified or unjustified nor for what reasons. This vagueness in his discussion precludes accepting Gadamer's answers to the problem of prejudice versus openness. Nevertheless, we must allow that he did recognize the importance of the problem.

Finally, it must once again be emphasized that Gadamer "considers the actual purpose of communication to be the mutual testing of prejudices" (Gadamer 1971, 268). Prejudices are therefore always subject to and in need of revision, but are in principle unavoidable. It thus seems

justified to interpret them as a result of 'situatedness.' From the fact of situatedness there arises also the fact that at different times, things must be understood and interpreted differently by different cultures or persons. This point, too, is important to feminist epistemologies.

Divergent Interpretations

Understanding takes place in the tension between openness and prejudice, both of which are necessary conditions for understanding. There is, for Gadamer, no 'God's-eye-view' from which every question could be understood in its totality. In place of the intellectually conceived 'as such' of the thing itself, he therefore posits different 'views of the world.' But there are many viewpoints: "Certainly those who grow up in a particular linguistic and cultural tradition see the world differently from members of another tradition. Certainly the historical 'worlds' that succeed each other in the course of history differ from each other and from today's world" (TM 406 [WM 451]). In this plurality of worldviews or images of the world, no particular one can lay claim to being in the singular possession of truth. That one understands the 'world' or a text differently from different viewpoints does not exclude the possibility that this is nevertheless understanding. Still, how is it possible that the same thing, the same tradition, the same world is constantly being understood differently but nevertheless understood? Gadamer deals with this problem by comprehending truth and understanding not as redeemable facts ('truth' is either present or it is not) but procedurally, as events without conclusion. Thus, the position he defends regarding the hermeneutic question in the humanities is that "the discovery of the true meaning of a text . . . is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that the true meaning has filtered out of it all kinds of things that obscure it, but there emerge continually new sources of understanding, which reveal unsuspected elements of meaning" (TM 265–66 [WM 303]). All understanding is historic and thus subject to change. For Gadamer it is nevertheless always a question of understanding 'the same' objects (TM 430 [WM 477]); but it is so because he comprehends interpretations or insights as an authentic part of the *object* of interpretation: "The way in which a thing presents itself is, rather, part of its own being" (TM 432 [WM 479]). He continues:

"The variety of these views of the world does not involve any relativisation of the 'world.' Rather, what the world is is not different from the views in which it presents itself" (TM 406 [WM 451]).

Although Gadamer seeks to emphasize that relativism is not a consequence of this concept, the dilemma that is well known not only to feminist epistemology is evident here. On the one hand, the possibility of different but equally justified 'readings' of a text, a situation, or a fact is foreseen. Gadamer's concept thus makes no claim either to totality or exclusivity: there is no single, true, or best opinion. Understanding is linked to historical, cultural, social, political, and still other conditions. On this basis it would appear to be impossible to deny that opinions of members of marginalized groups have the nature of understanding or knowledge. For these opinions there is, then, a gain in epistemological authority that is achieved by regarding the different possible interpretations as part of the object of interpretation (aside from which there is no longer an object 'as such,' for which, strangely enough, hegemonic groups have a monopoly on explanation).

This gain in authority is lost on the other hand, however; for on this basis, rejection of sexist or racist interpretations appears to be insupportable. Racists and antiracists would have equally correct views on questions like whether Blacks are less 'intelligent' than Whites. Wouldn't we then be living in a world in which it would also be a fact that Blacks are both less intelligent than, and as intelligent as, Whites, just as it would be a fact that the formulation of this question is absurd from the start? Is it not so that the permitted variety of interpretations leads to complete arbitrariness in the coexistence of interpretations? It remains to be seen whether Gadamer provides a means for distinguishing between correct and incorrect views. Here it is enough to say that Gadamer himself avoids raising the problem in all its jagged uncomfortableness.[7]

"Hermeneutics, Nevertheless, Is Relevant to the Philosophy of Science"

Thus far I have discussed some of the different points of contact between philosophical hermeneutics and feminist epistemology. The upshot of this discussion is that, instead of a mere co-existence of, or even tension between, epistemology and hermeneutics, epistemology must

undergo a hermeneutic expansion that has, in part, already taken place: feminist epistemologies in particular have demanded the inclusion of that which, according to Gadamer's own understanding, is no part of epistemology (which is related to the method-driven part of the production of knowledge).[8]

However, Gadamer had originally more or less excluded the sciences from the area covered by his hermeneutic investigations (and attributed to them, for example, a certain timelessness and independence from vested interests). In the wake of the discussion of Thomas Kuhn's work, however, he withdrew this "stylization of the natural sciences" (TM 252ff. [WM 288ff.]).[9]

This had consequences for the construction of a context for philosophical hermeneutics and epistemology. Ten years after the appearance of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Gadamer acknowledged: "Hermeneutics nevertheless is relevant to the philosophy of science insofar as it uncovers, by means of hermeneutic reflection, conditions of truth within the sciences that do not lie within the logic of research but that precede it" (Gadamer 1972, 450). Still, for Gadamer, hermeneutic reflection remains an undertaking that is separate from epistemology. As matters stand, we find that feminist epistemologies later overcame this separation. Different moments in hermeneutic reflection have been integrated there (though in the Anglo-Saxon world usually without knowledge of Gadamer's work), precisely because an epistemology that limits itself to a canon of methods and to questions of the 'context of justification' wears ideological blinkers; those limitations can be removed by bringing researchers themselves into play, thus making the self-imposed limits visible.

Some of the theoretical elements shared by Gadamer and feminists have been mentioned here already: openness and respect for one's counterpart as one of the demands of method, and the recognition of the irrevocable situatedness of the subject as a condition of all understanding. To this should now be added the recognition, in epistemological terms, of the 'context of discovery.' Thus, Gadamer knew that "the selective points of view that characterize the relevant questions in each case and that raise them to the level of a subject of research cannot be extracted from the logic of research"—that is, from the 'context of justification. "What is remarkable is that the theory of science here abandons itself to complete irrationality for the sake of rationality and holds that making the pragmatics of cognition a theme of discussion in philosophical reflection is illegitimate" (Gadamer 1972, 453). Gadamer con-

siders it a breach of the "duty to be scientific" when ideological preju-
dices remain active as a driving force in the background simply because
a pseudo-exact determination of method does not want to recognize them
(Gadamer 1971, 261). This has also been emphasized repeatedly by fem-
inist theoreticians (see, e.g., Harding 1994, Haraway 1995, and Bordo
1990). The conclusion they have drawn from it is the need to examine,
within a framework of epistemological reflection on scholarly research,
the influence that nonscientific factors have on the posing of scientific
questions and on research programs.

   The relevance of hermeneutics for the philosophy of science may,
however, extend even further. I will turn now to ask whether, from the
perspective of feminist epistemologies, it might not be fruitful to apply
the model of the hermeneutic conversation to cognitive processes as such.

The Hermeneutic Conversation as a Model for Cognitive Processes

Gadamer is no epistemologist in the traditional sense: he neither for-
mulates necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, nor does he
ask after the methods by means of which knowledge is most likely to be
produced. He describes the epistemic position of the subject (situated,
marked by prejudices), and he reflects on the ontologic status of the
objects of knowledge (no separation of thing and interpretation). In his
writings, Gadamer's starting point was the historical disciplines; and as
we have seen, he more or less excludes the knowledge of the sciences
from his reflections in *Truth and Method*. Later, however, he maintains
that "the intention of the whole was aimed at the universality of the
hermeneutic experience, which must be reachable from every starting
point if it is to be a universal experience" (Gadamer 1985, 3).

   If, however, as Gadamer concludes in later works, "the hermeneutic
situation underlies all experience of the world" and the hermeneutic sit-
uation "also plays a role in the work of the sciences" (Gadamer 1968,
114), why not go one step further and reconstruct (epistemic) human-
world interactions according to the conversation model developed by
Gadamer? In *Truth and Method* he applies this model to the understand-
ing interaction with texts. The text becomes a 'conversation partner';
and between person and text, a particular form of dialogue develops, from

question and answer and—in the most favorable case—increasing under-
standing. Since a text cannot feel misunderstood or raise objections to
its interpretation, different rules apply to this hermeneutic conversation
than to an actual conversation between persons. It is 'as if': It is a simu-
lated conversation that, because the other cannot contradict or clear up
misunderstandings, makes special ethical demands. (In order to under-
stand as well as possible, interpreters must, for example, be as aware as
possible of their own prejudices and reflect on their own situatedness.)

As we have seen, Gadamer believes that in spite of the limitations on
reciprocity in such situations, it is correct to speak of hermeneutical con-
versation (TM 327 [WM 369]). And so I ask myself, why should this con-
cept not be expanded so that, for instance, the relationship or interaction
between a person and the object of her interest (whether it is of a scien-
tific or an everyday nature) can be understood as a conversation?

But in what sense can one speak of carrying on a conversation with an
object? It should be noted that Gadamer's examples of the hermeneutic
conversation with a text are a special instance of the conversation situa-
tion encompassing a person and an object. Here the object is, to be sure,
of a special kind: it is a text that, on its own, has meaning; that is, it is an
artifact whose reason for being is to transport meaning. This distinguishes
texts from common objects such as a pile of dirty dishes or a telephone as
a nontextual physical objects. It is, however, also possible to establish a
basis for conversation with such objects. If, for example, I want to know
whether the dishes have already been done, I ask one of my housemates
or the pile of dishes: its presence answers "no" to my question. If I want
to know where the cordless telephone is, I press the call button on the
base (the question then is: "Telephone, where have you gone off to
again?") and follow the ringing. In answer to my question, I receive a
response; but the fact that I do results from my asking the right question
and being able to interpret the answer. Naturally, these examples are very
simple, but they are not banal: they show that the relationship between
question and 'answer' that is characteristic of the hermeneutic situation
can be extended significantly beyond the problem of text interpretation.
I ask a question and receive a particular answer. But perhaps not; then
the question wasn't asked properly. This does not distinguish everyday sit-
uations from those in science. Gadamer writes: "Those things that are
facts in science are not all the possible measurable quantities but the
results of measurement that are an answer to a question, a confirmation,
or refutation of a hypothesis" (Gadamer 1972, 457).

The problem of prejudices is, of course, more complicated in the interaction with objects than in the case of persons or texts. But in principle it should be possible to conceive of prejudices as expectations with regard to the object in question. In my examples from everyday life, there is little room for *misunderstanding* caused by prejudices (understanding that is made possible by prejudices, that is, by an expectation of meaning, is probably the rule here); it is different when we turn to the interaction with objects in science. There, for instance, the prejudice that such a thing as phlogiston—a substance thought to be inherent in all combustible matter—must exist led to a years-long search for a nonexistent substance; this in turn prevented the clarification of the actual processes in an oxidation reduction reaction. Dozens of examples of this kind could probably be found. The basic structure of the conversation—the alternating play of question and answer, from a certain question horizon, from prejudices that want to interpret the answer in their own light, from the suspension of prejudices if they can't be brought into harmony with the answers received—does not change, whether the other is a person, a text, or an object of research. It must be conceded, of course, that in this sequence, talk of a 'conversation' becomes increasingly metaphoric. The question is, why develop such a comprehensive and at the same time metaphoric concept of conversation?

One thing that favors testing an interaction model that at first glance seems so elaborate is this: the model of the hermeneutic conversation, of the interaction of the interpretation and the interpreted, may make possible a new perspective on the debate over social constructivism.

The problem is well known: on the one hand, from a feminist perspective, a constructivist argument makes possible the critique of science as a social construct. Epistemic or metaphysical privilege can thus be successfully countered in science. The postulates of lack of bias and objectivity emerge as a means to defend a certain social construct against the claims of other constructs. But here the committed constructivist undermines her own position: Why go to the trouble to criticize the ruling theories of science and scientific practice if you cannot, on the basis of your own fundamental argument, make a more substantial claim to being right than the claim you are criticizing? In feminist epistemologies, a central concern is a better representation of the world. Social constructivism is, in this context, a good means for undertaking a critical dismantling of a scientific worldview that does not want to see itself as such, but wants to explain 'how things really are.' On the other hand, if this claim

cannot, in principle, be realized, as social constructivism asserts, with what justification does it declare itself to be the better alternative? In the words of Donna Haraway: "They're just texts anyway, so let the boys have them back" (Haraway 1991, 186). In addition, it appears that the constructability of the world has limits. After all, an object does fall downward and not upward, doesn't it? Some representations of the world thus seem to be more appropriate than others. Different feminist theoreticians (and not they alone) have tried in recent years to find a middle road between radical constructivism and metaphysical realism.

The ideas of Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway may be mentioned here as representative (Hayles 1995, Haraway 1991). Hayles argues for a "constrained constructivism." She thus tries to comprehend what is "out there" as an "unmediated flux" that "does not exist in any of the usual conceptual terms we might construct (reality, nature, the universe, the world) until it is processed by an observer. It interacts with and comes into consciousness through self-organizing, transformative processes that include sensory, contextual, and cognitive components. These processes [are] the cusp" (Hayles 1995, 49).[10] She tries in this way to do justice to different intuitions: namely, that on the one hand the world is not already completely "there" and need only be discovered, but that it is formed and constructed in the epistemological process; and on the other hand that there is no full freedom in the construction. Nevertheless, Hayles's image of 'flux' and 'cusp' seems to me to be too elaborate, and flux cannot in the end be distinguished from substance and the thing-in-itself. But what is decisive here is that a fundamental question in the controversy over social constructivism underlies her arguments; namely, Where does the real, true, and unyielding reality end, and where does the room for constructs begin? It would be worth considering, it seems to me, whether this question is not incorrectly posed since it implies an identifiable interface. A different image, and a different question, might be more illuminating. Perhaps the question as to where the border lies would be less urgent if we turned our attention more to the interaction in which 'world' is constituted. For this Haraway has suggested the term 'conversations,' which we hold with the world around us and the beings and objects in it. By employing the concept of 'conversation,' both Haraway and Gadamer call attention to the fact that we ('we' epistemic subjects) are, to be sure, active, but that we are neither exclusively nor omnipotently involved in the process of world creation. "There are agents in all kinds of wonderful forms. Representations of a 'real' world therefore do not

depend on the logic of its 'discovery' but on the power-laden social relationship of the 'conversation.' The world does not speak itself nor does it give way to a master decoder" (Haraway 1991, 93–94).

Haraway's conversations designate fields of discourse rather than individual I-Thou interactions. The concept of the hermeneutic conversation according to Gadamer could thus make an independent contribution to the construction of feminist theory. It does justice to the constructional character of all knowledge by emphasizing the interpretive achievement of the epistemic subject. As Gadamer says: *In the end* there is the achievement of the interpretation, but both 'conversation partners' take part in the production of meaning (TM 349 [WM 391]). In this conversation model, the special importance of the question and the concept of the prejudices of the interpreter make broad room for alternative possible worlds: No being-in-itself of the world is simply being further revealed. On the other hand, freedom of construction is limited by the conversation relationship. If a question is put this or that way (and no other), one receives an answer that is, to be sure, still in need of interpretation but one that is no longer open to unlimited interpretation. This does justice to the intuition that there is a prediscursive, material resistance of the world to all human projects of description; and it may reassure all those who feel a need to assert that social constructivism (or similar projects, such as Goodman's "radical relativism under rigorous constraints," or Putnam's internal realism) cannot abolish the validity of the law of gravity (Putnam 1987, Goodman 1978).

What I have tried to draft here is—to be sure—nothing more than a rough sketch of a project. It's a project, though, that I would like to see carried through. Making instances of the concrete interaction between all possible actors the focus of our observations seems more attractive to me, in any case, than speculation about where 'reality' ends and interpretation begins.

Understanding and Misunderstanding

I will come back now to a previous question. If a number of interpretations of 'the same' text or content are possible, and if, as Gadamer suggests, these interpretations constitute the object and cannot be strictly separated from it, then the only question that remains, from a feminist

perspective, is whether this concept also provides criteria according to which successful and unsuccessful interpretations can be distinguished from one another.

It is clear to Gadamer that there is a possibility of false or inappropriate interpretations (TM, 266 [WM, 304]). Not just any opinion is as good as any other: relativism in this sense is at odds with Gadamer's thinking. Understanding does not always occur just because one has the feeling that one understands. But what distinguishes understanding from misunderstanding for Gadamer? It is difficult to find an answer to this question because Gadamer does not want to provide generalizable criteria or methodological guidelines that would guarantee correct interpretations. But the question in this chapter is: What can Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics contribute to the project of a feminist epistemology? And it is therefore important to ask whether sexist or racist views must be admitted as justified (or even correct) within the framework of an epistemological concept derived from Gadamer. This is where the issue of the viability of a feminist reading of Gadamer will be decided; and this is why we must ask what his work reveals if it is examined closely in this context. For this we must free ourselves of the intentions of the author, that is, we must be prepared to read him counter to his own intentions.

Three elements of philosophical hermeneutics in particular appear to be suited to the evaluation of the appropriateness of interpretations: hermeneutically significant *distance,* openness toward the other, and a consciousness of one's own situatedness.

Distance (particularly chronological distance) plays a special role in Gadamer's writings in the evaluation of interpretations, as indicated by a passage such as this one: "It is only this temporal distance that can solve the really critical question of hermeneutics, namely of distinguishing the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the ones by which we misunderstand" (TM 266 [WM 304]). Distance (often) first makes it possible to understand—that is, to perceive at all—the conditions under which a certain view comes to exist. Distance fulfills the function of helping to see more clearly, though not exclusively from a historical perspective:

> Distance reveals itself to be a hermeneutic moment, even in simultaneity, for example, in the meeting of two persons who first seek common ground in conversation, and fully in the meeting of persons who thereby speak foreign languages or live in foreign

cultures. Every meeting of this kind makes clear one's own pre-existing opinions, which seem so natural that one could overlook the naive assimilation with one's own and thus not even notice the resulting misunderstanding. (Gadamer 1985, 9)

It becomes immediately clear that this is but an ideal notion of understanding if we imagine white colonialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries allowing themselves to be inspired, in their encounters with the 'natives,' to reflect on their own preexisting cultural opinions (or their limited validity). And it is unclear whether the critical function of distance lies only in *self*-critique. If that were so, then it could only play its part when openness toward the other and a consciousness of one's own prejudices exists. One could rather argue the case that where these conditions are not fulfilled, self-critique can be replaced by external critique; and could take the side of an epistemological privileging of the view from below. But whether we consider this a promising idea or not, it turns out, on closer examination of Gadamer's concept of distance, that it rests primarily on two propositions: openness toward the other and consciousness of one's own position, that is, situatedness.

Understanding and mutual understanding, according to Gadamer, can take place only if we are truly open toward the other and take very seriously the possibility that we are wrong and the other is right—so seriously that, in the case of misunderstandings, we first seek the error on our part and in our perceptions. Is this kind of openness (or rather, the demand for openness) suitable as a methodological postulate of feminist philosophy, even though there might be some worries that it forces us to recognize even sexist positions as legitimate? I think that it is, but with certain limitations. I have already indicated, for example, that (hetero) sexist, racist, or classist opinions do not meet the conditions for openness.

If, however, openness toward other opinions becomes the necessary condition for epistemically justified positions, then the question arises—particularly for feminists—as to whether this is not throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Doesn't the criterion for exclusion formulated as 'lack of openness toward the positions of others' aim a blow at certain positions? One instance would, of course, be feminist positions that are not prepared to accept that a sexist position is correct and according to which women cannot produce great intellectual achievements. Two things can be said about the justification of this clear lack of openness: (a) this is not the same *kind* of lack of openness, for lack of openness toward a

sexist position is a direct consequence or function of its original lack of openness and lack of readiness to concede to others the right to be right, therefore a second order lack of openness may, in this conception, be justified; and (b) it is a liberating process, for members of marginalized groups no longer to have to assume that members of socially dominant groups are right in their views of everyone and everything. This kind of 'openness,' the willingness to seek the error in oneself, would rather be an act of subjugation and a result of a 'false consciousness'; it could not, therefore, be viewed as openness in the methodologically fruitful sense outlined here.

In situations where there is a power gap, the demand for openness toward one's counterpart is thus very complex. Perhaps openness could be regarded as an ideal worth striving for: its realization would be a sign of nonhierarchically structured relations. Last but not least, consciousness of one's own situatedness or prejudices turns out to be helpful in evaluating interpretations; but in my opinion it would be going too far to make it a necessary condition of understanding and a criterion for excluding opinions that are objectively correct but based on ignorance of one's own situatedness. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that Gadamer's opinions and feminist positions both hold knowledge of one's own perspective and one's own predisposition toward prejudice to be significant in bringing about understanding and knowledge. We should recall that Gadamer saw the mutual testing of prejudices as the actual purpose of communication. However, prejudices can be tested only if one is aware of them. Becoming conscious of them thus means a potential increase in knowledge. Not being aware of them means, at best, being subject to the illusion that one is free of prejudices; at worst they can obstruct the production of knowledge because, as Gadamer cautions, they continue to act as a driving force and thus escape rational examination. For Gadamer, the broadest consciousness possible of one's own prejudices leads to better interpretations (even if this consciousness must be regarded as a regulatory idea since complete consciousness of one's own particularity and limits would demand a god's-eye view that does not exist). Therefore, there must always be a demand for this consciousness, or rather, the lack of it is to be criticized. Still, it is probably not possible to formulate this demand in terms of a necessary or sufficient condition. It cannot be sufficient, especially from a feminist perspective, because it is possible—even with consciousness of one's own prejudices, for example—to advance sexist ideas with conviction. And it cannot be

necessary unless one is prepared to discard the lion's share of modern science because the scientists who produced it falsely believed that they were investigating nature as it truly and in itself is, and that this has nothing to do with themselves or their particular historical, social, or cultural situation.

On the basis of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, there thus appear to be no 'hard and fast' criteria that can definitively show certain interpretations of texts, social conditions, or the world at large to be false. On the other hand, it would be difficult to produce sexist, racist, or other interpretations that negate the existence of the other if we hold to Gadamer's admonition to be open to the other, to be willing to examine our own prejudices, and to be aware of limits to our own perspective that arise from these prejudices. Here, feminist epistemology and philosophical hermeneutics are close to each other.

In addition, feminist epistemologies owe to Gadamer the insight into the fundamental importance of the hermeneutic dimension of all knowledge. That Gadamer's ideas—at least when viewed from the point of view of epistemology—are often somewhat thin and vague undoubtedly results from the fact that forty years have passed since the appearance of *Truth and Method*. The answers of the year 1960 have been superseded in the year 2000—but not the questions. This is where feminist epistemologies can still learn from Gadamer. In particular, the problematic relationship between the necessary openness toward other voices and the limits to this openness arising from one's own situatedness still require clarification. Indeed, how power relations and asymmetries can be systematically theorized is still one of the most important and least satisfyingly answered questions in feminist theory.

Notes

1. See Gadamer (1965). Of course, this undertaking only makes sense if one does not proceed on the assumption that Gadamer's conservative political views are so intertwined with his philosophy that the latter can no longer serve emancipatory ends.

2. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (hereafter TM), 196 [Gadamer (1990) [hereafter WM], 226].

3. The tendency in contemporary scientific practice is for the contrast between "understand" and "explain" to disappear. We need think only of more recent social history, which works in part in ways that "explain," and of scientific successes that depend on an approach that "understands" (as Evelyn Fox Keller has shown in her biography of Barbara McClintock).

4. Let me note in passing here that C. S. Peirce (another philosopher who has thus far escaped feminist attention) develops a theory of all sign processes based on a conversational model. Hence, he construes "thought" as a special case or subspecies of dialogue wherein I am spoken to by former stages of myself instead of by others.

5. Kant already understood the importance of the scientific question for the answers to be given by nature. See *Critique of Pure Reason,* B xiii, preface to the second edition.

6. This is not the need for the colorfully exotic, but rather, with Schlegel, a critique of the "axiom of familiarity [which] is that things must always have been just as they are with us, for things are naturally like this" (TM 325 [WM 367]).

7. It is my contention that this is an effect of thinking primarily in historical categories. Where Gadamer speaks about differing and different interpretations, he tends to string them together as a sequence of succeeding interpretations, rather than as simultaneous ones (cf. for example TM 254 [WM 289]). It surely is easier to admit that different times are marked by different prejudices, and therefore we arrive at different interpretations—not interpretations that are better or worse, but that are in keeping with their specific situation—than it is to admit that this principle applies not only to diachronically but also to synchronically differing interpretations. For instance, it is one thing to concede—as Gadamer does—that the nineteenth-century German historian Theodor Mommsen recorded significant achievements in the area of classical history—even if we see many things differently today since we are moved by different questions and different prejudices. It is another thing altogether to concede that Ernst Nolte, the conservative German historian, and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen have given equally applicable interpretations of the causes of the Holocaust. These interpretations are contradictory: they cannot both be right. Whether the Holocaust was made possible by a specifically German antisemitism (Goldhagen) or by an overreaction to a perceived threat arising from the "Asian" horrors of Stalinism (Nolte's highly controversial position), is a question that one cannot simply allow to stand with the comment that it is just one of many different interpretations. Gadamer avoids conflicts like this one by theorizing a chronological order of differing interpretations that does not in fact exist.

8. In its most programmatic form in Harding (1991/1994).

9. For WM, see esp. nn. 209 and 211 (these notes are not included in the English translation).

10. From a German point of view, her "constrained constructivism" calls to mind Kant—that is, the physiological neo-Kantianism of the nineteenth century as put forward by Helmholtz and Mueller.

References

Alcoff, Linda, and Elizabeth Potter, eds. 1993. *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge.

Bordo, Susan. 1990. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism." In *Feminism/ Postmodernism,* ed. Linda J. Nicholson. New York: Routledge.

Code, Lorraine. 1992. "Feminist Epistemology." In *A Companion to Epistemology,* ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 1993. "Taking Subjectivity into Account." In Alcoff and Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies*.

Dalmiya, Vrinda, and Linda Alcoff. 1993. "Are 'Old Wives Tales' Justified?" In Alcoff and Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies*.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1943. "Das Problem der Geschichte in der neueren deutschen Philosophie." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1957. "Was ist Wahrheit?" In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1965. "Hermeneutik und Historismus." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1967. "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik, und Ideologiekritik. Metakritische Erörterungen zu Wahrheit und Methode." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1968. "Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1971. "Replik zu Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1972. "Nachwort zur 3. Auflage [von *Wahrheit und Methode*]." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1985. "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik. Versuch einer Selbstkritik." In *Hermeneutik II: Wahrheit und Methode*.

———. 1990. *Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik,* 6th ed. (*Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 1). Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.

———. 1993. *Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode: Ergänzungen, Register,* 2d ed. (*Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 2). Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.

Goodman, Nelson. 1978. *Ways of Worldmaking.* Sussex: Harvester Press.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books.

Harding, Sandra. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: 'What Is Strong Objectivity?'" In Alcoff and Potter, *Feminist Epistemologies*.

———. 1994. *Das Geschlecht des Wissens. Frauen denken die Wissenschaften neu.* Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag. [*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991].

Harding, Sandra, and Merrill B. Hintikka, eds. 1993. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science.* Dordrecht: Reidel.

Hartsock, Nancy. 1983. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In Harding and Hintikka, *Discovering Reality*.

Hayles, Katherine N. 1995. "Searching for Common Ground." In *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction,* ed. M. Soule and G. Lease. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of Pure Reason.* Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keller, Evelyn Fox. 1983. *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock.* San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.

Kuhn, Thomas S. 1962. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moulton, Janice. 1983. "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method." In Harding and Hintikka, *Discovering Reality*.

Nagel, Thomas. 1986. *The View from Nowhere.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Putnam, Hilary. 1987. *The Many Faces of Realism.* Chicago: Open Court.

11

The Horizon of Natality

Gadamer, Heidegger, and the Limits of Existence

Grace M. Jantzen

There is a strange story in the Hebrew Bible of King Saul, beside himself with jealousy over the young man David's increasing popularity. He pursued David, seeking to kill him; and in the pursuit chanced upon a band of David's supporters who were "prophesying" in religious ecstasy. Completely against his intentions, Saul himself was overcome, seized by the same spirit as David's supporters, and joined in the prophesying. "Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?" But it did not last; Saul soon reverted to his old ways, and eventually came to grief (I Samuel 19, 18–24).

In a similar manner, I am inclined to ask, Is Gadamer also among the feminists? It is not because I imagine Gadamer ever to have been at risk of falling into feminist ecstasy. His theory of interpretation, however, and in particular his insistence on the situatedness in time and the finitude

of the interpreter have at first sight remarkable affinities to feminist standpoint theory as articulated, for instance, by Sandra Harding (1991, 1993) and Nancy Hartsock (1983, 1987), though there is no indication that Gadamer and these feminists ever read each other. Yet the similarities of Gadamer's work to standpoint theory, welcome as they are in such an arch-traditionalist and conservative thinker, are, I shall argue, intrinsically connected with a focus on mortality as the central philosophical category. Such a focus has been part of the discourse of Western philosophy since Plato defined a philosopher as one who lives as though already dead, finding truth only beyond the grave. It is, I shall argue, profoundly antifeminist. Therefore, if feminists wish to appropriate Gadamer as one of our number, I wish to suggest that we should do so only with great caution, distancing ourselves from the death-loving categories of his work and developing instead a symbolic of natality.

Gadamer on Interpretation

Gadamer's most famous book, *Truth and Method,* is primarily concerned with the question of hermeneutics, even if that concern also opens up ontological questions (Warnke 1987, Wachterhauser 1999). In particular, Gadamer attempts to show that the epistemological methods of the natural sciences, characterized by objectivism, neutrality, and an emphasis on "fact," are not paradigmatic for all forms of knowledge. It has long been recognized that the methods of physical science cannot be rigorously applied to areas of study such as history, art, or literature; but it has often been held that this is because these human sciences fall short of the epistemological standards of disciplines like physics or chemistry. Gadamer vigorously rejects this view of the matter, and views the positivist epistemology developed in its service as nothing short of disastrous. He argues that it is just the other way around. The methods of interpreting the world that are utilized in the physical sciences are at most capable of generating a subset of knowledge suitable for particular purposes; whereas the hermeneutics of the human sciences are the more general and paradigmatic. I shall come to the reasons he gives for this in a moment.

If Gadamer wants to preserve the human sciences from being gobbled up by the methods of empirical science, however, he is at least as wary

of some of the attempts at rescuing the human sciences that have been made by writers in the Romantic tradition, especially Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher had argued that what is important for understanding an ancient text, a work of art, or a piece of music is to try to get into the mind of its author or creator. The more we can understand the author's thoughts, feelings and intentions, the better will be our interpretation of the work in question. Gadamer, however, rejects Schleiermacher's position. What we need to know, Gadamer urges, is the *meaning* of what is said in a text or a work of art. In order to know that meaning, the question of what was happening in the mind of the author is unimportant. That is a psychological fact about *him or her,* not part of the meaning or truth of his or her *text,* and it is the latter that is of hermeneutical interest.

But how, then, is that meaning to be discerned? Gadamer makes much of the idea of the hermeneutical circle, especially as developed by Heidegger. The hermeneutical circle had long been recognized as important for interpreting a text, where a part is understood in terms of the whole, and the whole in terms of the parts. Thus for example (mine, not Gadamer's) these lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *Aurora Leigh,*

> Earth's crammed with heaven
> And every common bush afire with God;
> But only they who see take off their shoes . . .
>
> ([1857]1995, 821–24)

can only properly be understood in the context, first, of the whole poem; second, of nineteenth century English Romantic verse, especially its pantheistic strand; and third, of the whole of Western literature and its roots in the Hebrew Bible, in this case particularly the story of Moses and the burning bush. Yet on the other hand all of these are in turn interpreted afresh because of Browning's lines: if it is not only a special bush in a desert long ago that was revelatory, but every common bush here and now, then revelation itself must be construed differently. We understand the poem by understanding the context; but we understand the context better, and indeed expand it, by understanding the poem. There is a continuous and reciprocal process of deepening interpretation between part and whole.

Heidegger takes this standard process of interpretation and gives it an additional dimension. Not only is there reciprocity between part and whole within the text and context, but there is also continuous movement between the text and the interpreter. Interpreters do not come to

a text with empty heads; they come with assumptions, presuppositions, and a background of knowledge, without which the hermeneutical process could hardly begin. As Heidegger states, "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (Heidegger 1978, 191–92), but rather we meet it with our own "fore-structure" of understanding. Yet our assumptions, our forestructure, may in turn be challenged by the text, and the background modified or enlarged in a manner similar to the deepened understanding of a poem gained from appreciation of one of its lines. We must never allow our forestructure to resist such challenge or modification by "the things themselves" (195). Thus the circularity of hermeneutics should not be seen as regrettable, let alone vicious, but rather, as Gadamer states in his appropriation of it, "ontologically positive" (Gadamer 1979, 236). This will become clearer in what follows.

We can already see that there is much in this theory of interpretation to gladden feminists' hearts, especially those of us trained in Anglo-American analytic philosophy have been taught to treat objectivity, neutrality, and the quest for empirical facts as central to all knowing, at the expense of subjectivity, taking a stance, sensitivity, feeling, and desire. As Genevieve Lloyd (1993) has argued, rationality itself has been constructed along masculinist lines; moreover, natural science with rationality thus construed has been taken as the paradigm of knowledge. Feminists challenge this empirical epistemology with its emphasis on objectivity and neutrality, showing the importance of subjectivity (Code 1991) and standpoint (Harding 1991, 1993; Hartsock 1983, 1987) not as unfortunate encumbrances, but as vital to all knowing. To find Heidegger and Gadamer making similar points is surely very welcome. Indeed, Gadamer insists that whereas the word "prejudice" is often given negative connotations, in fact it simply means "prejudgment." Prejudgments may be right or wrong, but they are not avoidable. The crucial thing is not to pretend that we have no prejudices, but rather to open them up to challenge and to be willing to change our minds when our prejudgments turn out to have been misguided (Gadamer 1979, 240–47).

And there is more. The prejudices or forestructures with which we approach a text are in reciprocal relation with the texts and traditions to be interpreted. Prejudices do not exist only to be dispelled; rather, they provide an important point of entry into the work to be interpreted. Many a feminist, trying to bring salient aspects of her subjectivity and

the perspectives of her own position to bear on a philosophical problem, has been simply overwhelmed by the sheer weight of the masculinist tradition of rationality in Western cultural discourse. Yet here are two major thinkers who place forestructures at the heart of what is involved in achieving understanding. It is perhaps surprising that feminists have made so little use of such potential allies.

Or is it? One of the questions Gadamer immediately raises is how, given that prejudices and forestructures of understanding are inevitable and even desirable, they could ever be corrected or challenged. How could we tell if, in a particular case, our forestructures were misguided? As Gadamer suggests, when we read texts, "we may ask how we can break the spell of our own foremeanings. To be sure there can be no general presupposition that what is stated in a text will fit perfectly with my own meanings and expectations" (Gadamer 1979, 237, with correction from p. ix). He does not, however, see the lack of certainty about a perfect fit as an insurmountable problem. Although our anticipatory foremeanings may sometimes be mistaken, they will be pulled up by the text itself, which will break their spell. Just as, when we learn a new language, we sometimes discover that we were mistaken about the meaning of a word we thought we knew because we hear it used in a context that does not make sense according to the meaning we thought it had, so also our more general assumptions are sometimes challenged and corrected by the text or discourse that we are trying to understand. It is crucial that we should be willing to accept challenge by a text, and be sensitive to possible correction. "But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own foremeanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own foremeanings" (238). Thus we become aware of our foremeanings precisely by the training that comes with continued exposure to texts and a willingness to learn from them. There are no short cuts; but from this it does not follow that we would make better progress if—*per impossibile*—we encountered a text without bringing any foremeanings at all.

The recognition of standpoint and the refusal of any "extinction of one's self" is again, surely, very welcome to feminists. However, we should note from the outset that Gadamer's method is in fact highly conservative. There is in his work considerable attention given to how the text or the tradition will challenge and correct my foreunderstanding, but

little about how my foreunderstanding will challenge or correct a tradition. In this respect, the parallel with learning a language is instructive: the language is virtually always "right"; and if what I thought a word meant is challenged by my encounter with its actual use, then it is I and not the word that must be corrected. Now, if part of my foreunderstanding is a commitment to feminism and I encounter a patriarchal discourse—say, the canon of Western literature, or the beliefs and practices of Christendom—it is easy to see how the assumptions will clash, but it is not at all easy to see what Gadamer could make of this. If all that he is concerned with is *understanding* the tradition—and that is indeed his first emphasis—then to be sure the tradition will quickly dispel any idea I might have had about its egalitarianism. If the point, however, is not merely to understand but also to bring about change—and without such a purpose, why bother?—then it is not easy to see how Gadamer's method will help. His approach is one that consistently privileges tradition. For all his welcome stress on foremeanings, the hermeneutical situation is one in which the text will "assert its *truth*" against them. But what if the text is false? Although Gadamer never overtly rules out that possibility, neither does he explore it: text and tradition are accorded so great a respect that he does not develop a "hermeneutic of suspicion" (Ricoeur 1974, 323) to run parallel to his hermeneutic of generosity.

In fact, the situation is even more complicated than what I have discussed thus far. For anyone to become a feminist in the first place— and thereby to have developed a feminist prejudice or foreunderstanding—she must already have engaged with the patriarchal tradition and found it wanting. From which position could she have done this? If Gadamer is right, then it is hard to see how anyone could escape from being locked into tradition, since it is only within traditions and as a result of them that foreunderstandings are formed. But if our foreunderstandings are always already shaped by the tradition, then how can they ever challenge that tradition? The conservatism of Gadamer's position runs very deep.

Gadamer is surely correct in his rejection of a "god's-eyeview," to borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway (1991); he insists that we are always situated somewhere. "We stand always within tradition, and this is no objectifying process, i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always a part of us, a model or exemplar, a recognition of ourselves that our later historical judgment would hardly see as a kind of knowledge, but as the simplest preservation

of tradition" (Gadamer 1979, 250). We are formed, built up, by the tradition to which we belong; and this tradition asserts its truth and normative value as we study it more deeply. Gadamer thus speaks of the "classical" as that which "through the constant proving of itself, sets before us something that is true," so that we are confronted with "the binding power of its validity" (255). It is this normativity, he argues, this recognition of the classics as the standard or measuring rod, that constitutes them as canonical (256).

But here again there is cause for uneasiness. After Foucault, we can hardly be quite so confident that the classics have been preserved simply because they continue to speak truth: might it not equally be that powerful conservative forces have so formed us that we will only count as true that which conforms to classical norms? It is certainly the case that the boundaries of scholarly disciplines have been drawn in such a way that challenge to the traditional canon of a discipline is made extremely difficult. Yet any academic feminist who has confronted the patriarchally constructed boundaries of her discipline, whether philosophy, literature, religion, biology, art, or law, may be allowed considerable cynicism at the idea that the classics of her discipline retain their canonical status simply in virtue of the radiance of their truth (Gadamer 1979, 443). The question of what counts as canonic is not separable from the question of who is doing the counting. It is always pertinent to ask what investments of gendered power are at play in the constitution of knowledge. Such a question, however, is quite foreign to Gadamer's approach. As John Caputo has said, "[D]eep truths are purchased by deep violence, by excluding what contaminates the system of truth, by repressing what disturbs its unity, by swatting away those who trouble the guardians of truth with bothersome questions. It has an idea that the tradition maintains itself in no small part by reason of its success in erasing the dangerous memory of those who have questioned it" (Caputo 1989, 263).

Another way of putting these points is to note that, for all Gadamer's rich learning, his presentation of both the interpreter and the tradition is surprisingly monolithic. Who is this "we" who "stand always within tradition?" And which tradition do "we" stand in? In part Gadamer's point is, as already noted, that everyone is situated somewhere; there is no view from nowhere. But in his writings, especially in *Truth and Method,* this emphasis on situation frequently slides unannounced into the tacit assumptions that "tradition" is the canon of Western culture reaching back into Greek and Roman antiquity, and that "we" are those

who have been educated according to its norms: probably white, Western, male, and privileged.

But these assumptions ignore the existence of other traditions with equal claim to respect and normativity: Islam, say, or Tibetan Buddhism, each of which also have interpreters, though "we" are not among them. Gadamer's writings reinscribe assumptions of European cultural hegemony. However, it might be said in Gadamer's defense that although his examples are indeed drawn from European culture, in which after all he himself is situated, his hermeneutical theory is of wider application and does not preclude other cultural traditions and interpreters. I leave the assessment of this defense to those more competent than I am to evaluate it (cf. King 1999).

Yet even from within a Western cultural trajectory there are problems here. Feminists know all too well that when the "we" who are interpreters are women, we are not only formed by the tradition, we are also alienated by and from it. Thus our hermeneutical activity puts us in the position of either ventriloquizing male discourse or else emphasizing not the validity of the tradition, but its binding power, and not in the positive sense Gadamer meant. Moreover, that tradition itself is nothing like the unified whole that Gadamer implies. Even within it there are dissenting voices of many kinds, voices expressing alienation and alterities, repressed voices whose dangerous memories are emerging as feminist and postcolonial scholars become aware of the pregnant silences and voices from the margins of the "classical" texts. To speak of "the" tradition, even if what is meant is the Western cultural trajectory, is already to assume a false universal whose hegemony has at least as much to do with technologies of power as with the inherent validity, beauty, or goodness that Gadamer prefers to emphasize.

The Fusion of Horizons

Perhaps the most widely known motif of Gadamer's work on hermeneutics, at least in the English-speaking part of the world, is his idea of the "fusion of horizons": those of the interpreter and of the text to be interpreted. As Gadamer presents it in *Truth and Method,* the key issue is the historicity of each of these. I begin with the historicity of the text. In the case of works of art or literature, for example, it is obvious that each was

produced in a historical context different from that of the present day interpreter. In the historical context or situation in which they arose, the world inevitably presented itself differently. Gadamer calls the situation that forms the perspective of the text its horizon: "the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 1979, 269).

Now, proper understanding of the historical text can be achieved only by entering as fully as possible into the world view in which it was formed. Gadamer puts this in terms of entering or acquiring the horizon of the text, its standpoint. "The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring the particular historical horizon, so that what we are seeking to understand can be seen in its true dimensions. If we fail to place ourselves in this way within the historical horizon out of which tradition speaks, we shall misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us" (Gadamer 1979, 270). If, for example, we read Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, we may feel that they speak to us directly, without intermediary. Yet we will understand them much more fully if we recognize in them a philosophical protest against the mechanistic epistemology of the Enlightenment represented for Blake by Locke and Newton, as well as a political protest against the imperialism and burgeoning capitalism of the eighteenth century. When we also become aware of Blake's personal biography, and of the influence of Swedenborg and Boehme and Paracelsus on his work, our understanding of his poems becomes ever richer. The more fully we can enter into the historical horizon of the text we are trying to interpret, the more insight into that text we will gain.

This much is hardly news. But Gadamer insists not only on the historicity of the text, which is after all obvious enough, but also on the horizon of the interpreter who encounters that text. As discussed in the previous section, each of us is already within a historical and cultural situation, and it is this situation that gives us our standpoint and perspective, and forms the horizon of what we can see. As Gadamer says, "we must always already have a horizon in order to be able to place ourselves within a situation"—that is, the historical situation or horizon of the text to be studied. "For what do we mean by 'placing ourselves' in a situation? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, in that we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must also bring ourselves" (Gadamer 1979, 271). Rather than denying or trying to rise above our subjectivity or standpoint,

the prejudices that are part of the forestructure of our understanding, we try instead to bring the prejudices to full consciousness so that they are part of the encounter with the text.

When we bring these prejudices to the text—when, to use Gadamer's terms, the horizon of our foreunderstanding meets the horizon of the text—what results is a "fusion" of horizons. Gadamer calls such fusion "effective history." Our own prejudices are challenged; our world becomes larger; our perspective more acute as the historical horizon of the text fuses with our own, so that our standpoint shifts and our view expands. Such fusion is how learning takes place; it is what all education is about.

> The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound by any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for the person who is moving. . . . When our historical consciousness places itself within historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own, but together they constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. (Gadamer 1979, 271)

The fusion of horizons, therefore, is an expansion of our understanding of and sympathy for not only the past and its texts, but ourselves and the present as well.

I have already discussed some of the attractions and difficulties of this aspect of Gadamer's account for feminist philosophy: what I wish to do next is to consider in more detail his idea of the horizon of the interpreter, and in particular its boundaries. When Gadamer writes of our own historicity, which gives us our horizon, he has little to say about how that historicity is actually constituted. He does not, for example, mention the actual historical formation of Germany in the twentieth century and its relations with the rest of Europe; nor does he speak of his own horizons or their formation. It might be held that these would not be appropriate in a theoretical text like *Truth and Method*. But if this is granted, it is still striking that even at a theoretical level he has little to say about the sorts of things that actually form our horizons. Though he speaks of prejudices

and their challenge, he is silent even in general terms about the origin and nature of these prejudgments.

If we try to fill in his silences, we find that whereas Gadamer does not discuss the formation of our prejudgments, feminists have paid a great deal of attention to precisely this issue. Our embeddedness in our historical context is, for a start, inseparable from our embodiment. Moreover, bodies are not generalities but are always specifically constituted as being of a particular gender, race, cultural and linguistic background, size, age, structure of dis/ability, and so on. Even if these particularities are socially constructed and ambiguous, they are the lenses that shape our perspectives, and it is through them that all our hermeneutical activity must be conducted. Although Gadamer stresses the importance of becoming conscious of our prejudices and horizons, he never mentions any of the particular aspects of their formation, or how, in specific terms, the ways in which our prejudices are formed would affect his idea of the fusion of horizons. If he had considered their formation in relation, say, to embodiment, gender, class, or race, he might not have been quite so sanguine about privileging tradition and according it normative status.

There is, however, one very important exception to Gadamer's overall silence about what actually constitutes our horizon, and that is his emphasis on our finitude. As Gadamer puts it in *Truth and Method,* the person of effective-historical consciousness is the one who achieves insight through experience, indeed the one who learns to be "discerning and insightful" (Gadamer 1979, 320). But the most important insight, the greatest lesson to be learned from experience, is a "knowledge of the limitations of humanity," and by this Gadamer means primarily temporal limitations, the recognition that we are "master neither of time nor the future." "Real experience is that in which man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. It proves to be an illusion that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns" (320). It is only with this recognition that we can begin to judge what aspects of the future are still open; only by accepting our limitations (and the limitations on the expectation and planning of all human beings) can we be aware of our own historicity. Such awareness, for Gadamer, is inseparably connected with the notion of standpoint, which can only ever be finite. "The standpoint that is beyond any standpoint, a standpoint from which we could conceive its true identity, is a pure illusion" (339).

Human finitude is, for Gadamer, fundamentally constituted by our mortality. Death is the ultimate limitation. Although in one sense our horizons are unlimited, in that there is no boundary set to the *sorts* of ideas or interpretations we might have, in another sense there is a sharp cut-off to our horizons: we will die. Death, therefore, forms what Karl Jaspers has called a "boundary situation," a situation in which objective rationality will not serve, and we are forced to depend upon ourselves (Jaspers 1969–71, vol. 2:177–222): for Jaspers this was a central consideration for existentialism. For Gadamer, however, the focus is not so much on a question of authentic existence but rather on the implications of our finitude upon our hermeneutical activity as historically situated interpreters. The fact that we will die means for Gadamer that death becomes a category in all our interpretation. I will explain this more fully in the next section.

A Horizon of Death

Gadamer draws deeply and appreciatively from Heidegger's discussion of death and human finitude. In *Being and Time* Heidegger presents death as central to *Dasein* (roughly meaning human existence). Contemporary society, the amorphous mass of people around us, he says, does not want to confront the reality of death, and provides instead "a constant tranquilization" about it (Heidegger 1978, 298). But Heidegger is contemptuous about society in this and other matters, characterizing it as "the they": "'they' say this, 'they' say that: why should I run my life according to the opinion of 'the they'?" In fact, Heidegger turns the whole issue around. Whereas 'they' try to tranquilize me and prevent me from confronting death's reality, if I refuse that concealment then I am simultaneously freed from the grip of the "they" and enabled to live authentically.

Rather than pretend that death is uncertain or at any rate probably still far away and not really pertaining to me, I need to accept that "death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility" (Heidegger 1978, 303). In grasping the fact of mortality not just as a general theory about humanity but as actually true for me, I can find authentic life as Being-toward-death. As Heidegger puts it, "Death does not just 'belong' to one's own Dasein in an undifferentiated way; death *lays* claim to an *individual* Dasein. The nonrelational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself" (308).

Thus it is death that gives me my life. In recognition of the fact that I am not infinite and will not live forever I am forced to bring serious attention to my own "potentiality-for-Being." Who and what do I want to be, given that I cannot take forever about it? And in the face of my own death, why should I let the decisions about the short life I have be made for me tacitly by "the they"? Since in death I shall in any case be "wrenched away from the 'they,'" I can already in anticipation free myself from living by their expectations and concealments. Thus by deliberately Being-toward-death I am free for my "ownmost possibility," my own authentic existence, into which I have been "thrown." This is not a comfortable situation, to be sure. It is filled with anxiety, both about death itself and about the conduct of life in the face of it. It is, nevertheless, authentic. "Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concernful solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned *freedom toward death*—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they,' and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious" (Heidegger 1978, 311). It is in this way that death enables me to live: to live *my* life and not the life somebody else expects of me. In my finitude is my authenticity.

Now, when Gadamer considers finitude and historicity as central to an understanding of hermeneutics, it is Heidegger's discussion of death that he has explicitly in mind. He refers to this discussion in his essay on "The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century," where he writes, "The authenticity of Dasein, which emerges in boundary situations, in running ahead toward death, was distinguished [by Heidegger] from the inauthenticity of trivial, thoughtless life, from publicness, from the 'They,' from idle talk, from curiosity, and so on—from all ways of falling prey to society and its power to reduce things to their lowest common denominator. In short, the authenticity of Dasein emerged as human finitude" (Gadamer 1976, 124–25). As Gadamer sees it, what is really crucial here is the positive effect of the recognition of finitude on our understanding of the "real fundamental constitution of Dasein," death as its "mode of being." It is this that Gadamer claims to have made central to his hermeneutical theory.

Thus although Gadamer's discussion of historicity and finitude in *Truth and Method* proceeds in general terms and does not explicitly mention death (or any other aspect of finitude), it is clear that this is what was shaping his account. When he speaks of the horizon of the interpreter,

therefore, and the historicity of that horizon, we know that this horizon is a horizon of death. Life is not boundless; it will terminate. And finitude needs to be part of the conscious forestructure of the interpreter.

But when we try to be more precise, what exactly is the force of death for Gadamer's hermeneutics? And what is a feminist to make of it? Some things are already plain. Perhaps most obvious is the way the fact of death helps to rule out the "god's-eye view" of understanding: for human beings bounded by time an "infinite" view is not available. From a feminist perspective such an elimination of the "god trick" is, as already discussed, highly welcome. Moreover, from Plato onward many in the Western tradition have looked on death as the event that will would free us from the shackles of the body and thus make real knowledge possible for the first time.[1] Gadamer sees such a construction of death and its aftermath as a consoling illusion. Knowledge is possible only within historicity, not by escaping from it. Though both Plato and Heidegger say that death is that which gives me true life, what they mean by this saying is diametrically opposite: for Plato it means that death is the escape from this body and its passions to an immortal state; whereas for Heidegger it means that there is no escape, and I had better live authentically now, not wait for some other time or place that will never come. Platonist though Gadamer in many respects is (cf. Gadamer 1986), he follows Heidegger in his understanding of death as a limit. When we consider how a Platonic-Christian idea of death has been used in the Western tradition to structure rationality as ideally disembodied, disembedded in material and social reality, and linked with the godly masculine soul rather than the sexual female body, feminists must surely, again, welcome Gadamer's approach.[2]

And yet I suggest that there is something in this emphasis on death as a central philosophical and hermeneutical category that should make feminists very uneasy as well. Since Freud, we have been cautioned to notice not only what is said but also what is not said: what are the significant silences, and what repressions do these bespeak? Moreover, since Foucault we are more alert to the ways in which silences function as technologies of power, exclusionary tactics in the strategies of what shall count as knowledge. I have already mentioned Gadamer's silence about the actual contours of our finite historicity: our gendered bodies, our ethnic and cultural location. What I now wish to suggest is that these silences point to a deeper silence, a silence about birth. When Heidegger and Gadamer speak of finitude, they are speaking of death; mortality is

for them the boundary of our existence and a central philosophical cat-
egory. But what about birth? Surely birth, as much as death, bounds our
existence and indicates our finitude. Is it not just as significant that we
have not always lived but came into existence at a specific time as that
we will not live forever? There are differences, of course, between birth
and death as a limit situation: for example, since death is in the future
while birth is in the past for anyone who can think about these events,
we might feel a fear or apprehension about the former that is inappro-
priate for the latter. But as Hannah Arendt has shown, natality is a philo-
sophical category that enables us to make sense of the possibilities of new
beginnings, freedom, and interrelationships in a finite and gendered web
of life (Arendt 1958, 96). And yet Heidegger and Gadamer (and indeed
almost the whole Western philosophical tradition) have nothing to say
about natality, focusing all their attention on death. What would it be
like if we were to treat natality with the same philosophical seriousness
as mortality?

A Horizon of Natality

In her acute and allusive book, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*
(1999), Luce Irigaray indicates some of the silences in Heidegger's work,
and the exclusionary strategies that those silences serve. While there are
important aspects in which Gadamer differs from Heidegger, they are not
in the areas to which Irigaray points, areas where both men keep silent.[3]
It is therefore instructive, for a feminist appraisal of Gadamer, to begin
to listen to these silences: I shall select particularly those relating to natal-
ity and a horizon of death.[4]

   Martin Heidegger's life's work was premised on the idea that Western
philosophy and Western culture more generally have forgotten Being, a
forgetting that has its roots in Plato and the pre-Socratics, and is rein-
forced in the whole Western tradition of metaphysics.[5] Heidegger writes
in the prologue to *Being and Time* that because we have forgotten Being,
"it is fitting that we should raise the question of the meaning of Being,"
for which the first step is to "reawaken an understanding for the mean-
ing of the question" (Heidegger 1978, 19). At once he proceeds: "Our
provisional aim is the Interpretation of time as the possible horizon for
any understanding whatever of Being." Thus for Heidegger as for

Gadamer, time, historicity, is the horizon of our understanding; and as we have seen, that historicity is focused for both of them by death.

The forgetting of Being is characterized by a preoccupation with beings, the things of this earth, particularly in regard to their utility for human purposes. From this utilitarian preoccupation derives the drive to mastery, the emphasis on ever more sophisticated technology, and the assimilation of knowledge to scientific epistemology that Gadamer deplores and that he works against in his hermeneutical theory. The recollection of Being is fundamental for both Heidegger and Gadamer. Heidegger's emphasis on death and historicity is part of this recollection. Being and time are not separable for him; and our own being-there *(Dasein)*, our own existence, is inescapably temporal. Moreover we arrive into this temporal situation without our own choice: in Heidegger's terms we are "thrown" into existence; or, as Gadamer has it, "history does not belong to us, but we belong to it" (Gadamer 1976, 245). In fact, the boundaries of temporality, of finitude, in which we find ourselves are precisely also the boundaries that open up a clearing for the disclosure of Being, the clearing in which Being can be grounded, and in which mortals dwell: "dwelling is the manner in which mortals are on the earth" (Heidegger 1993, 350), and it is "the basic character of Being, in keeping with which mortals exist" (362). But this dwelling is always already in language, toward which, however, we are still on the way: language is the "House of Being," that very Being that has been forgotten and that it is Dasein's hope to recollect (188–89, 424). The circle here is not unrelated to Gadamer's hermeneutical circle, in which "the heritage that has come down to us is again made to speak in our understanding and interpretation of it. The linguistic nature of this bringing into language is the same as that of the human experience of the world in general" (Gadamer 1979, 414). Put more succinctly, "Being can be understood as language" (432); it is the task of mortals to interpret it.

Irigaray immerses herself in Heidegger's turns of phrase and allows herself to notice not only what his words call forth but also what is forgotten in them. Heidegger has made the forgetting of Being central to his whole philosophical outlook: Irigaray, however, asks what is forgotten in this clearing where Dasein may dwell and in which Being may be unconcealed. To begin with the obvious, in order to create the clearing (which for Heidegger is always in a forest) trees have to be felled; "man" has to assert his mastery over nature. "Man would build his world only through an appropriation of the natural world. A breaking-in, a clearing of the

land, and a cultivation of this cleared land in order to take root in the natural world, to take from it the wherewithal to ensure his subsistence, to draw from it the means to find his erecting" (Irigaray 1999, 18). Although Heidegger has been writing against such mastery, against seeing Being merely in terms of beings for human exploitation, Irigaray wonders if his way of proceeding does not reinscribe exploitation at another level. "Must letting-be be understood as letting man's thinking be unfolded/deployed, or as letting nature bloom? Can these two advents occur at the same time? Which time?" (18).

Irigaray's questions here are very far from a flat-footed, literal rendering of what Heidegger intended metaphorically. Rather, she is entering into his language as a psychoanalyst might do, listening for what is not said, what is significantly forgotten. Heidegger passes over the mastery that is implicit in creating the clearing; he passes over, also, the element of air. The "open expanse" of Heidegger's dwelling is an expanse of air: "The excess of air is both so immediately 'evident' and so little 'apparent' that he did not think of it"; he has forgotten the air. The irony is piercing: Heidegger has done exactly that for which he most castigates the Western philosophical tradition: he has forgotten the obvious. "Abstracted, abstract, ecstatic in his there, he tumbles into the well, which he does not see at his feet. Which sets the maidservants laughing" (40).

But it is standard psychoanalytic teaching that if someone forgets or refuses to notice the obvious, there is an important reason for it, a pain or fear too deep to bring to light, but which the very vocabulary of the forgetting begins to indicate. Irigaray finds this pain in Heidegger's talk of "thrownness."

> To man, free air is first of all the advent of an absence that is too great: issuing from that surrounding into which he enters. He enters into the outside. He loses that living body of a home where he stayed before: there where she used to give herself to him, with no difference yet between his/her outside and his/her inside, between her and him, feeding him from the inside without demonstration. . . . Free, out in the free air, he is—first of all— in a state of utmost 'thrownness.' (41)

The French for "thrownness," here, a translation of Heidegger's *Geworfenheit,* is *déréliction:* it is a word that also means abandonment or

forsakenness, the utter loss of an infant separated from its mother, Jesus's sense of abandonment on the cross.

So what "man"/Heidegger has forgotten in forgetting the air is his birth, his mother, and the pain of separation and absence. Nor does he let himself be reminded of this by "mother nature," whose trees he fells for the construction of his dwelling in the clearing, a dwelling to take the place of the one he has lost. To live in air, without boundaries, feels too dangerous. Boundaries must be found: "once he has passed from inside her to outside, his boundaries will soon appear. He sets himself forth, and sets forth the whole, by surrounding himself, by surrounding it, with borders" (Irigaray 1999, 47).

The most unbending of these boundaries, and the one that can most take his mind off of his birth and his irreparable loss, is death, which simultaneously focuses his attention and is a return of the repressed, since it, like birth, is an ultimate boundary situation. Mortality, not natality, becomes his central philosophical category. He chooses to see himself and all men as mortals, not as natals. And yet ironically it is the fact that he is alive, can breathe, still has the air that he has forgotten, that allows him to concentrate on death. "This superfluity of air, this excess of air, henceforth allows him to have concern for his own death, is still given— given back thanks to other beings" (Irigaray 1999, 62) who support him in his life while he constitutes himself as Being-toward-death. The earth, the trees that purify the air, the women who give him his birth and sustain his body, are all treated only as objects for his mastery and use.

Irigaray, mimicking Heidegger's penchant for the pre-Socratics, invokes Empedocles's account of the four elements, in which he gives hatred a central place in their separation. Hatred, she suggests chillingly, is still operative in those whose purpose in building structures—including philosophical structures—is to shelter them from the pain of remembering their natality.

> Within the order of hatred, man's first birthplace would be where air and fire are found to be unjoined from the first. . . . He reaches air as if attaining the forsakenness/thrownness of an irreparable loss of love. . . . With these houses, these works, isn't he reproducing something of a useless separation? An irreparable forsakenness/thrownness [*déréliction*] from which he keeps himself safe through the economy of hatred? This is something he never expresses, never thinks through. (Irigaray 1999, 77)

Because of that refusal to acknowledge the pain of loss, he is destined to relive it and reinscribe it in his relations with women and with the earth, and to conduct all his interpretations under the sign of death. Death, and its repressed fear and hatred, is the hermeneutical horizon. It presents itself, to be sure, in the guise of respectability and civilization; but Freud had already taught that civilization is precisely the sublimation of *thanatos,* the wish for death.

If feminists, therefore, feel uneasy at Gadamer's theory of interpretation, even though some aspects of it are obviously congenial, I suggest that their uneasiness is well founded. Gadamer's emphasis on historicity and finitude as our own situation, our own horizon for interpretation, does not consider other aspects of our finitude, such as embodiment, race, or gender, which feminists emphasize. Rather, he focuses exclusively upon the Heideggerian notion of "running toward death." Moreover, in my reading it becomes clear why, when Gadamer is discussing the situation of the interpreter, he never mentions embodiment, gender, ethnicity, or any of the actual parameters of situation and how they might affect interpretation, though we might have expected that his emphasis on fore-understanding would have led him to consider such parameters. However, if the emphasis on finitude as death is chosen partly to avoid having to remember natality and its gendered embodiment and concrete connections with one another then, clearly these latter concepts will hardly be called to mind as crucial to the hermeneutic process.

I am of course not suggesting (and neither is Irigaray) that this repression of natality and its associations is a matter of conscious decision for Gadamer or Heidegger. The point, rather, is that "forgetting the air" is as deeply inscribed in the Western symbolic as Heidegger alleges is the "forgetting of Being." Putting it the other way around, the preoccupation with death, with mortality as the central philosophical category, is utterly taken for granted. The first line of the first syllogism students encounter in formal logic is usually, "All men are mortal." That we are natals is forgotten, silenced. Hence the philosophical implications of natality remain unexplored.

Neither should a reminder of natality be read as a denial of mortality: it would be a foolish feminist who would forget that she or he too will die. But to suppose that by bringing natality forward as a central category we would have to deny death is parallel to supposing that by supporting the goals of feminism we must hate men. These are just the sorts of binaries that feminists work to dismantle. Rather, just as both men

and women benefit from feminism, so also I would suggest that death itself can be better understood and accepted more as a matter of fact and less as a mystification if natality is given a central place (cf. Jantzen 1998a, chap. 6). This world rather than other worlds after death is the place where natals can flourish: birth, not death, is what gives me my life; and death can be seen as its ending, not as a mysterious gateway into some other world.

What, then, if Gadamer were to remember the air, to see the horizon of finitude not only in terms of death but also of birth? Could he then remember the mother, and all the other (m)others who have been silenced, buried under the dead weight of the classics and the masculinist hegemony of Western culture? What a massive reconfiguration of tradition that would entail! Moreover, if we could remember the air, might we also give more thought to the deadly tradition of mastery and pollution of the air and the devastation that it brings to the earth? And if, like the wind, the spirit blows where it wills, might we begin to escape the necrophilia of the Western secular tradition and glimpse a different divine horizon, not the dead god of Nietzsche or the crucified god of Western Christendom, but a breath of fresh air blowing among us, enabling human flourishing, becoming divine? (Irigaray 1993; Jantzen 1998a).

Notes

1. Or some of "us." Even in Plato, some will be reborn as lesser beings: as women, perhaps, or insects. And medieval Christendom was obsessed with doctrines of hell and purgatory, hardly a consummation to be wished.

2. I have discussed the Western preoccupation with death and its effect on the masculinist structure of rationality in my *Becoming Divine* (Jantzen 1998a, ch. 6).

3. For a discussion of the similarities and differences between the two men, see Wachterhauser (1999, ch. 5).

4. Irigaray is not the first to point to the centrality of birth as a significant philosophical category. Hannah Arendt had done so, in a very different style, in direct contrast to Heidegger. I have discussed Arendt's philosophy of natality in my article, "Necrophilia and Natality" (Jantzen 1998b).

5. Wachterhauser (1999) argues that Gadamer is less absolute about this, and interprets Plato more positively; but in any case both men deplore the forgetting of Being and pit themselves against it, trying to instigate recollection, with varying degrees of optimism about their likelihood of success.

References

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. [1857] 1995. *Aurora Leigh*. London: Penguin.

Caputo, John. 1989. "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Code, Lorraine. 1991. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1979. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward.

———. 1986. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1994. *Heidegger's Ways*. Trans. John W. Stanley. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Haraway, Donna. 1991. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Press.

Harding, Sandra. 1991. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

———. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: 'What is Strong Objectivity?'" In *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter. London: Routledge.

Hartsock, Nancy. 1983. *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

———. 1987. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. [1927] 1978. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell.

———. 1993. *Basic Writings*. Expanded edition, ed. David Farrell Krell. London: Routledge.

Irigaray, Luce. 1993. *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1999. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Mary Beth Mader. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Jantzen, Grace M. 1998a. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

———. 1998b. "Necrophilia and Natality: What Does it Mean to be Religious?" *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 19, no. 1.

Jaspers, Karl. 1969–71. [1932]. *Philosophy*. Vol. 1–3. Trans. E. B. Ashton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the 'Mystic East.'* London: Routledge.

Lloyd, Genevieve. 1993. 2d ed. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1974. *Conflict of Interpretations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Wachterhauser, Brice R. 1999. *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
Warnke, Georgia. 1987. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

12

Questioning Authority

Patricia Altenbernd Johnson

Authority presents a serious difficulty to feminist practice. Because authority has so often been used to dominate and oppress women, all authority is suspect. Yet the attempts by women to achieve equality suggest that women need to assume positions of authority to accomplish this goal. In occupying those positions, women are likely to find themselves participating in the very system of authority that serves to dominate and oppress women. Women whose work is informed by feminist consciousness and who are in positions of authority recognize the contradiction that must be lived.[1] Contemporary feminist reflections on difference present this contradiction even more dramatically and painfully. Insofar as the positions of authority that we hold require us to impose what is understood as legitimate order, we know that we serve a master that we do not want to recognize. We help perpetuate and legitimate patriarchal order. As bell hooks observes in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center,* "Before women can work to reconstruct society we must reject the notion that obtaining power in the existing social structure will necessarily

advance feminist struggle to end sexist oppression. It may allow numbers of women to gain greater material privilege, control over their destiny, and the destiny of others, all of which are important goals. It will not end male domination as a system" (hooks 1984, 90). Yet we want to maintain that taking positions of authority also enables us to subvert, overcome, or transform the very structures of authority that we seem to serve.

Hans-Georg Gadamer also recognizes that authority cannot simply be rejected and so, in *Truth and Method,* carries out a rehabilitation of the concept of authority. He looks back at the roots of authority in the Western tradition and puts forward a concept of authority that he believes can enable us to understand the legitimate role of authority for human understanding and community. Gadamer is primarily interested in the authority of tradition. He wants us to recognize that humans are finite historical beings, formed by and within our specific traditions. Because of this situation, all human understanding involves prejudices or prejudgments. This does not mean, however, that because we are born into a tradition and so adopt the prejudices of that tradition, that the authority exerted by tradition is based in the demand for obedience. Rather, Gadamer argues that tradition is authority only when those under the formative influence of a tradition recognize it as the source of reliable knowledge. It is the freedom of those under the authority that serves as the source of legitimate authority. Without such free recognition, there may be authoritarian structures, but there is no legitimate authority. Tradition is legitimate authority insofar as we recognize it as such. Gadamer maintains that this happens when we experience tradition as providing us with knowledge that enables us to construct a world of healthy relationships: familial, social, and political.

Gadamer's reflections on authority speak to the existential problem that a feminist in a position of authority faces by suggesting that authority is based in recognition and, therefore, in freedom rather than in obedience. While Gadamer's work is helpful, it is also incomplete. It does not directly address the relationship of authority and power. It does not look at women's epistemological situation and so does not ask after a concept of authority that includes in knowledge what some thinkers have called women's ways of knowing (Belenkey et al. 1986). Kathleen Jones's work, *Compassionate Authority,* is helpful as a fuller development of a concept of authority that is cognizant of feminist research and reflection. Jones makes use of Hannah Arendt's thought as well as that of many contemporary feminists in developing a concept of compassionate authority.

She argues that compassionate authority provides a concept showing that those in authority must work to construct a meaningful world based on human connections. She maintains that those in authority must adopt new norms of presence and new purposes in order to transform authority into this compassionate form.

Yet developing a concept of authority, following the direction of Gadamer and extended and elaborated in conversation with Jones's work, does not solve the problem that feminists have with authority. In part, this is because the positions of authority that they hold do not always easily accommodate retrieved and transformed understandings of authority. The positions remain within traditions that understand authority in the context of domination and obedience. Articulating for oneself a richer and more fruitful concept of authority is helpful, but it does not immediately transform the structures and practices of everyday authority. It does not enable us to adopt an authoritative stance that embodies this rehabilitated concept. Gadamer's work is again helpful in pointing toward this fuller rehabilitation or transformation. He suggests that we need to develop a logic of question and answer. Such a logic uses questions to bring issues into an open arena where we can acknowledge our own ignorance, and so engage in conversations in which understandings, individuals, and perhaps also social institutions change. For feminists, this means that we must develop the art of questioning authority, even from within positions of authority. Such an art of questioning may enable us to enact an authoritative stance that preserves legitimate authority while subverting the structures and practices that support authoritarian domination and oppression.

Gadamer's Rehabilitation of Authority

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer considers authority in the context of the Enlightenment rejection of prejudice. He observes that "The basic discreditation of all prejudices, which unites the experimental fervor of the new natural sciences during the Enlightenment, is universalized and radicalized in the historical Enlightenment" (Gadamer 1989, 276). Just as feminist experience demonstrates the tension in aspiring to authority while rejecting oppressive authority, Gadamer recognizes that there is a tension in the Enlightenment position. As humans we are finite historical

beings. We understand ourselves first within the families and communities of which we are a part. We are formed within these communities and the prejudices or prejudgments acquired there constitute the "historical reality" of our being (277). It is possible to overcome harmful prejudices instilled in us in these communities. But overcoming any particular prejudice is difficult. We cannot simply say that we reject the authority of our historical communities and begin as if these communities have no ongoing influence on us. We must recognize that the influence is powerful.

Gadamer outlines a process that he calls "rehabilitation" in response to the recognition that prejudice cannot simply be dismissed, and also as a way of exploring human finitude. Gadamer's choice of the word "*die Rehabilitierung*" is worth noting. During World War II, in order to be able to obtain a faculty position at a German university, Gadamer underwent a rehabilitation course. This course was at a camp and involved physical exercise and nationalistic singing, but, because of the director, did not demand political lip service. Gadamer was able to make friends who eventually helped him obtain a faculty position at Leipzig. He clearly made a decision at that point in his life. In reflecting on his choice he writes, "I saw my task as a teacher in strengthening the courage of the German academic youth to think for themselves and to strengthen their own sense of judgment. This means first of all engaging in the primacy of dialogue in the theory and practice of teaching. In this way we researchers and teachers have to obey the law of the long breath in the field of politics" (Gadamer 1997, 258). Gadamer strove to maintain his roots and to preserve what was valuable in the German educational tradition, yet his rehabilitation did not involve a blind acceptance of the positions advocated by those in power in Germany. He chose to stay in the University in order both to preserve and transform it. Many academics in Nazi Germany have been criticized for their passivity in the face of Nazi atrocities. Others are condemned for their active involvement in Nazism. But Gadamer's choice seems analogous to that of the contemporary feminist who chooses to attempt to subvert and transform from within. He chose to stay in order to try to help others develop a fuller understanding of human finitude as dialogical. He maintains that if we acknowledge that all of our structures of meaning develop and change most fruitfully when we remain open to the voices of others, we may be able to avoid the destruction and destructive tendencies of humans. The rehabilitation of concepts is part of this task. Gadamer's

choice in this situation is certainly open to challenge. Why in the midst of war and holocaust place priority on preserving academic structures and reflecting on self-understanding? Why try to rehabilitate concepts? Gadamer's answer, I believe, is that insofar as we do not capitulate, rehabilitation of concepts is a means of voicing challenge. It may also contribute to subversion, to undermining oppressive authority.

According to Gadamer, concepts are rehabilitated by revitalizing them without divorcing them from their origins. This requires finding within the origins and tradition of the concept an element that is capable of voicing a challenge to the currently dominant understanding, while still maintaining its connection to the community of meaning of which it is a part.

In carrying out a rehabilitation of the concept of authority, Gadamer begins with what he takes to be the formulation that is most influential in contemporary twentieth-century thought. He maintains that this conceptualization is closely connected with the Enlightenment articulation and rejection of prejudice. He suggests that Enlightenment thinkers identified two sorts of prejudices that people could develop. Some prejudices are due to authority and some to over-hastiness. Gadamer notes that both of these sources of prejudice take reason to be fundamentally important. Prejudices that develop due to over-hastiness come about because reason is not used well. Prejudices developed because of authority emerge because that which is old and familiar is favored over any use of reason. The Enlightenment understands authority as demanding blind obedience, and defines it as opposed to reason and to freedom. According to Gadamer, this is the understanding of authority that has dominated Western society since the Enlightenment. Authority is viewed as authoritarian. Those who are situated under an authority are expected to obey. Those in authority have the power to command and to limit the freedom of others. Authority is rightfully feared. This general understanding of authority also leads to suspicion and mistrust. Anyone in a position of authority is viewed as primarily concerned with power over others.

Gadamer suggests that when we come to recognize the function that prejudices play for human understanding, we will also recognize the need to consider the possibility of legitimate or justified prejudices. If there is a prejudice against authority that develops during the Enlightenment, and if that prejudice is not legitimate or justified, then it is possible that what happened in the Enlightenment caused the concept of authority to become deformed. The pre-Enlightenment understanding of authority

may contain possibilities that will ground authority in freedom rather than obedience. The task of rehabilitation is to free the concept from these illegitimate prejudices so that a fuller and more humanly appropriate concept can emerge and influence our social practices.

Gadamer's thought is sometimes frustrating. He makes momentous claims and presents them as if they were simple and accepted truths. This is the case in his rehabilitation of authority. In the course of two pages in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 1989, 279–80) he sets out a concept of authority that is intended to free us of the prejudices of the Enlightenment. He then relies on this concept for much of the rest of *Truth and Method*. He does not argue for the acceptability of the concept, but rather seems to suggest that our experience will confirm the correctness of his points. He writes, "The authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his [*sic*] judgment takes precedence, i.e., it has priority over one's own" (279). Legitimate authority rests on recognition by another, not on power over another. When we recognize another person as an authority, we acknowledge that what that person says or writes is true, or at least rationally convincing.

Gadamer suggests that the sort of authority that a teacher claims is a good example of the connection to knowledge that is essential to authority. When we learn from a teacher, we may well accept what she or he says as true. We accept the prejudices of the teacher, and we defend the teacher. We are biased in the teacher's favor. While we are young, there may be an element of blind obedience in our relationship with our teachers. But even very young children exhibit the ability to discern the teacher's commitment to truth. Irrational or arbitrary teachers do not do well in that they lose the respect and recognition of their students. As we grow older and are able to choose our own teachers, we choose teachers for their knowledge. While we may be mistaken about the correctness and extent of their knowledge, when we recognize a teacher as an authority it is because we believe the teacher is a knowledgeable voice. We believe that teacher can enable us to arrive at what is reasonable. Gadamer suggests that it is our act of recognition that is the basis for authority. Following Hegel, Gadamer understands the act of recognition as a manifestation of human freedom. Legitimate authority is, therefore, grounded in freedom and reason.

While Gadamer is clearly influenced by Hegel when he bases authority on recognition, his understandings of the process of recognition and the freedom that makes recognition possible are most significantly influenced by existentialism and phenomenology. His rehabilitation of authority would benefit from a clearer discussion of freedom. However, his understanding of freedom, and so of recognition, is similar to that developed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Freedom is not an expression of autonomy. It is an expression of the ambiguity of the human condition. Human existence is always situated, and human freedom always involves the ability to live in a world of one's own choice. Within a particular situation, each individual makes choices. Some situations are more limiting than others, but insofar as our situation allows for choice, we disclose the world. Beauvoir writes, "To wish for the disclosure of the world and to assert oneself as freedom are one and the same movement" (Beauvoir 1997, 24). This existential freedom is the basis of a process of recognition in which humans mutually participate in disclosure.

However, Gadamer does not articulate an understanding of freedom. Rather, he moves quickly into a consideration of the concept of tradition that relies on the concept of authority. For the purposes of this discussion of authority, it is not necessary to follow Gadamer into his considerations of tradition. It is sufficient to note that his work begins a helpful, although limited, rehabilitation of the concept of authority. Gadamer shows that authority, in its essence or heart, is based in freedom, not in obedience and domination. Legitimate authority requires the act of human recognition. Because recognition is based in freedom, authority is bestowed and acquired. Legitimate authority, like legitimate prejudice, is able to direct us to claims and beliefs that can stand the test of time and reason. Authority aims at insight and knowledge, not domination.

Gadamer's rehabilitation of authority is a helpful first step for feminist thought. If authority can be understood as separated from obedience and domination, and if authority is grounded in human freedom, then it is easier for women to assume positions of authority without finding that they have compromised their basic feminist goals of emancipation. Yet Gadamer's treatment of authority is in many respects a minimal beginning point for developing an authoritative stance. While what we mean when we use a word is important, changing the way in which a society understands a concept and changing the practices associated with that conceptual framework require more.

Continuing the Rehabilitation of Authority

Gadamer's work positions the discussion of authority in the context of an emphasis on the freedom of those who recognize authority, emphasizes that authority requires recognition, and aims at an order based on insight and knowledge. His work challenges the Enlightenment distrust of authority, but does not succeed in overcoming that distrust. Distrust remains because his work does not address the richness and complexity involved in positioning authority in the context of human freedom. He does not ask how recognition emerges. Moreover, he fails to ask whose knowledge serves as the aim of the order established.

Kathleen Jones's work *Compassionate Authority* furthers this conceptual work of rehabilitation. Jones's work on authority is *not* developed in any direct relationship with Gadamer's thought. Indeed, he is not listed in her bibliography or index. Her work is, instead, developed in dialogue with the thought of Hannah Arendt. Arendt's reflections on authority begin in the same German context as Gadamer's, where both studied with and were greatly influenced by Martin Heidegger. Thus Jones's thought on authority is easily read within a general conversation with Gadamer's work. Jones brings the "concern to reconstruct authority in terms consistent with the development of a woman-friendly democracy" to this conversation (Jones 1993, 162). She acknowledges that Arendt's goal was not equally feminist, yet maintains that her incorporation of Arendt's thought creates the sort of dialogue that Arendt advocated. My use of Jones's thought is done in that same spirit. Placing Jones in relationship with Gadamer furthers the possibility and promise of open dialogue on authority.

Jones places the discussion of authority in the context of political, not existential, freedom. However, she also emphasizes the importance of questions about recognition and knowledge, and acknowledges the significance of feminist work in addressing these questions. In addition, she notes that authority, particularly as it has developed in modern democratic societies, is viewed more as a place that is to be occupied than as a possession of an individual or group (Jones 1993, 244). Recognition of authority involves recognizing that a particular person or group occupies the place of authority. But in Western democratic societies, the characteristics that usually elicit recognition are traditionally masculine characteristics. Jones notes that often a person is presumed to be an authority because of a commanding presence and a deep and commanding voice.

A leader, a person who is recognized as speaking for a group, generally is taller or larger, has an air of self-assurance, and is self-assertive. This means that men usually occupy the positions of authority. But it also means that, no matter the sex of the person occupying the position, authority comes to mean that the person in the position dominates the conversation, and so silences others. Even in the context of democratic political freedom, recognizing authority usually means establishing an order that marginalizes and so diminishes the freedom of at least some of the community.[2]

Jones also agrees with Gadamer that authority aims at an order based on insight and knowledge. But she makes use of feminist work in epistemology, particularly as it focuses on issues of difference.[3] She notes that it is important to ask whose knowledge counts in the formation of meaningful order. Again, she notes that the characteristics often ascribed to and praised in those in authority emphasize traditionally masculine types of knowledge. This is knowledge that is separated from emotion, insight that is not tied to affection. Feminist epistemology has raised serious questions about the completeness of such understandings of knowledge. For example, Sara Ruddick argues in *Maternal Thinking* (1989) that the practice of mothering enables people (female and male) to develop epistemological processes and concepts that include emotion in a very integral way. If these types of knowing are ignored in the process of establishing order, then authority again serves to exclude and marginalize. Indeed, Ruddick's work suggests that we may overlook practices that could enable us to develop richer, and more peaceful, social structures.

In addition to noting the importance of raising questions about recognition and knowledge, Jones's work also demonstrates that raising these questions points to possibilities for understanding authority in ways that are usually overlooked. When authority is understood as concerned with establishing legitimate order while remaining true to its basis in freedom, and when questions of recognition and knowledge are raised in a feminist context, then new values and principles for founding order emerge. Jones identifies natality as such a value and compassion as an important principle. It is important to note that Jones's work does not arbitrarily redefine authority. Like Gadamer, she recognizes the importance of rehabilitating the concept by looking for hidden possibilities that are, in some way, already present in the concept and that connect the current understanding and its application with its heritage.

Natality is a concept that Jones adopts from Hannah Arendt's work

in *The Human Condition*. Arendt uses natality to emphasize that each person lives, and so acts, as a unique individual. Each person is a new beginning and so a source of hope. She writes, "Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence that Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora's box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us" (Arendt 1958, 247). Human uniqueness does not, however, imply human isolation. Natality shows us that uniqueness begins in and requires human connection.

At birth, a person is connected to and dependent upon others. The infant grows into a meaningful world in relationship to others. Jones emphasizes Arendt's point that authority is derived from the verb *augere*, to augment. When we experience authority from the perspective of natality, we recognize authorities as connecting with us and helping us to make the world meaningful. A parent becomes an authority for a child, not because of the parent's ability to command, but because of the connections that are made with the child. Later in life, the authority of the parent is again not experienced as a command to which obedience is due, but as a reminder of our connection with and dependence on others. When we understand authority in the context of the value of natality, we recognize that authority humbles us because it reminds us that we are dependent. Jones writes of authority that it "reminds us of the others who preceded our existence, without whose actions we would not be" (Jones 1993, 168).

Natality is a value that is foundational for social order and so helps to set the context for a fuller understanding of authority. Similarly, the concept of compassion functions as a principle for developing a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of authority. Compassion is not to be confused with pity. Both take the position of the other. Pity takes the other's position in order to correct and improve it. Compassion imaginatively takes the position of the other in order to understand it and in some way join with it. Maria Lugones's notion of playful world-traveling helps to characterize the concept of compassion for contemporary readers, while also moving this discussion of authority back into the context of an existential and phenomenological understanding of freedom. In the

article "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," Lugones develops a concept of playful world-traveling in distinction from what she terms an agonistic manner of approaching others. This agonistic approach acknowledges the need for people to recognize each other, but develops the process or dialectic of recognition following Hegel's lead in his description of the relationship of the Lord and Bondsman. The process of recognition begins in a situation of conflict and in a attempt to conquer. She maintains that "given the agonistic attitude, one *cannot* travel across 'worlds,' though one can kill other 'worlds' with it" (Lugones 1987, 16).[4] Instead, she advocates a process of recognition that begins with a commitment to entering the world of the other with a playful attitude. This means that one is open to surprise and to changes in oneself. She maintains that traveling to another person's world in a loving manner enables us to "understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*" (17). Compassion, understood in terms of such a world-traveling and taken as a principle for guiding action from a position of authority, helps us constantly to acknowledge our ongoing connectedness with others, each of whom is a unique individual.

To be compassionate is to find the means for being at home in the world of and with others. This requires that we recognize the plurality and diversity of human existence, and the communal bonds that help give meaning to our existence. When authority is founded on natality, it is necessarily humble. When it develops by means of the principle of compassion, it is attentive and seeks for ways to enable all members of a community to be at home in each other's worlds and in a common world. As such, authority facilitates the construction of meaningfulness by inviting dialogue across difference.

Practicing Authority

This retrieved concept of authority clearly is in keeping with much recent feminist thought and would seem to be a helpful concept for women in authority to adopt and try to realize. Yet it still does not address many of the lived tensions that women in positions of authority experience. While women may believe that authority is grounded in freedom and requires an act of recognition, and while they may attempt to function in positions and spaces of authority by trying to facilitate dialogue across

differences, many with whom they deal begin with the presupposition that anyone in authority simply wants, or requires, the blind obedience of other people. Those in authority who attempt to function in the context of a concept of compassionate authority find resistance to this approach. Colleagues are accustomed to a world where authority is always suspect and always to be challenged, even if they are really not "at home" in that world. Trying to function in a position of authority with a rehabilitated concept of authority can meet at least two types of potentially problematic responses. First, colleagues can respond by not taking your voice seriously, not simply because it is a woman's voice in a position of authority, but because they mistake the motivation of actions. Second, colleagues can refuse to function within the context of a rehabilitated concept of authority and so move the situation back into the context of a concept that emphasizes domination and obedience.

My own experience with trying to practice a rehabilitated understanding of authority has been as Chairperson of a university department with a faculty of seventeen full-time and several part-time faculty. Relating specific examples of these types of responses is professionally problematic. However, a general account of these responses is still possible and helpful. Facilitating the tenure process for junior faculty provides many opportunities for practicing authority based on a rehabilitated concept of authority, and for experiencing the challenges of such practice. When the tenure process is viewed as bringing new life into the meaningful structure of the community that is the academic department, the challenge is to enable the new faculty member to enter the community, bringing his or her uniqueness to the life of the community. This means that the process of tenure must be facilitated in such a way that the new faculty member is not forced to obey the commands of the tenured faculty or the chairperson, but is able to bring her or his uniqueness to the character of the department. This approach can disturb current faculty who would prefer to minimize the difference that is allowed within the departmental community. But it also can be resisted by the new faculty who prefer to reshape the character of the department rather than enter into an already ongoing conversation that represents the life of the department. Both of these situations show that faculty, old and new, continue to function within a concept of authority that focuses on obedience and power or domination. Senior faculty want obedience from junior faculty and junior faculty want to seize power from senior faculty.

In the midst of such struggle, the question often arises: How can one

in authority be at home and continue to try to function within a conceptual framework that emphasizes attentive love, and with a focus on developing communal bonds that support both equality and uniqueness?

The Art of Questioning

Gadamer's insights into the philosophical importance of questions and his provocative suggestions about the need for a logic of question and answer give helpful guidance for learning how to practice authority. Gadamer discusses the importance of questions and the art of questioning at the end of the second part of *Truth and Method.* Following Plato, Gadamer maintains that "In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know" (Gadamer 1989, 363). Questioning, therefore, has priority in the process of learning and coming to knowledge and understanding. Questions open up what is being asked after and help us to recognize the possibilities of what is questioned. For something to be learned, it must be opened by a question.

Gadamer notes that a question can fail to result in openness. It can contain presuppositions that lead one astray or can be what he calls a "distorted" question. Such a question sets no direction and so leads us nowhere. A genuine question has a direction, toward a decision or a position. The human task is to learn to ask questions. Yet Gadamer warns of the difficulty of this task. He writes, "There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable. On the contrary, the example of Socrates teaches that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know. Hence the Socratic dialectic— which leads, through its art of confusing the interlocutor, to this knowledge—creates the conditions for the question. All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know; so much so, indeed, that it is a particular lack of knowledge that leads to a particular question" (1989, 365–66).

Gadamer holds that questioning, which is the art of thinking, is best understood as the art of conducting a conversation. For its effective practice, this art requires that those engaged in the conversation not work at cross purposes. A conversation is not a situation in which people try to "out argue" each other. Rather, Gadamer describes conversation as "testing." Each person must consider the weight of the other's position. The

art of questioning includes the recognition that a question has many sides. Thus, a person who is learning the art of questioning must find ways to "prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion" (1989, 367). Such a person must find ways of showing the strength of what seems to be a weak position. Moreover, the person who develops the art of questioning must recognize that the goal of questioning is to reach understanding. Gadamer emphasizes that this "is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (379). Questioning takes place in a community and leads to decisions that constitute and define that community.

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer moves from this account of the importance of the art of questioning and its relation to conversation to the linguistic nature of conversation. His later work on health, however, provides a helpful example of the art of questioning. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, Gadamer addresses a number of presentations to groups of physicians, many of which are anthologized in the volume *The Enigma of Health* (1996). Two of the essays are especially helpful for reflecting on the issue of how one in a position of authority develops the art of questioning.

"Authority and Critical Freedom," originally published in 1983 in German, discusses how a physician can best understand what it means to be considered an authority. As in *Truth and Method,* Gadamer emphasizes here the importance of recognition and knowledge for authority. He notes that anyone who feels the need to invoke authority does not really possess authority. He writes, "Genuine authority is recognized as involving superior knowledge, ability, and insight" (1996, 121). Physicians are regularly recognized as authorities in Western societies because of the scientific knowledge they have and because of their ability to apply that knowledge in treatment of disease. He notes that we are all tempted to misuse authority, and so we must always remind ourselves that authority is bestowed by recognition and takes place in the context of human freedom. He suggests that those who participate in positions of authority, in this case physicians, have an ethical demand placed upon them. This demand means that they must develop and maintain what Gadamer calls critical freedom. He explains critical freedom as including respect for the dignity and "independent significance" of others (123), especially those to whom one relates as an authority. This respect carries with it the need to humble oneself. To do this, a person in authority must develop self-

discipline and self-criticism. Gadamer writes, "There is, in truth, no real opposition between authority and critical freedom, but rather, a deep inner connection. Critical freedom is the freedom to criticize, and the most difficult form of criticism is clearly self-criticism. The distinguishing character of human beings, the ability to recognize our own limits, is based on this. It is the foundation of all genuine authority. The most immediate expression of self-criticism is our ability to ask questions. Every posing of a question is an admission of ignorance and, in so far as it is directed towards someone else, a recognition that they may possess superior knowledge" (123). Gadamer's treatment of contemporary medicine reinforces his earlier emphasis on the connection between authority and the art of questioning.

In the essay "Treatment and Dialogue" Gadamer further explores the importance of learning to question for a physician's medical practice. He notes that treatment is a process of question and answer, answer and question. In participating in this process with a patient, a physician clearly functions from the position of authority. Gadamer identifies a number of insights that can help guide the questions that a physician raises. A physician needs to begin with the "recognition of the other individual's personal space and of their differences" from the physician (1996, 126–27). This includes the recognition that the patient really holds the measure of any appropriate treatment. Beginning with this insight helps the physician to understand that she or he does not heal. While this process of questioning has health as a goal, healing takes place in nature and is the restoration of a concealed harmony. The dialogue between physician and patient must be concerned with "creating the opportunity for the other to awaken his or her own inner activity—what doctors call the patient's own 'participation'—without losing their way once again" (137). The physician must be attentive to the individual in order to ask the questions that may best identify the most appropriate treatment and that will most help the patient to be self-assertive. These questions are possible because of the physician's knowledge. Moreover, the physician does practice treatment that is also based on his or her knowledge. Throughout the process, however, the physician must avoid the temptation of pride, of misusing his or her knowledge and skills. The physician must constantly return to the acknowledgment of ignorance, and to the wonder and enigma of health.

Questioning Authority

It is possible, and important, to question authority in many ways and from many directions. Especially important, and least often acknowledged, is the need to question authority when one is in a position of authority. Indeed, without questioning one's authority it is probably not possible to be "at home" in a place of authority. This chapter is an exploration into how to begin to develop this part of the art of questioning authority, especially in connection with commitments to feminism and the recognition of the need to change and transform patriarchal social structures.

Such questioning must begin in an admission of ignorance. I do not know what it means to occupy a position of authority, to be an authority, to be in authority. In raising the question of authority, I recognize that I have set a direction. Like the physician, I aim for a healthy order, however enigmatic that health may be. From Gadamer I learn that authority need not be connected with obedience and domination. Authority can be understood as grounded in human freedom and dependent upon recognition of knowledge, ability, and insight. From many feminist thinkers, I learn that Gadamer's reflections on authority need to be constantly augmented with questions about whose recognition and whose knowledge contributes to the establishment of meaningful social order. From Jones, I learn that reflecting on authority in the context of human natality and guided by the principle of compassion can keep me mindful of human uniqueness and human hope, and of the importance of ongoing connectedness with others. And from Gadamer, I learn the importance of self-critical questioning in order to avoid the temptations of authority. I must regularly, and in new ways, ask if my actions are facilitating or hindering structures of meaning that recognize genuine freedom and the uniqueness of each individual. I must ask if my actions and decisions facilitate or hinder the self-assertion of all of the members of the community. I must ask if some are prevented from being heard, or from being part of that community. I must find ways of asking these questions so that others participate in the questions and in the directions set by these questions. I must ask if I am using, or being used by, a position of authority to perpetuate structures of domination and oppression. If I am to be at home in a position of authority, I must question authority.

While often I experience this questioning as a solitary activity, I think that Gadamer, Beauvoir, Jones, and Lugones all show that an authorita-

tive stance that embodies a rehabilitated concept of authority can only be realized in a world with others. Others who also recognize the need for an authoritative stance based in freedom and recognition rather than an authoritarian stance based in domination and obedience are most helpful. My questioning must be part of an ongoing conversation with others who share my project. But the questioning must also attempt to engage those who assume that all authority is authoritarian. This need places me back in the situation described at the beginning of this chapter: without definitive answers, but with clearer questions and so with a clearer sense of how to open spaces in which to question authority.

Notes

1. For purposes of this chapter, feminist consciousness is to be understood as minimally including the recognition that equality for women will require changes in current social structures in order to break down the domination of patriarchal structures. For a history of the development of feminist consciousness, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*. She defines feminist consciousness as "the awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternative vision of societal organization in which women as well as men will enjoy autonomy and self-determination" (Lerner 1993, 14). She notes that the term "feminist consciousness" can be misleading because it may obscure the manner in which women may function as oppressors as well as the oppressed (284).

2. Helpful sources include Diamond and Quinby (1988), Butler (1990), Collins (1991), and Young (1990).

3. Helpful sources include Harding and Hintikka (1983), Keller (1986), Lennon and Whitford (1994), and Alcoff and Potter (1993).

4. She categorizes Gadamer, quite incorrectly, as belonging to a group of thinkers whose approach to the concept of play is agonistic.

References

Alcoff, Linda, and Elizabeth Potter, eds. 1993. *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge.

Arendt, Hannah. [1950] 1998. *The Human Condition*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Beauvoir, Simone de. 1997. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press.

Belenky, Mary Field, Blyth McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. 1986. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought*. New York: Routledge.

Diamond, Irene, and Lee Quinby. 1988. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1997. "Reply to Robert R. Sullivan." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. The Library of Living Philosophy, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1996. *The Enigma of Health*. Trans. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 1989. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Harding, Sandra, and Merrill Hintikka, eds. 1983. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Reidel.

hooks, bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.

Jones, Kathleen B. 1993. *Compassionate Authority*. New York: Routledge.

Keller, Evelyn Fox. 1986. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kourany, Janet, ed. 1998. *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lennon, Kathleen, and Margaret Whitford, eds. 1994. *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. New York: Routledge.

Lerner, Gerda. 1993. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lugones, Maria. 1987. "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2:2: 3–19.

Ruddick, Sara. 1989. *Maternal Thinking*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Young, Iris. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

13

Gender, Nazism, and Hermeneutics

Robin May Schott

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
mere skill and little gain;
but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
thrown by an eternal partner
with accurate and measured swing
towards you, to your centre, in an arch
from the great bridgebuilding of God;
why catching then becomes a power—
not yours, a world's.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, quoted at the beginning of *Truth and Method*

De nobis ipsis silemus. (About the self it is better to keep silence.)

—Paul Natorp, quoted at the beginning of *Philosophical Apprenticeships*

Gadamer's announced intention is to turn away from a philosophy of the subject. He argues that a philosophy of the subject, such as is present in Romantic hermeneutics, emphasizes the author's creativity while over-looking the situatedness of understanding. Hence, a subjective starting point in philosophy underestimates human embeddedness in language and tradition. Gadamer follows his own advice, and in his intellectual autobiographical pieces—*Philosophical Apprenticeships* and his essay "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey"[1]—Gadamer gives us little clue about himself as an individual and a political agent, as opposed to Gadamer the philosopher. But if one believes, as I do, that the scholar is not separated from his or her existence as a sexual and political being, the few clues about his concrete life become troubling (both in their lim-ited number and in their content). I intend to take these "autobio-graphical" works as my texts in order to raise questions and criticisms often raised by "ideology critics" (and I would not be uncomfortable in being included in this category). Does Gadamer's philosophy adequately

deal with social and material life? Can he account for the different posi-
tions of individuals in language, positions that entitle some to legitimacy
in participating in intellectual and academic conversations and relegate
others to silence? If the answer to these questions is "no," is Gadamer's
hermeneutics "conservative," not merely in that it refers back to an
inherited tradition? Rather, is it a fundamentally conservative perspec-
tive that separates out concrete personal identity from philosophical
expression, and thus explicitly refuses to raise questions that could pos-
sibly challenge existing social relations? In my brief contribution to this
anthology, I will raise some questions that may be developed in greater
length in the future.

Because philosophy cannot be all things to all people, and Gadamer
is acknowledgedly *not* a social and political philosopher, my criticisms
may seem irrelevant. But it is my contention that when one is the
"catcher of a ball," one cannot always choose the decisions that must be
confronted as part of one's historical destiny. Gadamer's life spanned the
twentieth century, a period in which fundamental challenges have been
raised by women concerning their historical subordination and their
exclusion from higher education and politics. Moreover, it is a period
marked forever by the barbarism of Nazi Germany. Using these axes as
reference points, I will try to elucidate Gadamer's personal and intellec-
tual choices, in order to return to the philosophical questions concern-
ing the relation between philosophy and material life—which includes
the domains of history, politics, and personal identity.

In the translator's introduction to *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, Robert
Sullivan claims, "The entire German twentieth century is here chan-
neled to us through the life of one man" (Gadamer 1985, viii). In this
context Sullivan refers to the political contours of twentieth-century
German history that are present in some manner in Gadamer's tale—
from World War I to Nazism to the Soviet control of portions of East
Germany. It is my conviction, after reading Gadamer's autobiographical
writings, that much of the history of twentieth-century Germany left this
philosopher untouched. He continued to carry on a dialogue with clas-
sical texts, once claiming to a colleague, "I basically only read books that
are at least two thousand years old" (Wolin 1985, 13). His apparent obliv-
ion to the issues posed by twentieth-century politics indicates a vision
of philosophy that is divorced from the surrounding lifeworld, a vision
that violates Gadamer's own conception of hermeneutic consciousness with
"the constant operativeness of history in his [sic!] own consciousness"

(Gadamer 1976, 28). History does not operate in consciousness simply through abstract formulations, nor can its effect on consciousness be understood merely abstractly. Rather, to acknowledge and accept the "operativeness of history in consciousness" requires also a concrete engagement in making history. Gadamer's flight from concrete existence through a life lived in the "Ivory Tower" provides little inspiration for those seeking to take the relation between consciousness and history seriously.[2]

At the beginning of *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, Gadamer raises the question of how to write a memoir, how to return to those earliest times in his life. What aspect of those times should be remembered? "Certainly not simply the things that flare up in memory from earliest childhood: the red roundness of an Edam cheese, a spinning fan in the window on Afföller Street in Marburg, the fire engine pulled by heavy stallions thundering along the Shoe Bridge in Breslau. Such early remembrances are ridiculously intimate and irrelevant because of their very communicativeness" (Gadamer 1985, 1). Gadamer evinces an obvious discomfort with the mundane details of daily life, devoting a mere five pages to the period of his life before his university education began. These details are apparently too "communicative" about the self, so Gadamer quickly leaves them and this style of writing for that which "people today are more interested in," for example, the progress of technical civilization. In this brief opening chapter, then, Gadamer tells us of the Zeppelin, the Titanic, and the fact that his father was a pharmaceutical chemist, a significant researcher, and an authoritarian. About his mother (presumably she was alive for he later speaks of his liberation from his parents), his dreams, and his desires aside from his love for philosophy, he is silent (4). (He does indicate that he was interested in "strategy" and that people said he had an officer's career in front of him, until he was pulled away by the dreams of the "inner man, poetry, and theater." One cannot help but speculate about the course of his life had he chosen a military career.)

Not only is Gadamer's mother completely absent in his memoirs, but so are other women who are apparently more significant to his adult life. We know that he was married, because on page 14 he mentions that during his Heidelberg years he asked his wife to read his dissertation, so he could better evaluate the dissertations he was receiving from his students. But when he married, the name of his wife, whether she had read his dissertation earlier or not—all these observations belong apparently to the too intimate, too communicative details of life. Since *Philosophical*

Apprenticeships is devoted to the great men who have influenced him, other references to the existence of the female sex are brief.[3] On page 17, one reads that a "very tender, soft, almost girlish voice brought up a few clever things about Nietzsche," only to discover that this is the voice of Jacob Klein. On page 29, we learn that Scheler was, among other things, a "lover of beautiful women." On page 35, Gadamer describes himself in 1923 as "an immature doctor of philosophy and all-too-young-husband," though he misses yet another opportunity to name his wife and provide any information about her. The existence of women in Gadamer's consciousness does reappear on page 70, when he refers to Heidegger's penchant to give a lengthy talk "much to the despair of his wife as we were sitting in front of full dishes." (Though one might expect a scholar of the Greeks to have a sense of the "chairetic" moment for talking and for eating.)[4] On page 96, Gadamer's cowhide briefcase-turned-schoolbag becomes the means of revealing that he had a daughter by his first marriage and a daughter by his second marriage. But when his daughters were born, and whether his first marriage ended in death or divorce, remain outside the province of this story. The only reference to women's presence in the academy (since Hannah Arendt doesn't make it onto his list of important persons) is to the "temporary predominance of female students during the war" (Wolin 1985, 11).

In "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey," much the same pattern of description is repeated. Gadamer paints a life of work, in which weekdays are devoted to his teaching and his administrative work (serving as rector of the University of Leipzig at the end of the war) and weekends are devoted to his own work (without a hint about his family life). He paints a picture of himself as a man amongst men, and he introduces the whole medley of contemporary male German professors who were once his students. Finally, on page 18, a woman is named. "Some twenty-three years of issues of *Philosophische Rundschau* appeared under the strict leadership of my wife, Käte Gadamer-Lekebusch, until it was entrusted to other, younger hands." Although he "brought to life" the journal, she led it. (Was she also a philosopher? Did she have an intellectual relationship with her husband?)

But to what avail are these questions? How do they have philosophical as opposed to merely "intimate" import? Is my admittedly angry recounting of Gadamer's virtual silence about women in his personal and professional life merely the ranting of a latter-day American feminist, tasteless and out of place in these austere circles, and reflective of an

American empiricist penchant to count up women? Even if my motives are "impure," I would venture that they do have philosophical bearing. In the past, Gadamer has defended himself against the criticism that he has detached language from social and historical processes and action. He argues that concrete factors such as work and politics (and one might add sexual identity) are not outside the scope of hermeneutics. Instead, language reflects everything that is. Gadamer notes that language is a game of interpretation that we are all engaged in every day: "everybody is at the center, is 'it' in this game. Thus it is always his [sic!] turn to be interpreting" (Gadamer 1976, 32). Although Gadamer effectively argues that one can never be outside an interpretive framework, his assumption that "everybody is at the center" presupposes that all interpreters are equally legitimated in being "it" in this game.[5] As his own chronicles announce, however, only very select persons (exclusively male) are dialogic partners for Gadamer. When one's conversational partners are drawn from such an exclusive club of like-minded men, it is easier to display the hermeneutic generosity of spirit that assumes the openness to one's opponents' position and the probability that they are right (42). Whether or not this conversational experience can be normative for understanding in general, and whether or not it proves that hermeneutics is "universal," remains highly questionable. (If I were to carry on a conversation with the leaders of Operation Rescue, should I assume that they are probably right?[6]) From this point of view, Gadamer's depiction of hermeneutic understanding seems to echo the "bloodless academic philosophizing" that he thought he had abandoned when he turned to Heidegger as his mentor (Gadamer 1997, 9).

Gadamer's references to national and academic politics under Nazism are somewhat more explicit than his acknowledgment of women, though less than a satisfying *Auseinandersetzung*" (or argument) with Nazism. He writes in *Philosophical Apprenticeships* of Hitler's ascent to power in 1933: "It was a terrible awakening, and we could not absolve ourselves of having failed to perform adequately as citizens. We had underrated Hitler and his kind, and admittedly we made the same mistake as the liberal press in doing this. . . . It was a widespread conviction in intellectual circles that Hitler in coming to power would deconstruct the nonsense he had used to drum up the movement, and we counted the anti-Semitism as part of this nonsense" (Gadamer 1985, 75). He goes on to talk about the grotesqueness in Marburg, where soon a refusal of the Hitler salute would become an immediate ground of dismissal. By the

stylization of the greeting, students could recognize the convictions of the teacher. Gadamer continues, "Certainly it remained difficult to keep the right balance, not to compromise oneself so far that one would be dismissed and yet still to remain recognizable to colleagues and students. That we somehow found the right balance was confirmed for us one day when it was said of us that we had only 'loose sympathy' with the new awakening" (76).

Gadamer's use of the Hitler salute, certainly not zealous but convincing enough to enable him to carry on a successful academic career in Nazi Germany, epitomizes his strategy of survival. Although unlike his teacher Heidegger (whose own Nazi moment is treated only obliquely in Gadamer's memoirs), Gadamer evinces no sympathy with National Socialism; nonetheless he was intent on accommodation in order to further his academic career. Gadamer speaks of his Jewish friends who "had to leave us or voluntarily choose emigration," without ever discussing the government's representation of its policy toward the Jews. In giving a piece on Plato that has been printed under the motto "he who philosophizes is not at one with the premises of his times"—a quote from Goethe—Gadamer claims for himself some small act of resistance. But in the 1930s, Gadamer's "little ship had run aground," and he sought ways to save his academic existence in Nazi Germany. Although refusing to enter any party organization, he voluntarily registered for a "rehabilitation camp"—a political course for Dozenten that was required for habilitation, itself a prerequisite for becoming a professor. By means of this camp Gadamer won an influential friend, and in 1937 he finally got the professorial title. Soon he was called to Leipzig, where he also served as rector after the war. Of the Russians in charge of Leipzig after the war he writes that although he might disagree with them, they could "be certain that I would carry through their directives exactly, even against my own convictions" (Gadamer 1985, 107).

Gadamer's picture of his survival under Nazism is of a man who "does not want to make a martyr of oneself or voluntarily leave the country," but who seeks to find small ways of affirming his identity in the midst of enforced conformity. "Indeed, from that time on [1933] the fact that one strenuously avoided politically relevant themes (and publication in journals outside one's special field altogether) was in accord with the same law of self-preservation" (Gadamer 1997, 13). Clearly, Gadamer was a strong individual, intent on survival, intent on his career, and willing to make accommodations for the sake of his life and work. What is rather

more surprising than his accommodation during Hitler's regime is that in the post–World War II period, when many German intellectuals had been trying to come to grips with the phenomenon of Nazism, Gadamer had become no more explicit on the political and cultural implications of this period. It was as if Gadamer's penchant for reading very old books made it easy for him to turn away from any politically relevant themes, and he had continued that practice when the political conditions themselves no longer demanded that silence.

In this historical context, the claims of a hermeneutic philosophy to be "radically open," to not "lose (oneself) in theoretical constructions which were not fully made good by experience," seem dramatically unrealized (Gadamer 1997, 13, 16). Moreover, amidst these historical events, it hardly seems adequate to develop a philosophy of language that presents the following vision: "Language is the element in which we live, as fishes live in water. In linguistic interaction we call it a conversation. We search for words and they come to us; and they either reach the other person or fail him" (22). This very abstract notion of language as "the element in which we live" does not deal with the particular features or failures of linguistic interactions. Why, as far as these memoirs are concerned, did Gadamer never have a conversation with female students, colleagues, friends, or spouses? Is it because these women's words have "failed him"? What is responsible for that failure? His own prejudices? The entrenched male chauvinism of the German academy (where even today there are only very few female philosophers)? Is an ontological approach to language rich enough, and concrete enough, to provide the resources to answer these questions? Similarly, where did the conversation go wrong between German Jews and their anti-Semitic persecutors? In order to understand this failure, aren't we obliged to delve into the history of anti-Semitism, its economic justifications, and the psychological and existential factors that support it?[7] Can Gadamer's ontological approach to language, and his goal of developing a universal hermeneutics, help us to come to terms with these most pressing historical demands? And if not, if contemporary politics is defined as outside the scope of hermeneutic reflection, can hermeneutics really be said to explore the relation of consciousness with its historicity, to understand the ways in which historical context is reflected and appropriated in intellectual thought?

It is important to remember that Gadamer's philosophical choices are existential ones as well. There are philosophers and artists, whose work

spans some of the period of Gadamer's long life, who have chosen more explicitly to address personal and political currents omitted both from Gadamer's hermeneutic writings as well as from his autobiographical ones. As one contrast, I will mention briefly Audrey Flack, feminist painter and sculptor. The curator of the retrospective exhibit of Flack's work at the Speed Art Museum (Louisville, Kentucky) in 1993 described it in the following terms: "It is personal and self-revelatory. Historically conscious and emotionally charged, it is passionate, involved and unashamedly sentimental. Flack's art is about people and objects she cares for and that she often sees as extensions of herself. Both her portraits and still lives have a positive physical and moral presence and a sense of respect for living beings."[8] Flack's work encompasses self-portraits ("Self-Portrait Holding Charcoal Stick," "Self-Portrait in Underpants," "Triple Self Portrait"), photorealist images of public figures (Kennedy and Hitler), scenes of Mexican workers and market women, paintings of religious and sexual icons, and bronze goddess figurines that celebrate the female figure, strength, and energy. Here we have a radically different vision of the relation between high culture and the social world than is present in Gadamer's work. Flack purposely breaks the rules of high culture in order to create art "for the people."

I am not interested in comparing these two figures, Gadamer and Flack, with such different life histories and cultural contexts. Nor am I interested in setting up a female artist who paints herself in her underpants as normative of the relation between personal identity and creative production. Rather, my references to Flack are meant to serve as a sort of shock therapy and reality test. Her art reminds us that the parameters within which one creates, whether art or philosophy, are at least partly self-chosen ones. Although Gadamer chose to keep silent about the self, this very silence is self-revelatory. It indicates a desire to maintain a safe distance from troublesome issues on both a personal and political scale. The huge gaps in his intellectual autobiographies about his own historicity give us ample grounds to question his view that about the self it is better to keep silent.

What then does this critical reading of Gadamer suggest about the relation between philosophy and material life, the question posed at the beginning of this essay? For me, it suggests at the very least that the question is unavoidable, however much a philosopher might seek to turn away from it explicitly. But limitations of time and space preclude a fuller examination of this question here. I will instead briefly indicate the kinds of strategies that might be useful in pursuing it. One strategy might be

to develop comparisons between hermeneutics and other leading currents of twentieth-century intellectual life—for example, German critical theory or French poststructuralist theory. And indeed, there have been many projects devoted to this debate (for example, the debate between Gadamer and Habermas and the attempt to set up a debate between Gadamer and Derrida). However, such a debate continues to function on a high level of abstraction.

I find it more fruitful to look at theorists engaged in philosophical reflection on world-historical events (while acknowledging that these theorists have a theoretical perspective that may itself be debated). Hannah Arendt, for example, sought to grapple with issues of Jewish identity, anti-Semitism, violence, and authoritarianism in her works *Rahel Varnhagen, The Origins of Totalitarianism,* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* More recent philosophers like Berel Lang have written on the Holocaust and on genocide. Were philosophers to turn their attention to the urgent political tasks of our time, there would be attempts to grapple with the motivation for massacres and rapes such as are taking place in the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, with the resurgence of anti-Semitism and violence against *"Gastarbeiter"* in newly reunified Germany, with questions of individual and collective responsibility for racism and inequality, with the existence of institutionalized homophobia in the United States. I would argue that contrary to the insular model of Gadamerian hermeneutics, philosophers might become engaged in their historicity and situatedness, might abdicate the struggle for abstract justifications of universality, and might challenge the practices of the university system that perpetuate the mythology of this institution as an Ivory Tower. To develop a fruitful understanding of the relation between intellectual understanding and concrete existence, one must acknowledge that the philosopher is also a historical, contingent, embodied being, acknowledge how one is implicated in one's personal/historical identity, and develop theories as a means of resistance, not merely as tools that are innocuous and complicitous with existing inequalities and injustices.

Notes

1. Published in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24, (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 3–63.

2. See my discussion of this flight from concrete existence in an earlier article, Schott (1991). In that article, I connect Gadamer's notion of re-appropriation, of making a second home away from home, with a flight from the temporality and materiality of existence that has characterized much of the masculine tradition in Western philosophy.

3. Chapter headings are entitled "Paul Natorp," "Max Scheler," "Martin Heidegger," and so forth.

4. "Chairetic" comes from the Greek "chairos," referring to the most opportune moment in the body's healing process for a physician's intervention. Metaphorically it refers to the importance of timing in life.

5. See my earlier discussion in Schott (1991, 208–9). In that piece, I argue that Gadamer's philosophy is oblivious to issues of legitimacy and illegitimacy faced by oppressed groups. The problem of oppression is not only external, but also internal, as Beauvoir and Baldwin among others have so eloquently argued. If one has learned to be inferior, one will not feel entitled to be "it" in the game of interpretation, and individual feelings and thoughts will become suppressed.

6. Operation Rescue is an activist antiabortion group in the United States that has employed violence in targeting abortion clinics, then their doctors and their clients.

7. Sartre seeks to explore these factors in *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Though his analysis has often been criticized for equating anti-Semitism with other forms of prejudice, and thereby ignoring its specificity, he at least faces as historically inevitable the task of understanding anti-Semitism.

8. Thalia Gouma-Peterson, curator of "Breaking the Rules: Audrey Flack; A Retrospective 1950–1990," exhibited at the Speed Museum, University of Louisville, January 12–February 28, 1993.

References

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection." In *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* trans. and ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1985. *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Trans. Robert R. Sullivan. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1997. "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1995. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Trans. George J. Becker. New York: Schocken Books.

Schott, Robin May. 1991. "Whose Home is it Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics,* ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge.

Wolin, Sheldon S. 1985. "Under Siege in the German Ivory Tower." *New York Times Sunday Book Review,* July 28.

14

Three Problematics of Linguistic Vulnerability

Gadamer, Benhabib, and Butler

Meili Steele

We are thinking out the consequences of language as a medium.

> —Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue*, 461

Could language injure us if we were not, in some sense, linguistic beings, beings who require language in order to be? Is our vulnerability to language a consequence of our being constituted within its terms?

> —Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 1–2

Many of the recent debates in feminist political philosophy are concerned with what problematic(s) to use in order to understand democratic political ideals, gendered differences, and their histories.[1] For the purposes of this chapter, I will contrast two important problematics in these debates, the procedural/deliberative politics in the tradition of Critical Theory, represented here by Seyla Benhabib, and the poststructuralist or postmodernist politics, represented here by Judith Butler. The goal of the contrast will be to set up the contribution that Gadamer's work can make to contemporary feminist philosophy.[2] Butler's postmodernism criticizes the way that liberalism and deliberative democracy accept a political community's linguistic inheritance and ignore the dynamics by which subjects are produced. In Butler's view, the only way to make available the workings of oppression and to give a space to difference and liberty

is to think through the originary moments by which a community constitutes its meanings through excluding others. These originary exclusions are so deep that they are largely inaccessible to historical actors, and so the philosopher needs to avoid the subjectivist trap of reading hermeneutically and narratively. Instead, she tracks the movements of history by reading the self-understandings of a society as the repetitive effects generated by these originary moments. While Benhabib agrees that the self-understandings of political and cultural traditions have been so deformed by power and exclusion that a hermeneutics of tradition should be dismissed, she criticizes Butler on two counts: first, for renouncing the normative dimension through which political institutions receive their legitimation, and second, for ignoring the processes by which we understand and criticize each other as political subjects. For Benhabib, legitimacy is dialogically conceived through procedures of argumentation. Philosophy's task is to pursue the normative dimension of democracy, while the social sciences work on the empirical dimension.

How does Gadamer's work contribute to this debate? After all, it seems to present a conservative understanding of language and tradition as a nourishing medium that largely ignores the effects of power, the occlusion of difference, and the demands of political agency. Gadamer's metaphilosophical argument that we are historical, linguistic beings, which was an important contribution at the time *Truth and Method* was published (1960), is now largely a given in feminist philosophy. The question is now not whether to make the linguistic turn or not, but what problematic should be used to characterize our historical being-in-language. This chapter will argue for the indispensability of Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology for feminist political philosophy. Both Benhabib and Butler, in opposing ways, remain caught in the Enlightenment desire to achieve liberty, justice, and clarity by setting up a philosophical problematic over and against a historical phenomenology, by trying to leap out of the hermeneutic circle. Our historical inheritance has indeed been complex and oppressive in ways that are constitutive of existence—indeed, in ways that Gadamer does not thematize; yet the way to deliberate about this inheritance is not by creating a formal procedural subject or by flattening ethical/political histories and their languages into the effects produced by transcendental engines.

However, since the dismissal of Gadamer is so widespread, I will not begin with Gadamer but rather with Benhabib's attempt to accommodate hermeneutics in her feminist Critical Theory. I then offer a response

that shows how her theory fails to make available the complex ways that gendered subjects inhabit and act through language in the way that Gadamer's philosophy can. Nonetheless, this reply to Critical Theory leaves untouched Butler's understanding of language, so I will then lay out Butler's complex combination of Foucauldian constructivism and Derridean dissemination. I respond to Butler through a Gadamerian reading of Susan Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers," a story that shows how his hermeneutics displays the dynamics of power, difference, and contestation better than Butler's problematic. This is not to say that hermeneutics has all the answers to the politics of interpretation, but that the site of interpretive political judgment emerges through and not against dialogical hermeneutics. My point is not to drive out competing ontologies, but to put them into dialogue. The question that guides my exposition is how to develop an interpretive philosophy that can come to terms with the ontological complexity of our linguistic vulnerability that has made possible both women's oppression and achievement.

Benhabib: Modernity and the Denial of Language

Benhabib describes her project as "a postmetaphysical interactive univeralism" that seeks to reformulate "the moral point of view as the contingent achievement of an interactive form of rationality rather than a timeless standpoint of a legislative project" (Benhabib 1992, 6). The "interactive form of rationality" comes from the work of Jürgen Habermas, who transforms Kant's moral universalism from the monological perspective of the categorical imperative to the dialogical perspective of the rules of communicative action. Habermas appeals to the universal presuppositions of communication that one cannot help but invoke (Habermas 1990, 89–95), and his conception of presupposition is not historical but Kantian: "The theory of communicative action *detranscendentalizes* the noumenal realm only to have the idealizing force of context-transcending anticipations settle in the unavoidable pragmatic presuppositions of speech acts, and hence in the heart of everyday communicative practice" (Habermas 1996a, 19).[3] These ideals are then turned into dialogical procedures. As Benhabib explains, "These rules of fair debate can be formulated as 'the universal-pragmatic presuppositions' of argumentative speech and these can be stated as a set of procedural rules"

(Benhabib 1992, 31). In other words, the rules of dialogue, not the substance of what is said, test whether or not the outcome of the exchange is rational and legitimate. Benhabib's claim for interactive universalism is that it addresses two persistent problems of democracy, legitimacy, and difference. First, her project confers legitimacy on the outcome that emerges when collective decision-making processes are "conducted rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals" (1996b 68). Second, "Proceduralism is a rational answer to persisting value conflicts at the substantive level" (73).

Habermas and Benhabib offer this view as an alternative to liberalism and republicanism/communitarianism (Habermas 1996, 23). Liberalism focuses on rights and the procedures for aggregating individual interests, while ignoring the role of public dialogue in constituting public institutions and citizens. In contrast, communitarianism rejects this separation of procedures from the substance of individual and collective identities, insisting that it is both undesirable and impossible to abstract ourselves from who we are individually or collectively in order to reason justly. Interactive universalism seeks to develop an idea of public reason dear to communitarians, without relying on the idea of shared community, since "politics may not be assimilated to a hermeneutical process of self-explication of a shared form of life or collective identity" (Habermas 1996, 23–24).

Benhabib seeks to qualify Habermas's commitment to procedures by "situating reason and the moral self more decisively in contexts of gender and community" (Benhabib 1992, 8), so as to take into account Gadamerian and feminist critiques of formalism: "From Hegel's critique of Kant, Gadamer borrowed the insight that all formalism presupposes a context that it abstracts from and that there is no formal ethics which does have some material presuppositions concerning the self and social institutions" (25). She deflects this Gadamerian point through her historicization of modernity and her understanding of language, and I will pursue each successively.

Part of her response to this Gadamerian line is to make Kantian procedures emerge after a prepolitical historical reconciliation that is sufficient to establish a public language and space of discussion, or "lifeworld." By making this move, Benhabib does not have moral rules stand over against the historical communities, but instead they become part of the communal inheritance: "The standpoint of communicative ethics has been made possible by the culture of modernity" (Benhabib 1992, 40).[4] This prepolitical internalization of modernity needs to be unpacked. First,

this means that we must accept as given the Kantian division of reason, in which there is a "separation from each other of the good, the true, and the beautiful or of science, ethics, aesthetics and theology" (41). For Benhabib, these divisions are historical achievements of modernity and not timeless features of reason. Second, they provide a structural unity for the lifeworld that justifies the "assumption that the institutions of liberal democracies embody the idealized content of a form of practical reason." The word "idealized" here means that one "aim[s] at the reconstruction of the logic of democracies" (Benhabib 1996, 69). She forthrightly acknowledges her Hegelianism, by calling modernity's cultural/political inheritance "objective spirit," without a supersubject (68–69). Benhabib seeks to neutralize the Gadamerian objection about historical context through internalization, so that Kantian universal questions can be posed.

There is a paradox here. On the one hand, Benhabib's intersubjective project seeks to overcome Hegel's privileging of the trans-subjective perspective of the philosophical observer over the intersubjective perspective of the participants, a privileging that makes the meaning of history always work behind the backs of agents.[5] On the other hand, her fear of relativism ends up plunging subjects neck deep into a lifeworld that has solved enough important ethical/political issues to be unproblematic as a prestructured medium for argumentation. This understanding of modernity makes three assumptions that Gadamer and Butler will contest. First, Benhabib assumes that the differentiation of reason into three spheres is an empirical fact of modern culture; second, she assumes that this division is desirable; third, she assumes that it makes sense to "reconstruct" out of the histories and languages of democracy an idealized process that is neither determined by these histories nor fully abstracted from them. In her view, we are somehow in a special nonhermeneutic space between noumena and phenomena where the "logic of democracies" can be discovered and have a critical purchase on everyday practice.[6] Here we see the leap out of hermeneutics in order to create a space of rationality that can adjudicate hermeneutic conflicts.

Benhabib tries to soften this opposition to Gadamerian hermeneutics by recourse to narrative: "The 'narrative structure of actions and personal identity' is the second premise which allows one to move beyond the metaphysical assumptions of Enlightenment universalism" (Benhabib 1992, 5–6). Moreover, narrative helps her give nuance and particularity to her conception of "objective spirit" so that it does not fall prey to the holistic assumption she criticizes in Habermas's reconstructive project,

which "speak[s] in the name of a fictional collective 'we' from whose standpoint the story of history is told" (Benhabib 1986, 331). Benhabib draws her conception of narrative from Hannah Arendt, who helps her steer between "contextual judgment and universal morality" (Benhabib 1992, 124), and it is important to connect their positions on narrative and language with their Kantian understandings of modernity, in which truth, art, and morality are separated. The complications of Arendt's reading of the *Critique of Judgment* are not germane to this discussion.[7] However, what is crucial for this chapter is that Arendt's and Benhabib's understanding of narrative is very different from Gadamer's, or indeed from Alasdair MacIntyre's often cited account. Benhabib herself does not see it this way.[8] For her, the central tension between the contextualists— the "NeoAristotelians like Gadamer, Taylor, and MacIntyre" (134)—and the universalists does not involve language.

Benhabib makes Arendt's "enlarged mentality," the ability to "think in the place of everybody else" (Arendt 1977, 220, 241) that is developed from Kant, the centerpiece of moral theory because it bridges the demands of the universal and the particular: "The moral principle of enlarged thought enjoins us to view each person as one to whom I owe the moral respect to consider their standpoint. This is the universalist kernel of Kantian morality. Yet 'to think from the standpoint of everyone else' requires precisely the exercise of contextual moral judgment" (Benhabib 1992, 136). How we understand the language that makes subjects and contexts available is not an issue. The source for her view of language is Arendt, who wants to keep language and truth apart. For Arendt, storytelling is "thought" rather than "cognition," since the former "has neither an end nor aim outside itself" (Arendt 1958, 170; 1978, i, 13–15).[9] Hence, "culture and politics . . . belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake but rather judgment and decision" (Arendt 1977, 223). Arendt, like Kant, wants to keep reflective judgment apart from the concept, which is the domain of determinative judgments about truth (and morality).[10] In this way, Arendt blocks out the Gadamerian position of having language mediate our interpretations of ourselves and the world, in which stories inform experience. Arendt denies the ontological force of culture to constitute identities in enabling or oppressive ways. We are gripped and transformed by stories in ways that Arendt and Benhabib cannot make available.

The model of "enlarged thought" accepts a subject-to-subject model that fails to interrogate the historical medium that articulates these sub-

jects, the tissue of being that connects and tears them. Benhabib, like Arendt, protects language from historical damage, as if language itself were not bound up with the catastrophes of modern life. At the same time, she fails to see it as a resource of moral reflection. The languages of the West since the Enlightenment are deeply implicated in the atrocities and traumas that we continue to work through and that must be given a larger place in a political philosophy than Benhabib's procedural theory can offer. Yet she deprives language and stories (literature) of any critical capacity, unlike Gadamer or Bakhtin, who make literature a mode of reflection on the languages of society.[11] Her way of understanding this medium keeps historicity and linguistic vulnerability at bay, as her reading of women's history reveals.[12]

In "On Hegel, Women, and Irony," she outlines three different approaches to feminist history. The first approach is a "mainstream liberal feminist theory [that] treats the tradition's views of women as a series of unfortunate, sometimes embarrassing, but essentially corrigible, misconceptions" (Benhabib 1992, 242–43). The second is "'the cry of the rebellious daughter,'" which accepts the Lacanian view "that all language has been the codification of the power of the father" and that seeks "female speech at the margins of the western logocentric tradition." (She makes no references, but presumably she is referring to French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray; this description does not fit Butler.) A third way, the one she endorses, is "a 'feminist discourse of empowerment'" (243). This view follows radical critique in "revealing the gender subtext of the ideals of reason and the Enlightenment," but, unlike the "rebellious daughters," Benhabib does not want to discard these ideals. There are two parts to fulfilling these ideals. On the one hand, she exposes the exclusion of women from political traditions such as social contract theory, where we find "boys [who] are men before they have been children; a world where neither mother, nor sister, nor wife exist" (157). On the other, she reads "against the grain, proceeding from certain footnotes and marginalia in the text . . . toward recovering the history of those the dialectic leaves behind" (245). She claims to restore "irony to the dialectic, by deflating the pompous march of necessity" and giving to victims their "otherness" and "selfhood" (256), thus counterbalancing her Hegelian reading of modernity.[13]

She recovers the story of Caroline Schlegel Schelling as an account of a female liberal agent whom Hegel rejected. Caroline was a politically active intellectual, who worked in the revolutionary groups in 1792–93,

when Mainz was under French control, and who was arrested when the German armies retook the city. After her release, she and her husband Auguste Schlegel moved to Jena, where she was active in that city's famous intellectual circle. She deeply influenced both Schlegel brothers, especially Friedrich's views of "women, marriage, and free love" (Benhabib 1992, 252). Shortly after her arrival in Jena, Caroline became estranged from her husband and attracted to Friedrich Schelling. After Auguste left Jena, Caroline moved in with her new companion, and the two of them shared a house with Hegel for two years (1801–3). (She eventually divorced Schlegel and married Schelling.) In sum, Hegel "encountered brilliant accomplished and nonconformist women who certainly intimated to him what true gender equality might mean in the future" and "he did not like it" (254). Hegel's threatening encounter with Caroline Schlegel Schelling forms the subtext of his reading of *Antigone* in which "the female principle must eventually be expelled from public life" (255).

By pulling out the stories of isolated individuals who assert liberal ideals, rather than having a hermeneutic engagement with language and tradition, Benhabib leaves unexamined the symbolic and social inheritance that other feminists have found to be so conflicted.[14] This kind of interpretive judgment cannot be thematized by simply taking another's point of view. Language's constitutive dimension shapes and gives us access to the complex ways we live our pains and aspire to goodness. Moreover, the history of the vocabulary of democracy shows how our ideals and our anguish are interconnected. This lacuna in her philosophy is not accidental, but is required by her commitment to two anti-hermeneutical positions: first, that formalized ideals can stand outside history and hermeneutics; and second, that narrative is about individuals rather than about languages. I will develop the weaknesses in this kind of formalism through a Gadamerian critique.

Reopening Historicity and Language: A Gadamerian Response to Benhabib

Gadamer would disagree with both parts of Benhabib's accommodation. First, he rejects her understanding of modern reason as the historical realization of three spheres. Second, he rejects the conception of historicity

implicit in this view. These two issues come together in his conception of language and tradition.

Gadamer attacks the Kantian legacy that misapplies the methods of natural science to hermeneutic beings. The result is that we deform and impoverish our world by overlooking the bond between subject and object, by claiming that we can step out of the hermeneutic circle. The separation of truth from morality and aesthetics continues the legacy, even as it tries to make social science "hermeneutic." Gadamer's argument about our being-in-language seeks to undo the damage done by the Kantian division of reason into theoretical, practical, and aesthetic that Benhabib wants to enshrine. Gadamer aims to show how our being-in-language and being-in-dialogue is logically prior to any such division, how the hermeneutic circle is not an account of what we should do in making particular discursive claims but of what we inevitably do because of who we are. The attempt to stand outside hermeneutics in order to establish an epistemological and moral site of adjudication produces a specious clarity about the true and the good. Since we are interpretive beings, the question of "how understanding is possible" (Gadamer 1994, xxix) is fundamental.

Gadamer's answer to what makes understanding possible is tradition. However, "tradition" is not a mere substitute for Hegel's "Spirit" any more than it fits Benhabib's idea of objective spirit—"the collective and anonymous property of cultures, institutions and traditions as a result of the experiments and experiences, both ancient and modern, with democratic rule over the course of human history" (Benhabib 1996, 69).[15] What Benhabib's version does is take the ontological dimension of tradition away by making it a shared background from which we make narrative specifications. For Gadamer, "tradition" and "prejudice" are shaping forces of culture and subjectivity that the Enlightenment claimed to be able to step away from, when in fact they are inevitable characteristics of our being. The effects of tradition and prejudice are always ahead of the consciousness that tries to seize them. This means that the picture of the speaking subject is not the autonomous claims-maker of discourse theory. Rather, "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being" (Gadamer 1994, 276–77). Our being-in-the-world is not conceived in terms of a subject who manipulates alien objects that stand outside all preunderstandings; rather, the subject moves in a hermeneutical circle that "describes under-

standing as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of the text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition" (293).

To make available his conception of subjectivity and to stress its importance, Gadamer offers a new phenomenology, one that is not individualistic as we find in Arendt and Benhabib, but one that displays our vulnerability as interpretive beings who are struggling to understand the languages they inhabit, and not just as choosers of words to make claims. Gadamer's subjects are not standing in a synchronic lifeworld together, as Benhabib's holism would have it, for such a conception leaves out the temporal and transformative dynamics of Gadamer's metaphor of "inhabiting." If "belonging to a tradition is a condition of hermeneutics" (Gadamer 1994, 235), this "belonging is brought about by tradition addressing us" (463). Gadamer's philosophy of tradition is not designed to "situate the subject," but to show how the subject is continuously reconstituted through dialogue with others and tradition. Tradition does not simply stand in the background; it asks us questions, nourishes, and oppresses (358ff). Tradition is not the medium through which the "lifeworld is reproduced," a medium whose rules can be reconstructed by the social scientific observer. Dialogue is not just an exchange of claims by individuals, but the "coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation" (463). The dialogue of question and answer between past and present that subtends any conversation in the present avoids the simplifying understanding of "lifeworld," in which historical inheritance is an unproblematic "background" that is "intuitively known, problematic [and] unanalyzable" (Habermas 1987a, 298).[16]

Thomas McCarthy, a defender of Benhabib's line of reasoning, says that Gadamer's idea of tradition commits "the fallacy of treating logical conditions as normative principles." From the ontological insight that "we take for granted in any act of reflective critique" more than we call into question, McCarthy argues that "Gadamer tries to draw normative conclusions against enlightenment criticism and in favor of traditionalism." However, the idea that we are "more being than consciousness" is "no less true of the revolutionary critic than the conservative" (McCarthy 1994, 41). First, we need make it clear that Gadamer is not advocating traditionalism, but articulating tradition as the ontological condition of understanding. Thus, "the confrontation of our historical tradition is

always a critical challenge of this tradition" (Gadamer 1987, 108).[17] Second, we need to reject McCarthy's suggestion that because Gadamer's ontology applies to everyone, it can provide no critical perspective on everyday understandings and thus drops out. This dismissal of the importance of historical inheritance is precisely the mistake that Benhabib makes when she neutralizes "tradition" as a shared background or life-world. Gadamer's description of our being-in-language does not determine whether one is a revolutionary or not, but it does make new understandings of our being-in-the-world available, and forecloses others. One of the views it forecloses is the phenomenology that McCarthy and Benhabib put forward, in which the subject of morality appears in a quasi-noumenal realm where ideals and rules are divorced from language and history.

The desire to escape from the ontology of prejudices, to seek a shallow clarity, is not only present in the epistemology of the social sciences, but also in the Kantian moral formalism that denies our historicity and puts out of play the linguistic fabric from which we are made. The separation of justice from the good offers the illusion that we can know deontological rules in a transhistorical way that does not apply to knowing linguistically mediated practices.[18] The claim of the subject of justice to be able to stand above and adjudicate competing understandings of the good presupposes clear epistemological access to competing claims and a moral site above the fray. Gadamer's ontology blocks both of these routes.[19] The meanings of the normative concepts of modern political life, such as "equality," are imbricated with the sexist and racist vocabularies that have infused them, and all are historically renewed through reappropriation.[20] An understanding of our historicity requires that we probe the ambiguous medium that we have internalized, which continues to infect and nourish our stories. The dethroning of the self-understanding of justice in no way entails that justice not receive the highest priority among moral goods. What it does require is that this priority not be conceived as a standpoint outside other goods with its own methodological requirements; rather, the claim to priority must be part of a historical argument in which justice makes comparative claims against other goods.

The idea of tradition gives us a way of understanding women's sufferings and achievements in the transformation of public and private life that goes beyond the retrieval of isolated individuals to the retrieval of aspects of alternative traditions. Thus, Gadamer's conception of tradition

does not have to be monolithic, even if he does not explore the multiplicity and divisions in the linguistic currents of culture. The idea of tradition has been developed by feminist literary historians, for example, who urge us to look at the distinctiveness and value of women's writing, from Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* to Beverly Guy-Sheftall's *Words of Fire* (Showalter 1977; Guy-Sheftall 1995). These feminists do not fit Benhabib's "rebellious daughter" category, which runs together two different understandings of our being-in-language proposed by feminist theories. The first group is made up of constructivists, who understand language and historical inheritance in terms of a third-person ontology of power that redescribes the self-understandings of historical actors from the point of view of linguistic and institutional forces. (I examine this idea in the next part on Butler.) The second group consists of "cultural or gynocentrics feminists," such as Showalter and Guy-Sheftall, but who would also include Irigaray or Hélène Cixous, who do not think women's practices are exhausted by the totalizing accounts of Hegelians, Lacanians, or Foucauldians.[21] Retrieval is not just of isolated individuals who embody Kantian conceptions of autonomy, but of women's practices that challenge a sexist and racist linguistic medium that constitutes subjects. Our freedom and agency are to be defined through our linguistic constitution, not against it. "Freedom implies the linguistic constitution of the world. Both belong together" (Gadamer 1994, 444); hence, "to be situated within a tradition does not limit freedom of knowledge but makes it possible" (361).

Benhabib repeats the mistake of liberalism by separating out the norms of equality from the languages and myths that shape identities. As Adrienne Rich states, "Until we know the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves," for "our language has trapped as well as liberated us" (Rich 1979, 35). However, Rich's remark does raise a question about Gadamer's understanding of the subject's relationship to tradition as one of dialogical play, a problem that Robin Schott's observation pointedly addresses: "Ontology for Gadamer clearly does have normative implications, since he speaks of those who refuse to abandon themselves fully to the play. Therefore, differences in human identity (such as gender) may become normatively inscribed into interpretations of being" (Schott 1991, 204). Gadamer does indeed conflate the ontological and the normative in his concept of play. In his desire to overcome the distanciated understanding of subject and object, Gadamer generalizes the phenomenology of one kind of textual experience. Play

certainly does not account for the violent relationship that women often have with traditions, as we will see in the Glaspell story. However, the conclusion to be drawn from this is not that we can separate the ontological and the normative, as Critical Theory does, but that we need to have phenomenologies of the different ways that we inhabit language, ones that display oppression, contestation, admiration. My reading of the story is a gesture toward how our being-in-language can be given characterizations alternative to the ones that Gadamer gives, without breaking with his fundamental insight that we inhabit language. I do not mean for these Gadamerian responses to exonerate his work entirely, for clearly, he is insensitive to the multiplicity of traditions and to the different effects of power. What I am trying to deflect are familiar critiques from the perspective of Critical Theory, which Benhabib represents.

Even more deeply entrenched in modern culture than ethical formalism is the legacy of Kant's reduction of literature to the subjective, aesthetic realm—whether as formalism or as Benhabib's and Habermas's individualistic expressivism. Such an understanding of literature helps modern reason ignore the way the languages of literature and other domains weave in and out of each other as they constitute and make claims on us: "The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person experiencing it" (Gadamer 1994, 102). Indeed, "experience" is an important word for Gadamer because he wants to deliver it from a subjective sense of *Erlebnis* and give it the transformative sense of *Erfahrung* (60–100).[22] Gadamer traces the history of the word and concept of *Erlebnis* in *Truth and Method*, locating its emergence into general usage in the 1870s with the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, who employed the term to capture both the lived experience of an author or social actor and the result (64). Dilthey reconceives of experience as something more than mere sensation so as to offer the human sciences a new foundation: "The primary data, to which the interpretation of historical objects goes back, are not data of experiment and measurement but unities of meaning" (65). Although this concept of experience is primarily epistemological, its legacy isolates aesthetic experience from other forms of experience: "As the work of art as such is a world for itself, so also what is experienced aesthetically is, as an *Erlebnis*, removed from all connections with actuality" (70).[23] *Erlebnis* thus encapsulates two features of modernity's misreading of our being in language: the subjectivization of experience and the isolation of the aesthetic. "The work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather,

we learn to understand ourselves in and through it. . . . The binding quality of the experience *(Erfahrung)* of art must not be disintegrated by aesthetic consciousness" (97).

While the subjectivist conception does "not include the Thou in an immediate and primary way" (Gadamer 1994, 250) because it aims to "get inside another person and relive his experiences," Gadamerian "understanding begins . . . when something addresses us" (299). In addition, *Erfahrung* brings an understanding of historicity to the concept of experience that Dilthey's *Erlebnis* omits (346). Like the scientific experiment, Dilthey's historical method was "concerned to guarantee that [its] basic experiences could be repeated by anyone." By insisting on repeatability, Dilthey's concept of "experience abolishes its history and thus itself" (347). Gadamer draws on Hegel's idea of experience as reversal of consciousness, as negation: "Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive" (356). However, Gadamerian negation is tracked through the linguistically mediated experience of the subject, and not by the trans-subjective account of the Hegelian narrator: "The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definite knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself" (355), and in an awareness "of our finitude and limitedness" (362).

Gadamer seeks to break down the tyranny of the philosophical concept over our idea of truth. This Kantian legacy, which Hegel refined rather than repudiated, keeps literature in secondary position.[24] For Gadamer, literature serves "as a corrective for the ideal of objective determination and for the hubris of concepts" (Gadamer 1985, 190). Moreover, he does not isolate the speculative pursuits of philosophy from everyday speech, for he finds speculation in ordinary conversations: "Even in the everyday speech there is an element of speculative reflection," since this happens any time "words do not reflect being but express a relation to the whole of being" (Gadamer 1994, 469).[25] Instead of sequestering the task of philosophy into normative debates, as Benhabib does, or trivializing its significance, as Richard Rorty does,[26] Gadamer's puts philosophy at the heart of our daily conversations. Every utterance is an event of language that touches ontological, normative, and epistemological issues simultaneously. Philosophy's task is not to content itself with the insight that we are linguistic constructs or to seek truth and goodness beyond these "linguistic appearances," but to unfold the potential and the historicity of the medium that constitutes us.

Butler: Freedom as Effects Without Subjects

Judith Butler, like Gadamer, follows in the wake the "ontological turn" initiated by Heidegger. She claims that her ontology of power is more primordial than Gadamer's tradition, in the same way that he claimed his problematic was more primordial than the subjectivism of his predecessors. While both understand language as a medium for the subject and the world, their understandings of this medium are radically different. For Gadamer, our being is formed through the dialogical play of tradition, of critique and retrieval; while for Butler language is not a medium in which we swim but a disseminating ontology of power that produces effects that cannot be characterized in the vocabulary of tradition and dialogue. While Gadamer makes a linguistic and hermeneutic revision of phenomenology, Butler breaks completely with the self-understandings and narratives of subjects.

In her recent works, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997) and *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Butler aims to show that her philosophy does not deny agency, freedom, and equality, as detractors such as Benhabib maintain, but in fact gives a more perspicuous account of these ideas once we understand ourselves as linguistically vulnerable beings.[27] Her philosophy draws on elements from both Foucault and Derrida. From Foucault, she takes the concept of power, which is the "formative and constitutive" medium in which subject and world are made. Power's particular manner of constitution tends to produce a shallow, defensive self-understanding that disguises the way that power really operates: "The conditions of intelligibility are themselves formulated in and by power, and this normative exercise of power is rarely acknowledged as an operation of power at all" (Butler 1997a, 134). This dissimulation produces the two levels typical of the hermeneutics of suspicion: a surface level that characterizes the self-understanding of the culture, and a deeper level that her analysis seeks to make available. Power "works through its illegibility: it escapes the terms of legibility that it occasions" (134). Our superficial understandings of the production of meaning lead us to mis-frame issues such as censorship in terms of individuals and the state. We should not make the humanist mistake of seeing this as a question of what one can say; rather, we need to make the deeper ontological cut and interrogate the "domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all" (132). Unlike the hermeneutics of suspicion, Butler's approach does not place an explanation behind the self-understanding—

i.e., a truth beneath the appearance. Rather, the point is to make the illegible legible.

But the key to understanding her work is not the familiar reworking of Foucault, but the way in which she revives Derrida, particularly his reading of speech-act theory. The choice of speech-act theory is apt because it embodies the liberal assumptions about subjectivity and language that she wants to challenge, assumptions that underwrite not only the work of Habermas but also contemporary debates over pornography and hate speech, which serve as the examples for her critique. For Butler, liberalism falsely associates agency and autonomy with the control of meaning, and her phrasing of this critique often sounds very Gadamerian: "The linguistic domain over which the individual has no control becomes the condition of possibility for whatever domain of control is exercised by the speaking subject. Autonomy in speech is conditioned by dependency on language whose historicity exceeds in all directions the speaking subject" (Butler 1997a, 28). Indeed, Gadamer could only agree with her critique of the liberal interpretation of hate speech, which ignores such speech's inherited character: "The subject who speaks hate speech is clearly responsible for such speech, but that subject is rarely the originator of that speech. Racist speech works through the invocation of convention" (34). Hate speech and pornography are "traditions," which cannot be located only at the level of speakers. Moreover, like Gadamer, Butler challenges the separation of description and norm that informs liberal practical reason in which "we first offer a description . . . and then decide . . . through recourse to normative principles" (140).

However, she differs from Gadamer in that she wants to break with the unifying ideas of hermeneutics, such as narrative, tradition, and understanding. All of these ideas obscure where the action of language really takes place. In order to discern the way meaning operates, we need to recognize that the entire speech system depends on a repressed other, "the constitutive outside": "This 'outside' is the defining limit or exteriority to a given symbolic universe, one which, were it imported into that universe, would destroy its integrity and coherence. In other words, what is set outside or repudiated from the symbolic universe in question is precisely what binds that universe together through its exclusion" (Butler 1997a).[28] Because coherence is achieved through exclusion, Butler justifies reading against the grain of meanings and understandings for "effects," so that we are not trapped in the symbolic system.[29] Butler is

careful never to put the site of her theory "outside" the system since opposition is "implicated in the very processes it opposes" (Butler 1997b, 17). Indeed, she criticizes such spatializing notions of subjectivity, which block out the temporality of repetition: what Derrida calls "iterability," the agent of change, as we will see momentarily. However, if Butler refuses to spatialize her relation to the languages and subjects she addresses, she nonetheless claims superiority for her language over the languages that she targets. Her language blends together the explanatory ambitions of the work of Freud and Lacan with the Derridean ambition of transcendental philosophy to consider the conditions of possibility of being. Through Derrida, she explicitly distances herself from the determinism that she finds in psychoanalysis and Foucault (Butler 1997b, 130) without relying on a Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenology. For Foucault, liberty is achieved by working out the conditions of "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do or think" (Foucault 1984, 45). For Derrida, language itself manifests a disseminatory dimension that is obscured by attention to conceptualization, a dimension that he discusses through his neologisms such as "iterability."

Hence, when Butler discusses the historicity of speech acts and language, she draws from Derrida's idea of iterability rather than Gadamer's idea of tradition. Performative acts "engage actions or constitute themselves as a kind of action, . . . not because they reflect the power of an individual's will or intention, but because they draw upon and reengage conventions which have gained their power precisely through a sedimented iterability" (Butler 1995, 134). "Sedimented iterability" is a way of referring to cultural channeling without presupposing that there is understanding or "know-how" that accompanies such redundancy.[30] Butler reminds us that for Derrida, the break with existing contexts is a "structurally necessary feature of every utterance and every codifiable written mark" (Butler 1997a, 150). The break is a transcendental condition of the utterance, a break that goes all the way down, and not a recontextualization of a core of meaning that would provide a continuity of understanding. What Butler is getting at is the difference between the transcendental and the empirical level of deconstruction. Perhaps the simplest way to characterize this distinction is through Derrida's well-known debate with John Searle over how to categorize fictional speech acts. At the empirical level, Derrida is challenging Searle's taxonomy, but at the transcendental level he is challenging the capacity of any

taxonomy to contain the disseminatory dimension of language, because "iterability blurs a priori the dividing line that passes between . . . opposed terms" (Derrida 1977, 210).[31]

We should not lament this truth about the interrupting other of our language, about our inability to control meaning, because such logocentric mourning ignores how this disseminatory movement of language—and not the wills of actors—opens space for new possibilities and for a nonsovereign idea of freedom: "The disjunction between utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative. . . . The citationality of the performance produces the possibility for agency and expropriation at the same time" (Butler 1997a, 87). Hence, "untethering the speech act from the sovereign subject founds an alternative notion of agency and ultimately of responsibility, one that more fully acknowledges the way in which the subject is constituted by language" (15). The disjunction of meaning is the condition of the possibility of resignification, of linguistic change that no individual or institution can contain. Thus, those who want to ban hate speech attribute to the speaker and his or her language a sovereign power that overlooks the way that those targeted by such languages have fought back, have come to respond to and reinscribe the language of oppression by various means. These responses are not to be attributed simply to the punctual agency of individuals, but also to the transcendental uncontainability of language that makes discrete acts of revolt possible.[32]

However, there is a tension here between Butler's account of the agency of the oppressed and their own self-understandings. The liberty of the subject for Butler comes from the disseminating effects of meaning as they work through and against the received self-understandings: processes that deny and/or ignore this truth. Butler senses that she must negotiate these two levels of meaning, one for the received vocabularies of the subject and one for those who think through her third-person vocabularies of effects.[33] For Gadamer, the ontology of tradition requires that we revise but not abandon the vocabularies of self-understanding in order to bring them into his new understanding. There is still a tension between inside and outside, a tension that Gadamer thematizes with the expression "historically effected consciousness," which means "at once the consciousness effected in the course of history and determined by history, and the very consciousness of being thus effected and determined" (Gadamer 1994, xxxiv). However, while Gadamer makes his conceptions of finitude and language open to challenge by third-person

accounts, he insists that the challenger draw the hermeneutic circle between her theory of subjectivity and her own utterance.

Butler, on the other hand, makes the category "disseminatory effects" stand at such an angle to all the ethical and axiological vocabularies of philosophy and everyday life that the hermeneutic circle is forever broken and practical judgments are paralyzed. This paralysis emerges from the gap between her ideals and her problematic. The goals of her project are uncontroversial: "the development of forms of differentiation [that could] lead to fundamentally more capacious, generous, and 'unthreatened' bearings of the self in the midst of community" (Butler 1995, 140). However, we need to ask how we should understand and cultivate such virtues and the intersubjectivity on which they depend, when we are always looking from the transcendental site of effects. Without an account of how these ideals emerge from the history of effects, they seem to simply drop from the sky, as does the subjectivity of a critic who is not ensnared in the same way as her predecessors.[34]

Benhabib mounts two criticisms of Butler's deconstructive position, one empirical, which is grounded in social science, and the other normative, which is grounded in philosophy. To the first issue, she writes that "some form of human agency . . . is crucial to make empirical sense of processes of psycho-sexual development and maturation" (Benhabib 1995, 110). In other words, "Can the theory account for the capacities of agency and resignification it wants to attribute to individuals?" (111). With truth in the hands of social science, philosophy is now only about working on the proofs of universals: "A certain ordering of normative priorities and a clarification of those principles in the name of which one speaks is unavoidable" (27).[35] Benhabib brings these criticisms together when she says to Butler and Joan Scott, "Women who negotiate and resist power do not exist; the only struggles in history are between competing paradigms of discourses, power/knowledge complexes" (114).[36] For Benhabib, this is ultimately a moral question rather than a question about epistemology or ontology: "Should we approach history to retrieve from it the victims' memories, lost struggles and unsuccessful resistances, or should we approach history to retrieve from it the monotonous succession of infinite 'power/knowledge' complexes that constitute selves?" (114). Here we see how she conflates a historical question over the force of language and institutions into a question of the morality of memory.

How we remember the lives of women is not determined by a historical reading of the causal efficacy of their actions. This stark opposition

between agents and constructs blocks out a more perspicuous phrasing of the question of how to read history that both Benhabib and Butler avoid, but that Gadamer brings to the surface.[37] Should we read the languages that constituted the subjects in question as enabling or damaging forces (or both), and to what extent are our current languages continuous or discontinuous with them? We must make an interpretive judgment about whether we want to write a narrative that hermeneutically retrieves, or a genealogy that helps us resist and escape. Both Benhabib and Butler and Scott stay away from a hermeneutic understanding of language, Benhabib for the sake of formal dialogue of legitimacy and Butler and Scott for the sake of epistemological commitment to the sociological and historical conditions of subjectivity.

This problem points to a larger issue in Butler's overall project. There is a limit to how far we can read our predecessors and contemporaries as "dupes" of processes that they do not understand but that are available to the critic armed with a theory and a therapeutic interest. We have to be able to account for our own ability to escape and for the values that drive this effort. This phrasing of the performative contradiction is historical—i.e., Gadamerian—not Kantian, as Benhabib's and Habermas's is. Butler's problematic offers no way to discriminate among languages that empower and those that do damage, for this would require more guidance than is available from reference to a transcendental generator of liberty through effects. This problem is nicely dramatized in the following statement by Butler: "If performativity is construed as that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration, how are we to understand the limits of such production, the constraints under which such production occurs?" (Butler 1993, 20). "Effects" has the anti-hermeneutic dimension that characterizes language divested of its axiological character. This useful moment of distanciation must be appropriated by the language of a "we," and Butler puts this hermeneutic vocabulary in her sentence—"we" and "understand"—however, she never says how she makes the move from "performativity" and "production" to this "we."

Moreover, this stance is vulnerable to the critique Gadamer makes of social scientific explanation—that it does not listen to languages of the past. The ear for otherness is tone deaf toward most languages. To be sure, a deconstructive approach can be open to otherness in a way that is left out by conceptual and humanistic categories such as voice and dialogue. But there is also a loss in trying to escape all humanist vestiges through

a vocabulary of "effects," which divests these languages of their appeal and the dialogical relationship we can establish with them. "Historical consciousness knows about the otherness of the other, about the past in its otherness, just as the understanding of the thou knows the Thou as a person" (Gadamer 1994, 360). Butler's recourse to a third-person transcendental perspective reproduces the reflective elevation of the philosophical observer outside a dialogical perspective on experience, by virtue of his or her access to a theoretical model. "A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond" (360). It is this kind of philosophical hubris that Gadamer's own transcendental arguments for tradition are designed to check: "We are concerned to conceive of a reality that limits and exceeds the omnipotence of reflection" (342). Of course, the holistic language of hermeneutics—"dialogue," "tradition," "self-understanding," and "narrative"—can be broken down into alternative units of analysis that open and redescribe the phenomenological vocabularies of individual and collective actors. This was always the claim of social explanations against "subjectivism." However, to set up an absolute break with these understandings, even if through the auspices of a transcendental argument rather than a theoretical explanation, is a logical, ethical, and political mistake.[38]

Is it indeed empowering to have no way of orienting ourselves or of accounting for our linguistic capacities? Does it make much sense to speak of Rosa Parks's agency only through the third-person language of "effects" (Butler 1997a, 147), and to avoid discussing the resources of the traditions outlined by Guy-Sheftall's book on the history of African American feminist writings? Moreover, Butler's philosophy of language does not help us understand the appeal of Rosa Parks's story, its claim on us.[39] By refusing to move to a hermeneutic vocabulary in which subjects appropriate the "effects" of historicity, she cannot account for women's achievement and action, or for the way in which texts move us to political change.[40]

A similar problem arises in Butler's discussion of trauma. Trauma opens a dimension of historicity that is not available in Gadamer. As Cathy Caruth explains, trauma is not an experience at all, but a skip in experience, in which the subject must "check out" in order to survive.[41] Traumatized persons, says Caruth, "become the symptom of history they cannot entirely possess" (Caruth 1995, 5). However, Butler draws on this theory only to extend the distance between the violent construction of

subjectivity and our self-understandings. "Social trauma takes the form, not of a structure that repeats mechanically, but rather of an ongoing subjugation, the restaging of injury through signs that both occlude and reenact the scene" (Butler 1997a, 36). True enough, but now the task is to understand how the effects of traumas are to be ameliorated or "worked through" by witnessing, in which the intersubjective connection and the particulars of representation are crucial. Butler poses this question precisely: "The responsibility of the speaker does not consist of remaking language ex nihilo, but rather of negotiating the legacies of usage that constrain and enable that speaker's speech" (27). However, she never addresses the question of how we make political judgments about historical inheritance, preferring to speak only of the "prior," transcendental condition of all languages through such phrases as "citationality."[42]

We are now ready for an example of how Gadamer's hermeneutics can help advance this debate. I have selected Susan Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers" because it offers a phenomenology of interpretation in a straightforward, "gossipy" language that calls into question the boundaries of art and everyday speech. Moreover, it foregrounds the way Gadamer's understanding of language can bring literature and philosophy together in a productive and speculative way so that truth is not handed over to social science, as Benhabib is too quick to do. Moreover, this story will permit us to address two familiar objections to Gadamer's work—that his idea of tradition is unitary and exclusive, and that it ignores power.[43]

The tale begins when Mrs. Hale is called from her work in the kitchen to join her husband, Mr. Peters (the sheriff), and his wife. Mrs. Hale, the center of focalization for the third-person narrative, learns that Mr. Wright, the husband of an old friend, has been killed. The sheriff suspects Mrs. Hale's friend Minnie has killed her husband. The group proceeds to the Wrights' home, where it splits up. The men go out to the barn to look for evidence that can establish a motive for Minnie, while the women wait in the kitchen. While sitting there, they encounter the "text" of Minnie's life—the dirty towels, the mishandled stitching on her quilt, the act of violence of which she is suspected, and so on. That is, the dominant tradition that the women bring to Minnie's house, a tradition that they share with their husbands, forms preunderstandings that do not help them reconstitute the self-understanding of the text. The men have called Minnie "mad," and the women at this point can articulate no other reading, even though they sense that more is at stake here for them.

Slowly the women start to put together an explanation of the strangeness of Minnie's text—the systematic psychological torture to which her husband subjected her, a torture that culminated in the strangulation of Minnie's double, her pet bird. The process of coming to this explanation forces them to transform their self-understandings (the texts of their own lives and indeed the entire culture of the time). Minnie's text asks them disturbing questions, not just the other way around. To understand this text means that they can no longer remain who they are. This is the risk and promise of linguistic vulnerability. They discover that Minnie's husband was not just "a cruel man," but also a typical one and that Minnie's response differs only in degree, not in kind, from the ones they have had but repressed. The story's off-stage narrator shows their complex hermeneutic interaction with the text—sometimes it grabs them and sometimes they push it away—that is rarely made explicit in their consciousness or in dialogue. The women are not exchanging claims in discursive dialogue, but experiencing a rupture in the very medium that constitutes them. This medium that Glaspell displays finds no place in either Benhabib's or Butler's understandings of language. The women of the story do not "enlarge their mentality," and they do not suddenly find themselves downstream from a history of effects. The context of their reading—their moments of isolation interrupted by their husbands' condescending remarks about the triviality of women's occupations—helps foster their transformative reading. The women recognize that the values and textures of their own lives are neither read nor recognized by their husbands, and that the forces that drove Minnie mad operate around and within them as well. However, this is not just a liberal drama of equality. The women come to understand the distinctiveness of their tradition, a tradition that goes unread by the men and the tradition that dominates their culture. The women do not simply take Minnie's point of view; they discover the narrow social space in which their living has been channeled and the anger that they have been socialized to ignore. The dominant tradition in which they have lived, which has nourished them into the particular cultural shapes they now inhabit, suddenly appears as narrow and oppressive as well. Gender and power make the ontology of their being in language something far different from Gadamer's play, but it is an ontological relationship nonetheless.

Ambivalent about the knowledge that their reading is bringing about, they alternatively leap at it and then hide from it. The boundaries of their selves have been unraveled as Minnie's text not only speaks to them

but for them: "It was as if something within her not herself had spoken, and it found in Mrs. Peters something that she did not know as herself" (Glaspell 1918, 272). When Mrs. Peters discovers the strangled bird, she does not just solve a detective's riddle but reworks the fabric of her memory and identity. As she recalls and reinscribes the story of what a boy with a hatchet had done to her cat many years ago, she gets back the feeling of that past moment. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters arrive at an explanation not by detaching themselves, but by engaging their personal feelings and the particularities of their individual lives. Minnie's text forces them to see themselves and their husbands in a way that requires a new language, a language that draws on the particular ways that the women have of understanding.[44] Unlike Minnie, they are able to create a way of speaking that unites them with each other and separates them from the men. They choose to hide the bird (conceal evidence) and betray their husbands. The women do work in a distinctive holistic and intersubjective way, as Carol Gilligan notes.[45] However, what is crucial in the story is not the "different voice" they bring to the house, but the one that emerges during the course of the story. Simply to valorize their "care" overlooks the forces of domination in the linguistic drama of their transformation, and attributes to them an idealized agency that Butler and Scott rightly criticize.[46]

These women are not asserting their autonomy over and above their linguistic embedding. Reading through that conception of agency, we would miss where the action is. At the same time, to read the story in terms of movements of discourse does not account for their achievements, which are their newfound capacity to recognize Minnie and each other and their capacity to reinterpret their lives. We see a linguistic phenomenology that can display both the forces of domination and the forces of change at work in the women and their situation. Such a phenomenology cannot limit itself to the boundaries of consciousness, nor can it dismiss experience as merely superficial in order to locate historical movements only in discursive shifts inaccessible to participants. Rather, their achievement is captured better by Gadamer's idea of historical consciousness: "Historical consciousness no longer simply applies its own criteria of understanding to the tradition in which it is situated, nor does it naively assimilate tradition and simply carry it on. Rather, it adopts a reflective posture toward both itself and the tradition in which it is situated. It understands itself in terms of its own history. Historical consciousness is a mode of self-knowledge" (Gadamer 1994, 235).

My reading of this story is designed to show how hermeneutic phenomenology has an indispensable place in contemporary feminist philosophy. Although Gadamer's ideas of tradition and dialogue need serious revision, the attempts by Critical Theory and poststructuralism to set up problematics against a hermeneutic understanding of our being-in-language have impoverished the conceptions of interpretive political judgment available to us. Benhabib's moral certainties cannot rise above their linguistic historicity. Butler's explorations of the limits of the sayable may expose the inconsistencies and inequalities of our linguistic inheritance; however, her work leaves us no way of choosing how to live through our languages instead of simply against them. Here we see where Gadamer can mediate the dispute between Benhabib and Butler, between the separation of individual agency and language and the poststructuralist reading of linguistic agency without persons. The need to account for power and rationality cannot lead us to ignore this kind of linguistic embodiment. Hermeneutics can serve as a mediator to the ontological dogmatism of its competitors, for understanding has a priority over genealogy in the same way that it does over explanation. Any theory of subjectivity and intersubjectivity must make holistic assumptions about what subjects are embedded in, and Benhabib, Butler, and Gadamer all give different and overly grand answers. The ontological medium of women's being-in-language does not have a monolithic answer in which an antihermeneutic ontology of power or hermeneutic ontology of tradition determines subjectivity. An interpretive philosophy needs to be ontologically flexible enough to have a place for the complex history of women's internal and external oppression, for women's achievements, for the multiplicity of their languages, and for their revisions. An interpreter must make a Gadamerian move that Benhabib's Kantianism and Butler's transcendental linguistic generator prevent. She must show how she closes the hermeneutic circle, placing herself in the linguistic lineage that she wants to retrieve and against the languages that she wants to critique.

Notes

1. Two collections give good representation of the alternatives, Butler and Scott, eds. (1992), *Feminists Theorize the Political* and Benhabib, ed. (1996), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.*

2. Later in the chapter, I will address other concerns of feminist political philosophy and give the details of Benhabib's and Butler's problematics.

3. Habermas goes so far as to tie a universal theory of intuition to communicative presuppositions: "There is a universal core of moral intuition in all times and all societies and this is because there are 'unavoidable presuppositions of communicative activity'" (Habermas 1986, 206).

4. Benhabib says, "I am still enough of a Hegelian to maintain . . . that such reciprocal recognition of one another's rights to moral personality is a result of a world-historical process that involves struggle, battle, and resistance, as well as defeat, carried out by social classes, genders, groups, and nations" (Benhabib 1996, 79).

5. See Benhabib's excellent discussion of this problem in chap. 3 of her *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*.

6. "As distinguished from certain kinds of Kantianism, I would like to acknowledge the historical and sociological specificity of the project of democracy while, against ethnocentric liberalism, I would like to insist that practical rationality embodied in democratic institutions has a culture-transcending validity claim" (Benhabib 1996, 69).

7. See Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Benhabib is critical of other dimensions of Arendt's thought but not of her philosophy of narrative and language.

8. In brief, Gadamer and MacIntyre maintain that we always already inhabit narrative— "stories are lived before they are told," (MacIntyre 1984, 212)—whereas Arendt makes language secondary to space of appearances: "Was it not precisely the discovery of a discrepancy between words, the medium in which we think, and the world of appearances, the medium in which we live, that led to philosophy and metaphysics in the first place?" (Arendt 1978, I, 8). Because she wants to preserve the priority of the world over language, she reverses philosophy's typical unmasking operation, so that everyday self-understanding unmasks the thinking self, which is "unaware of it own withdrawal from the common world of appearances" (Arendt 1978, I, 87). Benhabib cites MacIntyre in *Hannah Arendt: The Reluctant Modern* (96), as if this view were compatible with Arendt's and her own. I discuss these narrative issues at length in "Arendt versus Ellison on Little Rock: The Role of Language in Political Judgment."

9. Because Arendt accepts the epistemological tradition of philosophy that locates truth outside language, "she must," as Albrecht Wellmer says, "locate the human world, that is, the common world of men opened up by speech, the world of politics and poetry, of thinking and judging, beyond or above the sphere of cognition" (Wellmer 1996, 42).

10. "Since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality" (Kant 1987, 54).

11. Bakhtin says this nicely when he tells us that literature "reveals not only the reality of a given language but also, as it were, its potential, its ideal limits and its total meaning conceived as a whole, its truth together with its limitations" (Bakhtin 1981, 356).

12. Habermas performs the same trick with his idea of lifeworld: "As a resource from which interactive participants support utterances capable of reaching consensus, the lifeworld constitutes an equivalent for what the philosophy of the subject had ascribed to consciousness in general as synthetic accomplishments. . . . [C]oncrete forms of life replace transcendental consciousness in its function of creating unity" (Habermas 1987a, 326).

13. She claims that this approach to the history of philosophy follows Walter Benjamin (Benhabib 1992, 239). Benjamin and Arendt shared a horror of Hegel's philosophy of history, and, in Benhabib's view, "her response was the same as [his]: "to break the chain of narrative continuity . . . to stress fragmentariness, historical dead ends, failures, and ruptures" (1996a, 88).

14. Joan Scott's *Gender and History* is the locus classicus for the critique of this view: "Feminist history then becomes not the recounting of great deeds performed by women but the exposure of the often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies. With this approach women's history critically confronts the

politics of existing history and inevitably begins the rewriting of history" (Scott 1986, 27). I return to Scott later.

15. In "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction," Gadamer says, "When I speak of tradition and conversation with tradition, I am in no way putting forward a collective subject" (Gadamer 1989, 111).

16. See Charles Taylor's Gadamerian idea of articulation: "to transfer what has sunk to the level of organizing principle for present practices and hence beyond examination into a view for which there can be reasons either for or against." Like Gadamer, Taylor insists that such a project asks us to "undo forgetting" (Taylor 1984, 28).

17. The same misunderstanding informs the Habermasian critique of so-called "communitarians," such as Taylor. Taylor's critique is not advocating that we belong to communities but, like Gadamer, offering an ontological portrait of our being in language and history. This portrait criticizes the procedural portrait of language and subjectivity as a distorted and impoverished form of reasoning.

18. Taylor gives a Gadamerian critique of proceduralist accounts on the issue of the right and the good in "The Motivation Behind the Proceduralist Ethics." "The procedural theory is an illusion because it rests upon a substantive vision of the good" (Taylor 1993, 358).

19. Michael Sandel says this well in his critique of Rawls: "As the priority of justice arose from the need to distinguish the standard of appraisal from the society being appraised, the priority of the self arises from the parallel need to distinguish the subject from its situation" (Sandel 1982, 20).

20. Setting up presuppositions of communication as ahistorical noumena, rather than as historicized Gadamerian traditions, makes easy pickings for Butler, who celebrates the oppressed for contradicting the historical meaning of universality. "Subjects who have been excluded from enfranchisement by existing conventions governing the exclusionary definition of the universal seize the language of enfranchisement and set into motion a 'performative contradiction,' claiming to be covered by that universal, thereby exposing the contradictory character of previous conventional formulations of the universal" (Butler 1997a, 89).

21. See Linda Alcoff's discussion of the tension in feminist theory between third-person constructivist stances toward gender (e.g., Butler and Joan Scott) and those who retrieve certain practices from the patriarchal hegemony (Alcoff 1988). I develop my own typology, in chap.4, "Feminist Theories: Beyond Essentialism and Constructivism," in *Critical Confrontations* (Steele 1997a). For specific use of Gadamer in feminist theory, see Henderson 1990.

22. See especially the sections entitled, "On the History of the Word Erlebnis," "The Concept of Erlebnis," and "Critique of the Abstraction Inherent in Aesthetic Consciousness." I will focus here on Gadamer's reading of Dilthey, who gave the term its first important modern definition. A fuller account would have to look at Gadamer's reading of Husserl and Heidegger. See Risser 1997.

23. Many critics have taken up Gadamer's challenge to aesthetic autonomy. One of the most important is Paul Lauter's *Canons and Contexts*, where he shows how the institution of literary criticism invoked the separation of the aesthetic from the political and the referential in order to denigrate and exclude African American literature for its engagement.

24. In Hegel's system, art is a lower form of thought than philosophy, which realizes itself in the concept. Philosophical "thinking evaporates the form of reality into the form of the pure concept" (Hegel 1976, II, 976). See Gadamer's complex critique and retrieval of Hegel in *Hegel's Dialectic* (1976) and throughout *Truth and Method*.

25. See Kathleen Wright (1986) for a good analysis of the speculative dimension of Gadamer's understanding of language. In his discussion of literature (in particular Gadamer 1994), however, Gadamer ignores prose and the novel, focusing on poetry, as does Heidegger. Such a focus is unfortunate since it helps reinforce the distance between literature and everyday life, making literature a site for extraordinary experience.

26. Rorty says, "When philosophy has finished showing that everything is a social construct, it does not help us decide which social constructs to retain and which to replace," in "Feminism,

Ideology and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist Critique," *Hypatia* 8 (1991, 96). Gadamer offers a very different understanding of the "linguistic turn."

27. I will focus on *Excitable Speech* and Butler's contribution to *Feminist Contestations: A Philosophical Exchange,* in which she debates with Benhabib, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser.

28. In *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of 'Sex,'* Butler develops the "constitutive outside" in psychoanalytic terms as the "degraded object" of same sex desire, which is denounced and internalized (Butler 1993, 3). Heterosexuality is thus melancholic since it cannot witness and mourn the loss of this desire.

29. Foucault says that hermeneutics seeks "the re-appropriation through the manifest meaning of discourse of another meaning at once secondary and primary that is more hidden but also more fundamental" (Foucault 1970, 373).

30. Like Derrida, Butler thinks that the hermeneutic idea of "understanding" is too grandiose and opts for a minimalist idea of sense. "One of the things SEC [his essay "Signature Context Event"] was driving at is that the minimal making sense of something (its conformity to the code, grammaticality, etc.) is incommensurate with the adequate understanding of intended meaning" (Derrida 1977, 203).

31. I discuss the Derrida/Searle debate in the context of hermeneutics in Steele (1997a, 47–57).

32. See Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), in which he discusses how the African American tradition of "signifying" reworks the Master's language. Gates vacillates between a Derridean characterization of signifying and a hermeneutic one that speaks of tradition. I chart this contradiction and its significance in Steele (1996).

33. In the Introduction to *The Psychic Life of Power,* Butler speaks of the tensions between two temporal modalities of subjection, between the transcendental condition and the self-understanding: "First, as what is for the subject always prior, outside of itself and operative from the start; second as the willed effect of the subject" (14).

34. This same problem of interpretive judgment undermines Joan Scott's deconstructive "history" of feminism in France in *Only Paradoxes To Offer* (1996). Scott's transcendental generator is a formal paradox produced by the demands of equality and difference. This paradox is then reinscribed by the particular historical languages employed through time: "To the extent that feminism acted for 'women,' feminism produced the sexual difference it sought to eliminate. This paradox—the need both to accept and to refuse 'sexual difference'—was the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement through its long history." Although "the terms of her [the subject of feminism] representation shifted" (14), they nonetheless illustrate a nontranscendable paradox: "Feminism is not a reaction to republicanism, but one of its effects, produced by contradictory assertions about the universal human rights of individuals, on the one hand, and exclusions attributed to 'sexual difference,' on the other. Feminist agency is constituted by this paradox" (168).

35. Habermas also accepts this impoverished role for philosophy in "Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter," in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (1987).

36. Benhabib refers here to a debate between Joan Scott and Linda Gordon over women's agency in *Signs* 15 (1990): 848–52. Although the debate began as a question over the specifics raised by Gordon's attribution of agency to the women in her book *Heroes of Their Own Lives,* the argument quickly escalated into a question of what problematic should be used to read women's lives throughout history. Scott's 1996 book is a sequel to this argument.

37. Scott also calls up the strawperson of "liberal agency" in order to justify her problematic: "Instead of assuming that agency follows from an innate human will, I want to understand feminism in terms of the discursive processes—the epistemologies, institutions, and practices—that produce political subjects, that make agency . . . possible" (Scott 1996, 15). She does exactly the same thing in her well-known argument for a constructivist view of "experience." She calls up the specter of a naïve "appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as originary point of explanation" (in "Evidence of Experience," (Scott 1991, 777). But the rejection of "willful agency" and "experience

as evidentiary bedrock" in no way entails her description. The key question is the one she leaves out: how should we characterize these languages? As I will show, the answer is a matter of interpretive judgment, not determined by either a constructivist or hermeneutic position on language.

38. Gadamer is making a contribution to interpretive history, not causal history. To those who say that a causal account completely invalidates an idealistic account—i.e., contingency and power rather than ideas drive history so that historical actors are deeply deceived—Gadamer could answer that history is messy and that ideas are neither decisive nor irrelevant. Butler and Scott are not making an empirical, causal claim, but a transcendental claim for an alternative problematic.

39. In speaking of the effect of reading Rilke, Gadamer says, "Thou must alter thy life!" (Gadamer 1977, 104). That said, I would join Gadamer's critics who point out that his analysis focuses on how the changes that are brought about through dialogue produce unity rather than difference. Thus, "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is . . . being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer 1994, 379).

40. Scott says of the women she studies, "I do not think of these women as exemplary heroines. Instead I think of them as sites—historical locations and markers—where crucial political and cultural contests are enacted and can be examined in some detail. To figure a person—in this case, a woman—as place or location is not to deny her humanity; it is rather to recognize the many factors that constitute her agency, the complex and multiple ways in which she is constructed as a historical actor" (Scott 1996, 16). Fair enough. But the language through which we characterize these "locations" is not a positivistic one but one imbued with the hopes and ideals of the speaker.

41. Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: Trauma and Experience" (Caruth 1995). See also Saul Friedlander's *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe* (1993).

42. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* offers an excellent example of trauma and witnessing, both within the novel—e.g., Sethe and Paul D.—and between the text and reader. Morrison retells the slave narrative because of the failure of American society to witness the trauma of slavery. Interestingly, Butler discusses Morrison in *Excitable Speech* only to illustrate the thesis that the subject does not control language, and not for the intersubjective achievements in Morrison's work.

43. See Pascal Michon's (2000) powerful critique of Gadamer's reductive, Heideggerian understanding of language for the way it drives out the linguistic diversity in the history of literature and public life. (He insists, for instance, that the proper French translation of "Sprache" is "langue," not "langage" or "discours.") I discovered Michon's study too late to integrate it into my exposition, but the challenge his work might pose to my reading of Glaspell is that this reading shows how we need to leave Gadamer behind rather than appropriate him.

44. See Lorraine Code's discussion of the story in *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*, 145–49. "Glaspell's story offers a cameo portrait of knowledge production" (147).

45. See Gilligan's discussion of the story in "Moral Orientation and Moral Development," in *Women and Moral Theory* (1987).

46. I discuss Gilligan's reading of this story at length in *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression* (1997b, 133–39).

References

Alcoff, Linda. 1988. "Poststructuralism and Cultural Feminism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13: 4–36.

Arendt, Hannah. 1958. *Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1977. *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin.

———. 1978. *Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

———. 1982. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Benhabib, Seyla. 1986. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1992. *Situating The Self*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1995. "Subjectivity, Historiography, and Politics." In *Feminist Contestations: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1996a. *Hannah Arendt: The Reluctant Modern*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

———. 1996b. "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Benhabib, Seyla, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, eds. 1995. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge.

———. 1995. "Contingent Foundations." In *Feminist Contestations: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1997a. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.

———. 1997b. *The Psychic Life of Power*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith, and Joan Scott, eds. 1992. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge.

Caruth, Cathy. 1995. "Introduction: Trauma and Experience." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Code, Lorraine. 1995. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations*. New York: Routledge

Derrida, Jacques. 1977. "Limited Inc." *Glyph* 2: 162–254.

Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Order of Things*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.

———. 1984. "What Is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon.

Friedlander, Saul. 1993. *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1976. *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1985. *Philosophical Apprenticeships*. Trans. Robert Sullivan. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1977. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. David Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1987. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." In *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*, ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

———. 1989. "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1994. *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essays in German Literary Theory*. Trans. Robert Paslick. Albany: State University of New York Press.

———. 1995. *Truth and Method*. 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Gates, Henry Louis. 1988. *The Signifying Monkey*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gilligan, Carol. 1987. "Moral Orientation and Moral Development." In *Women and Moral Theory,* ed. Eva Kittay and Diane Meyers. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield.

Glaspell, Susan. 1918. "A Jury of Her Peers." In *Best Stories of 1917*. Boston: Small, Maynard.

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly. 1995. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*. New York: The New Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1986. *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews*. Ed. Peter Dews. New York: Verso.

———. 1987a. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1987b. "Philosophy as Stand-In Interpreter." In *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT.

———. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1996a. *Between Facts and Norms*. Trans. William Rehg. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

———. 1996b. "Three Normative Models of Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hegel, Georg W. F. 1976. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Henderson, Mae. 1990. "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition." In *Reading Black, Reading Feminist,* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. New York: Meridian.

Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. Werner Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Lauter, Paul. 1991. *Canons and Contexts*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *After Virtue*. 2d ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

McCarthy, Thomas. 1994. *Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Michon, Pascal. 2000. *Poétique d'une anti-anthropologie: L'herméneutique de Gadamer*. Paris: Vrin.

Rich, Adrienne. 1979. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*. New York: Norton.

Risser, James. 1997. *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rorty, Richard. 1993. "Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist Critique." *Hypatia* 8: 96–103.

Sandel, Michael. 1982. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schott, Robin. 1991. "Whose Home is It Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics,* ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge.

Scott, Joan. 1986. *Gender and History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 1991. "Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17: 773–97.

———. 1996. *Only Paradoxes To Offer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Showalter, Elaine. 1977. *A Literature of Their Own*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Steele, Meili. 1996. "Meta-Theory and the Subject of Democracy in the Work of Ralph Ellison." *New Literary History* 27: 326–42.

———. 1997a. "Feminist Theories: Beyond Essentialism and Constructivism." In *Critical Confrontations: Literary Theories in Dialogue*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

———. 1997b. *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. Forthcoming. "Arendt versus Ellison on Little Rock: The Role of Language in Political Judgment." *Constellations: A Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*.

Taylor, Charles. 1984. "Philosophy and Its History." In *Philosophy in History*, ed. Richard Rorty et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1993. "The Motivation Behind a Procedural Ethics." In *Kant and Political Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Wellmer, Albrecht. 1996. "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: The Unwritten Doctrine of Reason." In *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Wright, Kathleen. 1986. "Gadamer and the Speculative Structure of Language." In *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York Press.

15

Three Applications of Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Philosophy-Faith-Feminism

Laura Duhan Kaplan

A colleague invited me to write an essay about some of the difficulties I face in trying to reconcile my philosophy, my feminism, and my faith. After two botched attempts to outline such an essay, I came to realize that I had nothing to say on the topic because I have no difficulties reconciling philosophy, feminism, and faith. Instead, all three pursuits converge in my understanding of tradition. This understanding is not an intellectual achievement, but a way of life. It is difficult for me to rip this way of life far enough out of its context to articulate it in words. But perhaps I do not have to, as the words of other writers can serve me well here.

For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer has written that "understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused" (Gadamer 1995, 258). For Gadamer, interpretation is not adequately described by the phenomenological hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and others, as an encounter between a human subject and a text or social fact. More is at stake than simply these two reasonably open

systems, both of which are enriched by one another. In addition, an interpreter brings to every act of interpretation an entire tradition of language, culture, and belief. The tradition is tested even as it is applied; the tradition itself is open to new understandings. An interpreter reconstitutes the very tools she brings to her task. As she places herself within the tradition, she fuses the inherited past with the challenging present that calls out for understanding.

In my philosophy, my faith, and my feminism, I practice understanding as Gadamer has described it. I place myself within a tradition, and then continuously fuse past and present as I negotiate a modern life within traditional horizons.

Philosophy

In his book *The Poetics of Space,* philosopher Gaston Bachelard tells readers that philosophers have expended a great deal of energy crafting a phenomenology of the mind, but very little energy crafting a phenomenology of the soul. Let me intertwine my words with Bachelard's as I try both to understand and explain what he means. In the phenomenological and analytic traditions alike, philosophers generating theories of knowledge and philosophies of mind have focused on the mind's active agency. Analytic philosophers have described the processes by which the mind molds the raw data of perception into a web of concepts. Phenomenologists have observed the ways the mind reaches out into the world to prejudice even our raw perceptions of it. But little attention has been paid to the moments in which the world itself seems to reach out and touch a human psyche. In these moments, the world arrests and transfixes our attention; we say our senses have been "transported"; some artists and writers speak of "the aesthetic moment." Bachelard calls such a moment a "poetic moment," and says the study of poetic moments is what he means by a "phenomenology of the soul" (Bachelard 1994, xv–xxxix). A poetic moment, according to Bachelard, burns an image into a person's mind, and this image becomes a template for future images, understandings, and interpretations. But the poetic moment itself, the moment that seizes the soul, is not interpreted. Only later does the mind engage in interpretation, as a person attempts to reconstruct or analyze the moment through the filter of words and concepts.

Philosophy, for me, begins in poetic moments, as Bachelard describes them. A poetic moment enwraps me in a new and surprising vision. Even after the intensity of the moment fades, I still find myself under its sway, as I come to see more aspects of life through the new lens. Self-conscious attempts to widen or refocus the lens, as well as attempts to articulate the vision in public language are, for me, the main activities of philosophy. Spinning and sorting out the implications of such a new vision slide into the logical activity that many professional philosophers identify as "philosophizing," i.e., the testing of propositions about ethics, politics, or metaphysics through argument and counterargument.

But perhaps I have overestimated the importance of my own moments of original vision. Perhaps philosophy, for me, does not really begin in these poetic moments. Perhaps I begin in a much more conventional way, with the discipline. Perhaps even the poetic moments that seize me are shaped by a discipline much larger than my own life encounters, a discipline powerful enough to have maintained an identity across twenty-five hundred years. Many of classical philosophy's great systematic treatises are attempts to articulate a vision of the world, as Stephen Pepper argues in *World Hypotheses*. These visions, my experience as both a visionary and a reader of philosophy tells me, originate in a poetic moment. For example, Baruch Spinoza gives away the moment of insight that sparked his *Ethics* in that treatise's Appendix. (Of course, I read the *Ethics* from the end to the beginning, as I read all books.) How stupid, Spinoza notes, people seem when they think the universe organizes itself around them when, in reality, the universe does not care (Spinoza 1998, 109–115). And from this insight Spinoza develops his own twist on the philosophical style of the day, writing pages of elegant ontological argument, describing a God who is seamlessly infinite, identical with the very laws of nature. This God, complete and self-sufficient in every way, does not have the capacity to respond to selfish human prayers.

I believe I have learned much about the activity of looking for poetic moments from the philosophical tradition. I may have learned about this activity through a straightforward reading of the few philosophical texts, such as Spinoza's *Ethics,* that acknowledge it as part of the philosophical process. Or perhaps the activity of looking for poetic moments is itself part of my activity of reading. Most philosophical texts are doubly distant from me as a reader. They are written abstractly, and often about concerns unfamiliar to me. I myself must supply a living context if I am to "bridge the personal or historic distance between minds," as I some-

times define hermeneutic (i.e., interpretive) activity. The poetic moment is that bridge, the spark that illuminates a reading, the moment in which I rearrange the familiar under the description the text offers. The poetic moments that seize me, or that I seize upon and take seriously, are often those that illuminate the very text I am reading. In this way, the philosophical tradition directs me to attend to specific poetic moments.

I find myself now in a hermeneutic circle. I am making an original interpretation of the philosophical tradition, yet the terms of my interpretation are drawn from tradition. As Gadamer puts it, "past and present are constantly fused" as I try to find a place for myself within the tradition. I find myself in the same hermeneutic circle when I think of my faith, and of my feminism.

Faith

I am a Jew. I know no other life. "The soul of every living thing shall bless your name, Eternal One, our God, the spirit of all flesh shall glorify . . . you," says the Sabbath morning prayer, *Nishmat Kol Hay*. One Sabbath morning, swayed by the magic of the poetry and my own sensation of the divine presence, I accidentally misread it. "Every living thing shall bless you in its soul, its spirit, and all its flesh," I sang. On that morning, every corner of my body, from my toes to my fingertips, trembled with the divine presence. That sense of fusion with something much greater than myself is also my sensation of being Jewish. Oh, I can speak rationally about why the religion of Judaism appeals to me. Judaism emphasizes works over faith, prescribing a seemingly endless list of ethical rules designed to improve community life. It offers a rich tradition of song, story, and dance as modes of worship of a God who is too infinite to be pinned down in any single image. And it speaks of a long and complex history that indicates familiarity with challenges and changes to orthodoxy. But it is not Judaism's rational advantages that move me. It is, instead, the sense of fusion.

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement in Judaism, described Judaism as a civilization, with its own languages, literature, history, ethics, religion. I was raised within this civilization. I speak its languages, read its literature, know its history, practice its ethics, worship within its religion. Yet it would be wrong for me to say that I

live within the tradition. More accurately, the tradition lives within me. Sometimes I think I am driven by a blind imperative to preserve Jewish tradition at all costs. Perhaps this has become an imperative of self-preservation, as my present life is inseparable from the past that shapes it. In Gadamer's words, I have "placed myself within a tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused."

Feminist theologian Judith Plaskow has borrowed terms from phenomenologist Paul Ricoeur to articulate some of the dynamics of this fusion. My term "fusion" implies a seamless integration. But Plaskow sees fusion as an ongoing balancing act. Jews, and in her view particularly feminist Jews, must move between a "hermeneutic of remembrance" and a "hermeneutic of suspicion" (Plaskow 1991, 13–18). The hermeneutic of remembrance honors the past, calling us to be moved by traditional interpretations of Jewish language, literature, history, ethics, and religion. The hermeneutic of suspicion calls us to question these traditional interpretations, measuring them against the imperatives of modern life. If the traditional interpretations are found to be irrelevant or even harmful within the contemporary context, they are to be at least temporarily revised or laid aside. For me, the balancing act Plaskow describes is certainly a feature of living within tradition. In fact, the balancing act is at the core of several contemporary Jewish movements. The Reconstructionist movement, for example, suggests that Judaism has always been syncretistic, that Judaism has continuously recast its basic theological and ethical understandings in terms accessible to Jews of the time. Rather than let this process be haphazard, members of the Reconstructionist movement try self-consciously to understand Judaism in terms of modern notions of spirituality, science, society, and personal identity. The movement calls upon Jews to reinterpret ideas, practices, and rituals in ways that honor contemporary liberal notions of social justice, including respect for individual autonomy and resistance against racism, sexism, and heterosexism. The Jewish Renewal movement, sparked by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, offers a mystical counterpoint to the rationalism of Reconstructionism. The Renewal movement shares the social and ethical values of Reconstructionism, as it seeks to anchor Judaism within the contemporary understanding of spiritual quest. Both the Reconstructionist and Renewal movements recommend that reinterpretation take place in communities *(havurot)* small enough to invite participation and experimentation, but large enough for members to feel they are not alone. I am a member of one such community *(havurah),*

and so I feel I am not alone in the task of fusing past and present within the Jewish tradition.

The balancing act that is at the core of Reconstructionism, Renewal, and feminist Judaism takes place within the context of its practitioners' preexisting passion to find a way to honor tradition. In a sense, an existential fusion of past and present lays the foundation for self-conscious, public attempts to fuse past and present through reconstruction, renewal, or reinterpretation. Because members of these movements are shaped, in large part, by the very tradition they question, what practitioners perceive as new directions will be anchored in traditional meanings. Again I, along with many others, find myself twirling within a hermeneutic circle.

One of the complex movements within this circle involves the reinterpretation of language. As I (we) hold on to ancient metaphors, I (we) also give them new life, allowing our own spiritually potent poetic moments to renew them. A metaphor, according to Max Black's well-known philosophical analysis, consists of two terms, a focus and a frame. The focus is the term being described, and the frame is the descriptor that reflects upon the focus, showing it in a new light. The frame, says Black, carries with it a set of associated meanings, which, through the use of a metaphor, come to be characteristics of the focus (Black 1962, 39–64). My favorite example of such a Jewish metaphor sits squarely within the Sabbath morning prayer service: "The Torah (the Five Books of Moses and all the customs and stories derived from it) is a Tree of Life to all who hold fast to her." No doubt the authors of the prayer saw the Tree as a life-giving organism, providing human beings as well as animals with air, food, and shelter, and the Torah as providing moral, social, theological, aesthetic, and intellectual sustenance. But the image of the tree comes alive in my own poetic moments, placing the focus "the Torah" within quite a different frame, a frame that, through its associations, highlights other dimensions of Jewish tradition.

Trees taught me to write evocative, sensual descriptions of the world around me. My earliest teenage journals include page after page of painstaking descriptions of trees in all their seasonal cycles, from the early spring weeks of their translucent young leaves to the winter months of their brittle grey branches framing bits of sky. Five years later, trees taught me another way to write the world, a way that lifts prosaic objects out of their mundane contexts and takes them soaring, pregnant with metaphorical possibilities. I liked to walk alone at night during those years. One late spring evening, a cedar tree caught my eye as it whirled in a wild dance under the thin night light. Fresh green needles tinged

with blue edges overlapped to form the dancer's hoop skirt, twisting out from her tall straight torso. I understood, I thought, why some peoples worship the gods of nature: here was one dancing before me, infinite in its motion and completely self-sufficient in its beauty. All that summer, tree gods continued to reveal themselves to me. On a long mountain hike I saw birches streamside, their strong, sculpted legs splitting at the hips into branches reaching stalwart to the sky, virile guardians of the river. In my parents' yard I saw a tree with eyes, its knobs and knots all-seeing, all-knowing, judging the world with decades of quiet wisdom.

I draw my interpretation of the tree of life metaphor from my wildest visions of trees. The written Torah, the text of the Five Books of Moses, is the river guardian. His knobs and knots offer stability in a world of short-lived creatures and their social trends. But the oral Torah, all the actions, discussions, stories that Jews trace back to the Torah, is the dancing stream. She whirls and changes with the seasons, with the light, with the perspective of the observer. The written Torah is nourished by this flowing stream of life. He guards the stream, yet changes as it changes. He is virile, capable of growth, yet is young and immature, needing stimulation from the very lives he guards if he is to flourish. This symbiotic relationship again mirrors the hermeneutic circle: tradition lives only insofar as it is interpreted, yet those interpretations are made by people who surrender, at least in part, to the power of that tradition, fusing it with the other aspects of their lives.

Feminism

Definitions of feminism abound. Rosemarie Tong, in her book *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, offers no less than seven categories of feminism. I would like to propose yet another definition: traditional feminism. Traditional feminism is a lived feminism, the continuous act of "placing oneself within a tradition where past and present are constantly fused." Traditional feminism is my daily practice of balancing a hermeneutic of remembrance with a hermeneutic of suspicion, as I try to find a morally and socially acceptable way to inhabit the category "woman."

The work is not so simple, of course, as fusing a progressive, feminist present with the legacy of an oppressive sexist past. The present is not simply progressive: many feminist authors have written about the

deficiencies of gender and racial justice in the present. The past is not simply oppressive. In fact, the past is something of a mystery, as no adequate account of women's history is available. As feminist historians continue to sift through documents, artifacts, and stories, evidence of women's rich public contributions piles ever higher. And alongside it piles evidence that women's contributions gradually disappear from the public record. As I try to understand the past, I am not sure who or what to trust. Should I trust the somewhat fragmented tradition of brave women thinkers, activists, and leaders, a tradition that is mythical in the sense that bits of written and oral history are elaborated through imaginative fiction? Or should I trust the tradition in which women are chaste, homebound, and modest, a tradition that is mythical in the sense that it mis-describes as many women as it accurately describes? Both of these traditions are complicated by overlapping histories of race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality—histories that are themselves marked by vagaries and manipulations. For now, the only tradition of which I am certain is the tradition of struggle between these two competing ideologies of what it means to live as a woman. In every era, the two clash, and "the woman question" is raised anew. To live as a traditional woman *is* to wander between these two, and perhaps many other, conflicting ideologies of woman's nature. It is to fuse one's own ambiguous leaps of fusion with a tradition of ambiguity for women.

Perhaps I can articulate some of the dynamics of these leaps of fusion by referring back to my brief discussion of metaphor. In surveying the different ideologies of women's nature, I sometimes think of the word "woman" as the focus of an infinite number of metaphors. "A woman is strong," we say, and the associations of strength, physical and moral, become part of the concept "woman." "A woman is modest," we say, and the associations of modesty, from avoiding bragging to hiding one's talents, become part of the concept "woman." Each new metaphor flashes into shape within a poetic moment, a moment of strong passion that rearranges the familiar, coloring the past into a new present. Sometimes these moments are tinged with joy; sometimes they are tinged with anger. Sometimes they verify lived truths; sometimes they reveal falsehoods. They can lead me to renew commitments, reconstruct them, and sometimes to reject them.

The starting point for saying something genuinely new is the web of existing meanings. So it is, I propose, with social behavior. Change begins with the enactment of familiar routines. It begins to soar when a poetic

moment reveals the deficiencies of the familiar, and takes concrete shape with self-conscious deliberation about what ought to remain the same and what ought to change. Change means that some familiar meanings should be enhanced at the expense of others. Feminist change works the same way: given the ambiguities of women's history, it appears that feminists are as much renewing ancient meanings as they are rejecting contemporary ones. Even radical change, it seems to me, can sometimes be understood as living within tradition. Once again, I find myself within the hermeneutic circle, as what is conceptualized as resistance to tradition in one sense is recast as affirmation of tradition in another sense.

The hermeneutic circle is not a cause for paralysis. It is, rather, a way of life for social beings whose speech and behavior begin as enactments of routines we see others inhabiting. Initially, we accept the accounts others offer of the meanings of these routines. Later, we may come to question them. Moving with these meanings in order to move beyond them is the task of living within tradition. Ideally, past and present will be fused into a better future. This hope animates my philosophy, my faith, and my feminism, and animates this chapter.

<div align="center">References</div>

Alpert, Rebecca T., and Jacob J. Staub. 1988. *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*. Wyncote, Pa.: The Reconstructionist Press.

Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press.

Black, Max. 1962. *Models and Metaphors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1995. *Truth and Methods*. Trans. Loel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum.

Kaplan, Mordecai. 1985. *Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan*. Ed. Mel Scult and Emanuel Goldsmith. New York: Schocken Books.

Kol Haneshama. 1995. Wyncote, Pa.: The Reconstructionist Press.

Lerner, Michael. 1994. *Jewish Renewal*. New York: Harper.

Pepper, Stephen C. 1961. *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Plaskow, Judith. 1991. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.

Ricoeur, Paul. 1970. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Trans. Denis Savage. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Spinoza, Baruch. 1998. *Ethics*. In *A Spinoza Reader,* ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tong, Rosemarie. 1998. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Wiener, Shohama. 1996. *The Fifth-eighth Century: A Jewish Renewal Sourcebook*. New York: Jason Aronson.
Winkler, Gershon. 1998. *The Way of the Boundary Crosser: An Introduction to Jewish Flexidoxy*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson.

Selected Bibliography

Addelson, Kathryn Pyne. "The Man of Professional Wisdom." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983.

Alcoff, Linda Martín. "Poststructuralism and Cultural Feminism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory." *Signs* 13 (1988): 4–36.

———. "Continental Epistemology." In *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Ernest Sosa and Jonathan Dancy. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

———. *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Alcoff, Linda, and Elizabeth Potter, eds. *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Alpert, Rebecca T., and Jacob J. Staub. *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*. Wyncote, Penna.: The Reconstructionist Press, 1988.

Ambrosio, Francis. "Dawn and Dusk: Gadamer and Heidegger on Truth." *Man and World* 19 (1986): 21–53.

Apel, Karl-Otto. *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

———. *Between Past and Future*. New York: Penguin, 1977.

———. *Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978.

———. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Baier, Dale, and Susan S. Mckinstry, eds. *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness." In *Feminism and Philosophy*, ed. Mary Vetterling-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston, and Jane English. Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield Adams, 1977.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, [1947] 1997.

Belenky, Mary Field, Blyth McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Bellamy, Elizabeth J., and Artemis Leontis. "A Geneaology of Experience: From Epistemology to Politics." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6.1 (1993): 163–84.

Benhabib, Seyla. *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

———. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy

and Feminist Theory." In *Feminism as Critique*, ed. Benhabib and Cornell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

———. *Situating the Self*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

———. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996.

———, ed. *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Benhabib, Seyla, and Drucilla Cornell, eds. *Feminism as Critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser, eds. *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Benjamin, Jessica. "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination." In *The Future of Difference*, ed. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

Bernstein, Richard. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

Betti, Emilio. *Die hermeneutik als allgemeine Methodik der Geisteswissenschaften*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr,1962.

Black, Max. *Models and Metaphors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962.

Blackwell, Albert. *Schleiermacher's Early Philosophy of Life: Determinism, Freedom, and Phantasy*. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982.

Bleicher, Josef. *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy, and Critique*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Bordo, Susan. *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.

———. "Feminism, Postmodernism, and Gender-Scepticism." In *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson. New York: Routledge, 1990.

———. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

———, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.

Bowles, Gloria. "The Uses of Hermeneutics for Feminist Scholarship." *Women's Studies International Forum* 7 (1984): 185–88.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. *Aurora Leigh*. London: Penguin, [1857] 1995.

Bruns, Gerald L. *Hermeneutics, Ancient and Modern*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Buker, Eloise. "Feminist Social Theory and Hermeneutics: An Empowering Dialectic." *Social Epistemology* 4 (1990): 23–39.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

———. *Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. "For a Careful Reading." In *Feminist Contentions*, ed. Seyla Benhabib et al. New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. "Contingent Foundations." In *Feminist Contestations: A Philosophical Exchange*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. *Excitable Speech*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

———. *The Psychic Life of Power*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Butler, Judith, and Joan W. Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Candib, Lucy. "Reconsidering Power in the Clinical Relationship." In *The Empathic Practitioner: Empathy, Gender, and Medicine,* ed. Ellen More and Maureen Milligan. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Canetti, Elias. *The Human Province.* Trans. J. Neugroschell. London: Pan Books, 1986.

Caputo, John. *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

———. "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: A Derridean Critique." In *Dialogue and Deconstructions,* ed. Diana Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Code, Lorraine. *Epistemic Responsibility.* Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987.

———. "Credibility: A Double Standard." In *Feminist Perspectives,* ed. Code, Mullett, and Overall. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

———. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

———. "Feminist Epistemology." In *A Companion to Epistemology,* ed. J. Dancy and E. Sosa. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992.

———. "Taking Subjectivity into Account." In *Feminist Epistemologies,* ed. Alcoff and Potter. New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. " I Know Just How You Feel: Empathy and the Problem of Epistemic Authority." In More and Milligan, *The Empathic Practitioner.* Also, revised and enlarged in *Rhetorical Spaces.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. "Incredulity, Experientialism, and the Politics of Knowledge." In *Rhetorical Spaces.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations.* New York: Routledge, 1995.

———. "What is Natural About Epistemology Naturalized?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1996): 1–22.

Code, Lorraine, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall, eds. *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Coltman, Rod. *The Language of Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Heidegger in Dialogue.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.

Dallmayr, Fred. "Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction,* ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Dallmayr, Fred, and Thomas McCarthy, eds. *Understanding and Social Inquiry.* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

Dalmiya, V., and L. Alcoff. "Are 'Old Wives Tales' Justified?" In *Feminist Epistemologies,* ed. Alcoff and Potter. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Davidson, Donald. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

Derrida, Jacques. *Marges de la philosophie.* Paris: Minuit, 1972.

———. *Of Grammatology.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

———. "Limited Inc." *Glyph* 2 (1977): 162–254.

———. "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The*

Gadamer-Derrida Encounter, ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Diamond, Irene, and Lee Quinby. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance.* Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Dussel, Enrique. "Eurocentrism and Modernity." *boundary 2,* 20/3 (1993): 65–76.

Dworkin, Ronald. *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

Ebert, Teresa. *Ludic Feminism and After.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

Elam, Diane. "Is Feminism the Saving Grace of Hermeneutics?" *Social Epistemology* 5 (1991): 349–60.

Elgin, Catherine. *Considered Judgment.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Ellison, Julie. *Delicate Subjects: Romanticism, Gender, and the Ethics of Understanding.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories of Women and Men.* New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Ferguson, Kathy. *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.

Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schussler. *In Memory of Her.* New York: Crossroads, 1983.

———. "Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation." In *A Reader in Feminist Knowledge,* ed. Sneja Gunew. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Fiumara, Gemma Corradi. *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening.* London: Routledge, 1990.

———. *The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

———. *The Metaphoric Process: Connections between Language and Life.* London: Routledge, 1995.

———. *The Mind's Affective Life: A Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Inquiry.* New York: Routledge, 2001.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1970.

———. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

———. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1977.

———. "What is Enlightenment?" In *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

Freidan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique.* New York: Dell, [1977] 1984.

Freud, Sigmund. "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho analysis and Other Works." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* vol. 22. London: Hogarth Press, 1932–36.

Friedlander, Saul. *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik." In *Hermeneutic und Ideologiekritik,* ed. Karl-Otto Apel. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971.

———. *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies.* Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

———. *Philosophical Hermeneutics.* Trans. and ed. David E. Linge. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.

———. "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection." In Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics.*

———. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." In *Interpretive Social Science,* ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

———. *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato.* Trans. P. Christopher. Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

———. *Reason in the Age of Science.* Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981.

———. "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion." In *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects,* ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

———. *Philosophical Apprenticeships.* Trans. Robert Sullivan. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985.

———. *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy.* Trans. P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

———. "The Problem of Historical Consciousness." In *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look,* ed. Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

———. "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy." In *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* ed. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.

———. "On the Circle of Understanding." In *Hermeneutics versus Science?,* ed. John Connolly and Thomas Keutner. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

———. "*Destruktion* and Deconstruction." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. "Letter to Dallmayr." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. "Text and Interpretation." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. "Reply to Jacques Derrida." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. "Hermeneutics and Logocentrism." In Michelfelder and Palmer, *Dialogue and Deconstruction.*

———. *Truth and Method.* 2d rev. ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1989 and 1995.

———. "Reply to My Critics." In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur,* ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

———. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus.* Trans. Robert M. Wallace. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.

———. *Heidegger's Ways.* Trans. John W. Stanley. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essays in German Literary Theory.* Trans. Robert Paslick. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

———. *The Enigma of Health: The Art of Healing in a Scientific Age.* Trans. Jason Gaiger and Nicholas Walker. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

———. "Reflections on my Philosophical Journey." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

———. "Reply to Robin May Schott." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

———. "Über die politische Incompetenz der Philosophie." [1993] revised version in *Hermeneutische Entwürfe*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebbeck, 2000.

———. *Erziehung ist sich erziehen*. Heidelberg: Kurpfäzischer Verlag, 2000.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

———. "Moral Orientation and Moral Development." In *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Kittay and Diane Meyers. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1987.

Glaspell, Susan. "A Jury of Her Peers." *Best Short Stories of 1917*. Boston: Small, Maynard, 1918.

Grondin, Jean. "Hermeneutics and Relativism." In *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work*, ed. Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

———. "L'hérméneutique comme science rigoureuse selon Emilio Betti (1890–1968)." *Archives de philosophie* 53 (1990): 177–98.

———. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. New York: The New Press, 1995.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970.

———. "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*." In *Understanding and Social Inquiry*, ed. Fred Dallmayr and Tom McCarthy. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977.

———. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981.

———. *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews*. Ed. Peter Dews. New York: Verso, 1986.

———. *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Fredrick Lawrence. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.

———. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Weber Nicholsen. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990.

———. "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality." In *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

———. *Between Facts and Norms*. Trans. William Rehg. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

———. "Three Normative Models of Democracy." In *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

———. *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.

Hahn, Lewis Edwin, ed. *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*. The Library of Living Philosophers, Volume 24. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

Haney, David P. "Aesthetics and Ethics in Gadamer, Levinas, and Romanticism: Problems of Phronesis and Techne." *PMLA* 14:1 (1999): 32–45.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988): 575–99.

———. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Press, 1991.

Harding, Sandra. *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

———. "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?" In *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*, ed. S. Harding. Milton Keynes: Open University Press,1987.

———. *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

———. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is Strong Objectivity?" In *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter. London: Routledge, 1993.

Harding, Sandra, and Merrill Hintikka, eds. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983.

Hartsock, Nancy. *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983.

———. "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In *Feminism and Methodology*, ed. Sandra Harding. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Hayles, Katherine N. "Searching for Common Ground." In *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*, ed. M. Soule and G. Lease. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1995.

Hegel, georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

———. *On the Way to Language*. Trans. P. D. Hertz. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

———. *What Is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. G. Gray and F. D. Wieck. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

———. "The Origin of the Work of Art" (abridged). Trans. Albert Hofstadter. In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

———. *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. London: Routledge, 1993.

Hekman, Susan. "Beyond Humanism: Gadamer, Althusser, and the Methodology of the Social Sciences." *Western Political Quarterly* 36 (1983): 98–115.

———. *Moral Voices/Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

———. "Backgrounds and Riverbeds: Feminist Reflections." *Feminist Studies* 25 (1999): 427–48.

———. *The Future of Differences: Truth and Method in Feminist Theory*. Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell, 2000.

Henderson, Mae. "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition." In *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. New York: Meridian, 1990.

Hertz, Deborah. *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Hiley, David R., James F. Bohman, and Richard Shusterman, eds. *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.

Hoy, David. "Jacques Derrida." In *The Return of Grand Theory,* ed. Quentin Skinner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. Trans. J. N. Findlay. Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1970.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

———. *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press, [1987] 1993.

———. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

———. *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Mary Beth Mader. Austin: University of Texas Press, [1983] 1999.

Jaggar, Alison M., and Susan R. Bordo, eds. *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

Jantzen, Grace M. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998; and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

———. "Necrophilia and Natality: What Does it Mean to Be Religious?" *The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 19 (1998).

Jaspers, Karl. Philosophy. Vol. 1–3. Trans. E. B. Ashton. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1932] 1969–71.

Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reasoning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Jones, Kathleen B. *Compassionate Authority*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.

———. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kaplan, Mordecai. *Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan*. Ed. Mel Scult and Emanuel Goldsmith. New York: Reconstructionist Press and Schocken Books, 1985.

Keller, Evelyn Fox. *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1983.

———. *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*. Trans. David F. Swenson, ed. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the 'Mystic East.'* London: Routledge, 1999.

Kögler, Hans Herbert. *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

Kol Haneshama. Wyncote, Penna.: The Reconstructionist Press, 1995.

Kourany, Janet, ed. *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Kristeva, Julia. *About Chinese Women*. New York: Marion Boyars Press, 1986.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Langer, Susan K. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism, of Reason, Rite, and Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Lauter, Paul. *Canons and Contexts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Lennon, Kathleen, and Margaret Whitford, eds. *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Lerner, Michael. *Jewish Renewal*. New York: Harper, 1994.

Lloyd, Genevieve. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1984], Second edition, 1993.

Longino, Helen. *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Longxi, Zhang. "The *Tao* and the *Logos:* Notes on Derrida's Logocentrism." *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985): 385–98.

———. "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West." *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1988): 108–31.

———. *The "Tao" and the "Logos": Literary Hermeneutics, East and West*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992.

Lugones, Maria. "Playfulness, World-Travelling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2.2 (1987): 3–19.

Luker, Kristin. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *Le différend*. Paris: Minuit, 1983.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

———. *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

Malterud, Kirsti. "Women's Undefined Disorders—A Challenge for Clinical Communication." *Family Practice* 9 (1992).

———. "Strategies for Empowering Women's Voices in the Medical Culture." *Health Care for Women International* 14 (1993).

———. "The Legitimacy of Clinical Knowledge: Towards a Medical Epistemology Embracing the Art of Medicine." *Theoretical Medicine* 16 (1995).

McCarthy, Thomas. *Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994.

Mendelson, J. "The Habermas-Gadamer Debate." *New German Critique* 18 (1979): 44–73.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980.

Michelfelder, Diane P., and Richard E. Palmer, eds. *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Michon, Pascal. *Poétique d'une anti-anthropologie: L'hernéneutique de Gadamer*. Paris: Vrin, 2000.

Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Misgeld, Dieter. "Discourse and Conversation: The Theory of Communicative Competence and Hermeneutics in the Light of the Debate Between Habermas and Gadamer." *Cultural Hermeneutics* 4 (1976–77): 321–44.

———. "Modernity and Hermeneutics: A Critical-Theoretical Rejoinder." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.

More, Ellen, and Maureen Milligan, eds. *The Empathic Practitioner: Empathy, Gender, and Medicine*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Moulton, J. "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method." In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Harding and Hintikka. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983.

Mullett, Sheila. "Shifting Perspective: A New Approach to Ethics." In *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals*, eds. Lorraine Code, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Mura, Gaspare, ed. *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito*. Rome: Cita Nuova, 1990.

Nagel, Thomas. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Nagl-Docekal, Herta. "Towards a New Theory of the Historical Sciences: The Relevance of *Truth and Method*." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

Nicholson, Linda, ed. *Feminsim/Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Noddings, Nell. *Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

Nussbaum, Martha. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

———. *Sex and Social Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Nye, Andrea. *Words of Power: A Feminist Reading of the History of Logic*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Oliver, Kelly, and Marilyn Pearsall, eds. *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998.

———. "Introduction: Why Feminists Read Nietzsche." In Oliver and Pearsall, *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*.

Ormiston, Gayle, and Alan D. Schrift, eds. *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*. Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1990.

Palmer, Richard. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston, III.: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Pepper, Stephen C. *World Hypotheses: A Study in Evidence*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961.

Person, Ethel S. *The Force of Fantasy: Its Roles, its Benefits, and What it Reveals About Our Lives*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.

Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991.

Putnam, Hilary. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

———. *The Many Faces of Realism*. Chicago: Open Court, 1987.

Rabinow, Paul, and William M. Sullivan, eds. *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.

Rhode, Deborah. *Justice and Gender*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. Trans. Denis Savage. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

———. *Conflict of Interpretations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Riley, Denise. *"Am I that Name?": Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Risser, James. *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-Reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

———. "The Voice of the Other in Gadamer's Hemeneutics." In *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn. Chicago: Open Court, 1997.

Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

———. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

———. "Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist Critique." *Hypatia* 8 (1993) 96–103.

Rouse, Joseph. *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Ruddick, Sara. *Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Sandel, Michael. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1946] 1982.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Trans. George J. Becker. New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Scheman, Naomi. "Othello's Doubt/Desdemona's Death: The Engendering of Skepticism." In *Power, Gender, Values,* ed. J. Genova. Edmonton, Alberta: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1987.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*. Ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstmann. Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press for The American Academy of Religion, 1977.

Schott, Robin. *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988.

———. "Whose Home Is It Anyway? A Feminist Response to Gadamer's Hermeneutics." In *Gadamer and Hermeneutics,* ed. Hugh Silverman. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Scott, Joan. *Gender and History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

———. "The Evidence of Experience." *Critical Inquiry* 17.4 (1991): 773–97.

———. *Only Paradoxes To Offer*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Sherwin, Susan. "Philosophical Methodology and Feminist Methodology." In *Feminist Perspectives: Philosophical Essays on Method and Morals,* ed. Lorraine Code, Sheila Mullett, and Christine Overall. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Shusterman, Richard. "The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter: A Pragmatist Perspective." In *Dialogue and Deconstruction,* ed. Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Silverman, Hugh, ed. *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics*. In *A Spinoza Reader,* ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Steele, Meili. "Meta-Theory and the Subject of Democracy in the Work of Ralph Ellison." *New Literary History* 27 (1996): 326–42.

———. *Critical Confrontations: Literary Theories in Dialogue*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

———. *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Tanesini, Alessandra. *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Taylor, Charles. "Philosophy and Its History." In *Philosophy in History,* ed. Richard Rorty et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

———. *Kant and Political Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Teigas, Demetrius. *Knowledge and Hermeneutic Understanding: A Study of the Habermas-Gadamer Debate*. Lewisburg, Penna.: Bucknell University Press, 1995.

Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998.

Tuana, Nancy, and William Cowling. "The Presence and Absence of the Feminine in Plato's Philosophy." In *Feminist Interpretations of Plato,* ed. Nancy Tuana. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Wachterhauser, Brice R., ed. "Introduction: History and Language in Understanding." In *Hermeneutics and Modem Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

———. *Beyond Being: Gadamer's Post-Platonic Hermeneutical Ontology*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

Warnke, Georgia. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

———. "Feminism and Hermeneutics." *Hypatia* 8 (1993): 81–98.

———. "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women." In *Hermeneutics and Truth,* ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994.

———. *Legitimate Differences: Interpretation in the Abortion Controversy and Other Public Debates*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

Wellmer, Albrecht. *Hanna Arendt: Twenty Years Later*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

Wendell, Susan. *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Westphal, Merold. "Hermeneutics as Epistemology." In *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology,* ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999.

Wiener, Shohama. *The Fifth-eighth Century: A Jewish Renewal Sourcebook*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996.

Winkler, Gershon. *The Way of the Boundary Crosser: An Introduction to Jewish Flexidoxy*. Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1998.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, [1953], Third edition, 1967.

Wright, Kathleen. "Gadamer: The Speculative Structure of Language." In *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy,* ed. Brice Wachterhauser. Albany: State University of New York, 1986.

———. "Literature and Philosophy at the Crossroads." In *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work,* ed. Kathleen Wright. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

Young, Iris. "Impartiality and the Civic Public." In *Feminism as Critique,* ed. Benhabib and Cornell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

———. *Justice and the Politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

Contributors

LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF is a professor of philosophy, political science, and women's studies at Syracuse University. Her books include *Feminist Epistemologies*, co-edited with Elizabeth Potter (Routledge, 1993); *Real Knowing: New Versions of the Coherence Theory of Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1996); *Epistemology: The Big Questions* (Blackwell, 1998); and *Thinking From the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, co-edited with Eduardo Mendieta (Rowman & Litllefield, 2000). *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* is forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Email: lsalcoff@syr.edu.

LORRAINE CODE is Distinguished Research Professor in philosophy at York University in Toronto, cross-appointed to the graduate programs in social and political thought and women's studies. In addition to numerous articles and four co-edited volumes, she is the author of *Epistemic Responsibility* (1987), *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991), and *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on (Gendered) Locations* (1995). She is General Editor of the *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories* (Routledge 2000); and co-translator with Kathryn Hamer of Michèle Le Doeuff's *Le Sexe du savior* (Routledge 2003. forthcoming). Her book with the working title "Ecological Thinking" will be published by Oxford University Press. Email: codelb@yorku.ca.

WILLIAM COWLING is the co-author with Nancy Tuana of "The Presence and Absence of the Feminine in Plato's Philosophy" in *Feminist Interpretations of Plato* (Penn State University Press, 1994), and co-editor of *Revealing Male Bodies* (Indiana University Press, 2001). He teaches philosophy at Oregon State University and composition at the University of Oregon. Mr. Cowling's love of the Northwest and especially the Oregon coast is legendary.

GEMMA CORRADI FIUMARA earned a B.A. degree at Barnard College of Columbia University, where she studied as a Fulbright scholar. She is an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Rome, and a training analyst with the Italian Psychoanalytical Society. She is the author of *Philosophy and Coexistence* (A. W. Sijthoff, 1966), *The Symbolic Function: Psychoanalysis and the Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell, 1992), *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (Routledge, 1995), *The Metaphoric Process: Connections Between Language and Life* (Routledge, 1995), and *The Mind's Affective Life: A Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Inquiry* (Brunner-Routledge, 2001).

MARIE FLEMING is a professor of political science at the University of Western Ontario. Her most recent book is *Emancipation and Illusion: Rationality and Gender in Habermas's Theory of Modernity* (Penn State University Press, 1997). She is currently completing a book project dealing with critical theory, modernity, and art, and has a special interest in Adorno's aesthetic theory.

SILJA FREUDENBERGER was born in 1969. She studied philosophy, history, political science, and media studies in Marburg, Bremen and London. She received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Bremen, where she is *Assistentin* (assistant professor) at the department of philosophy. She works on epistemology, feminism epistemology, philosophy of language, and semiotics. Her current research focuses on problems of representation, realism, and relativism.

SUSAN HEKMAN teaches political science and graduate humanities at the University of Texas at Arlington. She has published articles and books on the methodology of the social sciences and feminist theory, including *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Northeastern University Press, 1990), *Moral Voices/Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (The Penn State University Press, 1995), and *The Future of Differences: Truth and Method in Feminist Theory* (Polity, 1999).

SUSAN-JUDITH HOFFMANN is an adjunct professor in the department of philosophy at McGill University. She has published work on Hegel and is currently engaged in research on the role of Wilhelm von Humboldt in the history of hermeneutics. She is also working on an account of the ethical dimension of language in Gadamer's existential hermeneutics.

GRACE M. JANTZEN is a research professor of religion, culture, and gender in the department of religions and theology at the University of Manchester, U.K. She is the author of many books and articles, including *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) and *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Indiana University Press, 1999). Her interests are in the interface of contemporary continental thought, gender, and religion, particularly mysticism. She is currently at work on a project provisionally entitled *Death and the Displacement of Beauty,* a genealogy of death and natality in Western culture.

PATRICIA ALTENBERND JOHNSON is a professor of philosophy at the University of Dayton. She works in philosophical hermeneutics, philosophy of religion, and feminist theory, attempting to connect these three areas of scholarship. Her publications include "Gadamer: Incarnation, Finitude, and the Experience of Divine Infinitude," "Feminist Christian Philosophy?," and four books in the Wadsworth Philosophy Series (Wadsworth/Thomson Learning): *On Heidegger* (2000), *On Gadamer* (2000), *On Wollstonecraft* (2000), and *On Arendt* (2001). Her administrative experience includes serving as a departmental chairperson and as an associate dean.

LAURA DUHAN KAPLAN teaches philosophy and interdisciplinary studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She is also a student rabbi in the Jewish Renewal movement. She has won a number of teaching awards, including the Carnegie Foundation / CASE U.S. Professor of the Year Award. In her books *Family Pictures: A Philosopher Explores the Familiar* (Open Court, 1998) and *Philosophy and Everyday Life* (Seven Bridges, 2001), she explores poetic moments and their potential for sparking philosophical insights.

ROBIN PAPPAS is a doctoral candidate in comparative literature at the University of Oregon. Her research interests include rhetoric, modernist poetry, the history of medicine and substance use, and feminist epistemological studies.

ROBIN MAY SCHOTT is an associate research professor of philosophy and Director of Research of the project "Philosophy on the Border" at the University of Copenhagen. She is the author of *Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm* (Beacon Press, 1988), co-editor of *Forplantning, Køn og Teknologi* (1995), and editor of *Feminist Interpretations*

of Immanuel Kant (The Penn State University Press, 1997). Her current research deals with the problem of evil in relation to the phenomenon of war-rape.

MEILI STEELE is a professor of comparative literature at the University of South Carolina. He has written three books, *Critical Confrontations: Literary Theories in Dialogue* (University of South Carolina Press, 1997), *Realism and the Drama of Reference: Strategies of Representation in Balzac, Flaubert, and James* (The Penn State University Press, 1998), and *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), as well as many articles on literature, philosophy, and politics. This essay will form part of his next book, *Hiding from History: Public Imagination and Political Dialogue*.

VERONICA VASTERLING is an associate professor in the department of philosophy and the center for women's studies at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. She is director of the research project "Feminist Hermeneutics and Phenomenology." Her publications, dealing with Arendt, Heidegger, Derrida, Lyotard, and Butler, are largely in the field of contemporary philosophy and gender theory.

GEORGIA WARNKE is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Riverside, and her most recent book is *Legitimate Differences: Interpretation in the Abortion Controversy and Other Public Debates* (University of California Press, 1999).

KATHLEEN WRIGHT is a professor of philosophy at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. Her works on Gadamer include "The Speculative Structure of Language" in *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy* (edited by Brice Wachterhauser, State University of New York Press, 1986), "Literature and Philosophy at the Crossroads" in *Festivals of Interpretation: Essays on Hans-Georg Gadamer's Work* (edited by Kathleen Wright, State University of New York Press, 1990), and "The Fusion of Horizons: Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wang Fu-Chih" in *Continental Philosophy Review* 33: 2000. She is also working on Hegel and sociality, on Heidegger and the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, and on Chinese philosophies, including Confucianism, Taoism, and the Chinese version of Zen Buddhism, in connection with the readings of the feminine in the later works of Heidegger and Irigaray.

Index