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NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING AND THE
INTERPRETATION OF HUMAN ACTION

BY

JOHN VAILLANCOURT CONNELLY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

The ultimate aim of this thesis is to articulate and defend the following four hypotheses, each of which logically follows from the former hypothesis and/or hypotheses. First, that the structure of human action is intentional, teleological and historicity-laden. Second, based upon the ontological structure of human action, understanding human action takes the form of a narrative description (interpretation). Third, because understanding human action takes the form of a narrative description (which is a specific literary genre), it follows that the process of understanding human action is modelled or best typified by the process of interpreting a narrative text. Fourth, because at its most basic level, the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures are a narrative of the Divine-human relationship, it is profitable to examine some of the interpretation techniques employed in biblical hermeneutics in order to insure that the ontological structure of both human action and narrative text is not betrayed or ignored.

In the first chapter of this thesis will be developed, each in its turn, what we shall argue is a plausible conception of intentionality, teleology and temporality. By

"intentionality" we shall mean the ontological relationship between persons and their world or environment. It is an ontological relation which is basic to the development of epistemology, or, more accurately, hermeneutics. The term "teleology" refers to that type of order which human agents give to actions and events to which they are intentionally bound. Put more simply, teleology shall refer to the logical relationship between ends and means which structures human action. And by "temporality" we mean the overlapping of past experience and future anticipations through the experience of presence. Each of these three structures, as we shall see, is absolutely fundamental for the development of an ontology which corresponds to the agent's description of his own experience. Due to the complexities involved, the development of each structure (our ideas about each structure) shall remain somewhat distinct in the first chapter.

Coalescence of the three structures discussed in the first chapter will take place in the second. There a comprehensive notion of "narrative understanding" will be developed. Put simply, narrative understanding is a theory for the interpretation of human action which is sensitive or responsive to the ontology of human being and action as developed in the first chapter. Because the project of interpreting the meaning of human action as it occurs in time is primarily that of the historian, we will take occasion to

apply the theory of narrative understanding to situations similar to those with which the historian deals. In doing so, similarities between the process involved in interpreting a human action and a narrative text or chronicle will be evident.

In the third and final chapter, we will simply point specifically in light of the work of Paul Ricoeur, to the plausibility of the third and fourth theses which develop as a consequence of the first two. We will first attempt to articulate the ontological similarities between human action and narrative texts and specifically the autonomizing capacity of both. Second, the text of Scripture as the "great narrative" will receive special attention. Decidedly less original or developmental in character, the third chapter, as a consequence of the lack of materials, will perform the important function of charting future philosophical and theological ventures.

For
M. Patrice Farley
and
William Lawrence Connelly III

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CHAPTER I

COMPONENTS OF NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING

Intentionality

Brentano is the philosopher most cited as the first to state clearly the thesis of intentionality: namely, that every cogito is fundamentally the cogito of a cogitatum. The relationship between the cogito and the cogitatum was referred to by Brentano as "intentional." The adjective "intentional," for Brentano, however, was restricted exclusively to an intramental object and to an equally intramental act by the subject in his relationship to the object.¹

Brentano's student Edmund Husserl, who developed a notion of intentionality which shall be of much assistance to us over the course of this thesis, broke with his teacher over the issue of the mentalistic character of intentionality. Husserl suggested that the significance of the intentional is not primarily that experience has an object but rather how it has an object. ". . . perceiving is not merely a subjective passion, something that happens to the subject, but something a subject does to and with the world."² He insisted against

¹F. A. Olafson, "Husserl's Theory of Intentionality," in Husserl: Exposition and Appraisals, ed. F. Elliston and P. McCormic (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 160-7.

²E. Kohak, Idea and Experience: Edmund Husserl's

Brentano that the object term of the intentional relation is not merely a "mental" object which bears resemblance to a "real" object outside consciousness. The intentional relation is not merely an intramental relation; "what is meant in the experience is the object itself, whether the object in question is a tree, a mathematical state of affairs, or even the god Jupiter."¹ Though each object above has a different ontological status (a tree is physical, the mathematical, ideal, and the god Jupiter, neither), a description of the experience, of the relation, is not adequate unless mention is made of its referent.²

All consciousness, Husserl maintains, is consciousness of something. Before analysing consciousness, therefore, we must first discover what specifically consciousness is conscious of. The discovery of those essences of things by which any object appears to us as a "this" or a "that" is accomplished through what Husserl entitles an "intentional analysis of the acts of consciousness." From this point on, however, it will be helpful if we focus our attention on the most important act of consciousness: the act of perception.

Perception is perspectival: it is limited to a certain viewpoint. Facing the front of my cottage, I can

Project of Phenomenology in Ideas I (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 121.

¹D. Carr, Phenomenology and the Problem of History (Evanston: Northwestern U. Press, 1974), p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 22.

effectively perceive only the facade. In moving to the side, I alter my viewpoint by altering my position with respect to the cottage. In so altering my perspective, my perceptions still have to do (I assume without reflection) with the same object, but now in a different respect. No matter how I may move myself around the perimeter of the cottage, so long as my perceptions are not obfuscated by other objects, I always perceive it from a certain perspective. "The perceived gives itself in and through the act of perception only by means of profiles (Abschattungen) which are correlated to a determined attitude and standpoint of the perceiver."¹ Moreover, while I am perceiving the cottage's facade I am aware that the other sides could and would be perceived if my viewpoint were to be altered. Husserl maintains that each provides for a quasi-infinite number of possible profiles corresponding to a quasi-infinite number of possible viewpoints which the viewer can assume.²

Perceiving anything, as we have seen, involves a manifold of partial perceptions of the unperceived whole. Each partial perception provides a profile for a certain perspective of the object. Husserl suggests that in perceiving anything, we perceive it as a structured meaningful whole. As with the example of viewing my cottage, one always

¹E. Husserl, *Ideas*, Vol. I, trans. W. Gibson (N.Y.: Collier, 1962), pp. 91-5.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 100-4.

experiences the manifold of perceptions as profiles of my "complete" cottage. No one perception or profile exhausts the perceived thing. In fact, no particular number of a possible quasi-infinite number of profiles are capable of exhausting the possible dimensions of a perceived object. We see, therefore, that Husserl's understanding of perception-as-intentional is not limited to the profile actually perceived but rather one which structures experience coherently and meaningfully. This position regarding intentionality (which we shall adopt in this thesis) is neither a reduction of experience to solely cognitive nor emotional states. To understand better how such a reduction is avoided, it will be useful to discuss Husserl's notions of noesis and noema.

Noesis is a term employed by Husserl to name the particular type of human act (perception, but also imagination, thoughts, desires, feelings, . . .) which provides a specific profile when a certain viewpoint is assumed. Included in the term noesis is also the idea that each perception of a certain thing aims at or has as its end perceiving the object as a whole. The notion of the "whole" or "total meaning" of an object, that which constitutes the meaningfulness of each and every act of perception, is called the noema. The noema is the meaning of the object as the manifold of particular profiles fit into a connected whole. Perception, and consciousness is general, is a process of completion whereby each noetic perception confirms and

complements the others towards the noematic result that the subject grasps the total meaning of the object.

Husserl draws a further distinction concerning noesis and noema which is best presented in the form of a question. Isn't it the case that even while I perceive the facade of my cottage, dimensions that are not effectively perceived contribute to its perceptions? In other words, could I see the front of my cottage, could it in fact be referred to as "my cottage," unless I had in view much more than certain colors and shapes which could be said to describe accurately the dimensions of its design? Husserl maintains that even that which is only an effective individual perception is always perceived in a passive synthesis which is not effectively perceived. Further, he maintains that the complex of the effectively perceived and non-effectively perceived perspectives constitute the meaning of the object in question. It is the case, therefore, that, according to Husserl, "consciousness (also perception) does not simply record; it is an act of rendering rational, constituting hyletic data (that something into which we analyse a perception) as intelligible wholes."¹

The sense in which Husserl meant the statement "every cogito is the cogito of a cogitatum," has been adequately developed but toward what cogitatum shall the cogito intend itself? Each and every moment we overlook some things in

¹Kohak, Idea and Experience, p. 123.

order to be conscious of others. The objects of our experience are therefore intrinsically judged and valued by us for various reasons. Consciousness is an act which values and renders coherent perceptions. Hurricane winds blowing across the North Atlantic mean nothing in a world devoid of conscious persons. Only for intentional persons who are able to perceive consciously is the storm meaningful. For the captain of a tanker crossing the same storm area of the North Atlantic, the reality that he perceives is constituted in a frightfully meaningful whole. For a passive observer, high winds in the North Atlantic may mean a certain barometric reading. High winds and stormy seas, for the captain, on the other hand, mean the potential destruction of his ship, his crew, and his life.

In the light of what has been said, the intentional act could be characterized as a person-world relation, which, in its objective reference carries a conceptual structure of the object perceived; it is an object which the subject constitutes through appropriate syntheses. This person-world relation is more comprehensive than the specialized notion of intentionality peculiar to certain verbs; non-linguistic lived-bodily actions are also intentional for Husserl.¹

Husserl's philosophy, "thereby established a strict correlation between the objective and the subjective, between the elements in the object-domain (the world) and the intentional

¹F. A. Olafson, Dialectic of Action (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 17.

activity that constructs them through the full range of judgemental syntheses proper to them."¹

Teleology

The history of historiography and philosophy is filled with various teleological conceptions. Traditionally, such conceptions have included a notion of something greater and somehow beyond or independent of finite human purposes. Implicit in nearly all of them is the idea of a final cause in history.²

An orthodox Christian view of history, for example that of St. Augustine, maintains that God is both supernatural and superhistorical. He arranges the cumulative sequence of the historical process from a position (if one can speak of God as "in a position") outside of time itself; in eternity.³ History, maintains St. Augustine among many others, is the arena for God's work in and through creation and especially human persons. He employs human persons for his own specific purposes. And, of course, since human persons are his creatures, his purposes are really their purposes too, though they may not comprehend them. Without God's incomprehensible purposes in history, such a history would not have a final teleology; no ultimate purpose.

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Augustine, The Confessions, trans. R. Warner (N.Y.: Mentor Books, 1963), Book X.

Dissatisfied with the Christian formulation, Hegel attempted to show, through the vast system which he constructed, both that history has its own teleology which transcends the purposeful actions of human persons and that such a teleology has no place for a transcendent (superhistorical) God. This specific teleology must transcend, he suggests, the purposes of human persons in order to make sense of the ambiguous and confusing "ways of the world"; but it must also be truly immanent in history. It must be built into the historical process in a way that would be impossible if teleology were to be equated with the will of a transcendent God.¹ The telos of the historical process, for Hegel, is a fully actualized conception of selfhood or spirit, but the entelechy, the power or reason which guides the successive stages of history, is logical in character. In the Hegelian system as in the Christian, therefore, the purposeful quality of human action is superseded by the ultimate purposes of some final cause in history.

In the end, the many efforts to conceive the process of history in terms of some type of externally imposed teleology are held in suspicion, largely due to the forced and confining relationship they imply between the transcendent form of historical understanding held by God or acted out by Spirit, and the historical experience of living within a temporal context. Basic to the analysis of any theory is

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 8.

its application to one's experience. Any theory which renders certain some distinction which each of us finds doubtful or which would render doubtful some distinction of which each of us is already certain will itself be regarded as doubtful.

In this paper we shall employ a notion of agent teleology. Such a teleology of human action refers to the logical correctness of inferring from 1) an agent's desiring that a particular end be achieved, and 2) his belief that some particular action is the best means to effect that end, therefore, 3) his action. This notion of agent teleology can be formulated in the following practical syllogism:

1. X desires A.
2. X believes that by doing B he will achieve A.
3. X does B.

Agent teleology is a (teleological) construction that attempts to explain accurately the common sense beliefs concerning human actions. It maintains that the kind of order that human intentions give to events in time and space are best understood by reference to the logical relationship, not between particular events and some final cause, but instead between the ends and means which structure human rational action.

The question thus arises whether human action might be explicable in a manner other than assigning a cause to it. It seems quite plausible that it may. In terms of our ordinary language, we often give an explanation of particular actions by referring to the purposes, aims or goals of the

agent who performed them. Oftentimes, we provide such explanations without any reference to a cause or causes. On a common sense level, actions are understood in terms of purpose. "The question 'why did you do that?', which is clearly a request for a reason, is almost never a recital of causes. It is rather a request for a statement of purpose or aim."¹

There are many who oppose this account of teleology on the basis that it violates the principle of extensionality. Carnap defines the principle with the following: "For every given (non-extensional) language S_1 an extensional language S_2 may be constructed such that S_1 may be translated into S_2 ."² James Cornman, in the article "Intentionality and Intensionality," an article which critically evaluates R. Chisholm's conceptions of intensionality, intentionality and extensionality, expands upon Carnap's definition by stating:³

First let us take as the extension of a declarative sentence its truth-value. Thus, the truth value of a sentence is a function of the extensions of its components. Second, because the truth value of such a sentence is a function of only the extensions of its components, then if a sentence is extensional, the replacement of one of those components by another expression with the same extension, i.e., by an extensionally equivalent expression, will not change the truth-value of the sentence. Third, if certain

¹R. Taylor, Action and Purpose (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 141.

²R. Carnap, The Logical Syntax of Language (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 320.

³J. Cornman, "Intentionality and Intensionality," in Intentionality, Mind and Language, ed. A. Marras (Urbana: U. of Ill. Press, 1972), pp. 54-5.

of the components are sentential elements, i.e., clauses, then the truth-value of the sentence is a function of the truth values, i.e., extensions of the simple sentential elements which are its components.¹

Why is it so significant that there be untranslatable intensional sentences?² The principle of extensionality requires that the validity of an explanation and the truth claims of its premises cannot be contingent upon either the manner in which it is described or "descriptions that incorporate a reference to the end state the occurrence of which is to be explained."³ If this thesis is maintained teleological explanations either have no truth-value or must be subsumed as a specific type of extensional explanation--one that involves no reference to agent beliefs and purposes. The absence of all references allow "teleological explanations" to avoid violation of the requirement that the truth-values of the statements in the explanation be independent of the descriptions they use.⁴

The principle of extensionality runs into difficulty because not all sentences can be translated (without change in truth value) into extensional sentences.⁵ To be specific, not all intensional sentences are able to be translated

¹Cornman, "Intentionality and Intensionality," p. 55.

²Ibid., pp. 55-6.

³Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 14.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵Cornman, "Intentionality and Intensionality," p. 56.

adequately into extensional sentences. The following supports such a claim:

1. Kant is called the author of the Critique of Pure Reason because he wrote the Critique of Pure Reason.
2. Kant is extensionally equivalent to "author of Critique of Pure Reason."
3. Kant is also extensionally equivalent to "author of Critique of Practical Reason". But both (2) and (3) are not equivalent. Therefore, it is the case that either Kant is called Kant because he wrote Critique of Pure Reason or Kant is called the author of the Critique of Pure Reason because he wrote the Critique of Practical Reason.¹

The derived sentence (3) is false and therefore the original sentence is non-extensional or intensional.

In this thesis we shall maintain the following:

1. Teleological explanations are incompatible with a purely extensional understanding of language, but are none the less for it.
2. Logically, the actual meaning of a particular event is not independent from the agent's intentions, beliefs, desires, [because] "... that X's use of one description rather than another for the goal he seeks may be of central importance in connection with a determination of what X did."²

We shall thus maintain that teleological explanations of certain events are capable of carrying truth-values.

It is also argued by proponents of extensionality that to speak in terms of the agent's "purpose" for this or that action is but one of a variety of causal explanations. Any such explanation is reducible to a causal explanation. R. Taylor, an agent teleologist of the first order, responds

¹F. Wenisch, University of Rhode Island.

²Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 14.

to this charge with the following:

. . . this is dead wrong. If one says that he did something, because such and such factors caused him to do it and were such as to leave him no alternative, he is giving an explanation in terms of causes, and his statements are false in case those factors did not exist. If, on the other hand, he says that he did something in order that a certain end might be achieved, he is giving an explanation in terms of his purposes, and his statement is not in the least rendered false in the case that it is not achieved.¹

It is perfectly legitimate to say that "I went to the store to buy pickles because I had a desire for them," and for it to be a true explanation, even though I may have returned home with olives instead. Purposes simply make actions intelligible; they do not cause anyone to do anything. On the other hand, to say that "I went to the store to buy pickles because two penniless pregnant women forced me at gunpoint," is a false explanation unless I was actually caused to act in that manner due to those particular factors.

Agent teleologists maintain that in terms of common sense and ordinary language, actions are teleological in form and typically rely on the logical connection as formulated before in the practical syllogism to explain them. There seems to be nothing to indicate that common sense is disposed in principle to agree that the practical syllogism should be reduced to a more primary non-teleological form.

Taylor suggests that there has been a genuine confusion of causal explanations with explanations on the basis of

¹ Taylor, Action and Purpose, p. 142.

purpose due to the fact that "ordinary locutions typically used for explaining persons' actions look for all the world like expressions of causality."¹ Specifically, the word "because" is used regularly in explanations of actions through their purposes as well as in causal explanations. The word "because," on the surface, appears to assign causes for voluntary actions. Instead, however, it can and oftentimes does assign reasons or purposes. The assimilation of purposes to causes, due to a misunderstanding of the usage of the word "because" or other equivalent words is a distortion which creates a genuinely misleading conception of human agency.²

Taylor proposes that, upon inquiry, the different usages of the word "because" become evident. Each expression below includes "because" in the expression of a causal relation:

1. Tom tripped on the step because he slipped,
 2. Tom tripped on the step because he was pushed,
 3. Tom tripped on the step because it collapsed,
- and so on.

He then compares the expressions of the first set with those of a second set:

1. Tom went to the store because he wanted candy,
2. Tom went to the store because he wished for candy,

¹Taylor, Action and Purpose, p.147.

²Ibid., p. 148.

3. Tom went to the store because he desired candy, and so on.¹

For a number of reasons the expressions of the above two sets must be distinguished. The expressions of the second set are all basically equivalent and concern agent purposes; they all have essentially the same meaning. This is not the case with the first set. Each statement would, though not necessarily, exclude the others. These statements are complete causal explanations in themselves and not merely a different way of saying essentially the same. Also, the statements of the first set in no way lend themselves to reformulations using teleological locutions.² Statements in the second set provide explanations suggesting that the agent was not coerced into performing the action, but instead initiated it himself. The first set presents the agent as a victim of circumstances. In each statement in the second set the word "because," ambiguous as it is, is qualified with another word, which, ordinarily understood, provides an explanation for the purpose of the action. The first set does not provide a word describing the intention of the agent, but, instead, gives an explanation for the event in causal terms.

To explain a person's actions by rendering a teleological account of it, as with the second set of expressions,

¹Taylor, Action and Purpose, p. 149.

²Ibid., p. 149.

is to represent it not as the effect of a cause but as the means to an end. Teleological explanations provide an intelligible explanation for behavior and at the level of common sense show why the action was performed. In other words, it explains the action. The explanation may not be exhaustive but it can nonetheless be true. To allow only for extensional explanations for actions is to disallow the attachment of any truth function to a teleological account. In this thesis, it shall be our position that though perhaps not exhaustive, teleological explanations are capable of being true or false and differs from the causal; that is, are irreducible to causal explanations. The teleological explanation serves to explain actions and events which could not be clarified with a causal model. Neither type of explanation is reducible to the other.

Temporality

It shall be our thesis that human action is historicity-laden. By this we mean that within human action, which is always intentional and teleological are certain historicity-laden assumptions (both past retentions and future protentions). To describe an event which occurs at one time entails that other specific events have taken place prior to it or will take place afterward, or both before and after the certain event being described. Even such basic acts as the intentional synthesis of "home," "brother," are meaning constructions rooted in a battery of past and present

experiences and the protentions of a future. Absence of such sedimentation of experiences and meanings would render human experience void of all but the most basic sets of sensory perception. Husserl likens a present conscious act to the tail of a comet which trails behind it in the non-present; a just-passed retention that slowly fades into the past. In an analogous way, present intention involves the just-about-to-be which has yet to be actualized. Human action which occurs in presence is therefore a synthesis of a manifold of perceptions and temporal complexes. It is a collecting together of the preceptual and temporal actual and non-actual in order to constitute the meaning of a particular object or act.

In addition to the prospective and retrospective character of human experience wherein the just-passed and the just-about-to-be influence our experience of presence, the attitudes and habits developed in the distant past are also very present in memory.¹ Included in such attitudes and habits are not only the memories of "things" or "objects" but also the state of consciousness that we previously maintained towards them. Thus, when I experience a certain object as having the meanings "dog" and "Muttsy," the present dog viewed in the context of past attitudes and experiences is my dog and companion. Of course, if we wished to follow this

¹E. Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness, trans. J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1964), sect. 23, 24.

train of thought further we could discuss the relationship between intentionality and the unconscious. Instead, however, we shall stick to the matters at hand which shall consist of a brief overview of the temporal dimension of human action and a defense of the particular interpretation we shall maintain.

Throughout the history of western thought there has been a fascination with the concept and experience of the present or "now" moment. In light of the prejudices tied up in the etymological history of the word "present," which has come to be understood by many as synonymous with some type of atomistic temporal point or monadic nub, we shall try, so far as possible, to avoid its usage. Instead of trying to discuss time from the standpoint of abstraction, we will be speaking of it in terms of the subject experience of "living presence."¹ Living presence, as we shall see, is that complex multi-dimensional grid of intentions through which persons experience the world. The traditional notion of the "present" is one that is ever entangled in the difficulty of speaking about an infinitesimal moment. In discussing living presence, however, we can speak of a temporal depth in experience. We are thus able to speak of the experience of living presence in the singing of a song as lasting seven minutes; or the listening to a record as a presence lasting

¹A term used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. C. Smith (N.Y.: Humanities Press, 1962), III:2, "Temporality."

one hour. From a chronological point of view, the temporal depth of the experience of living presence would vary greatly with the agent's intentions. It is the intentional meaning that constitutes the unity of an act. In both the singing of a song and the attention extended towards a speaker, the beginning is retained throughout the experience as a horizon that structures the meaning of the end. Employing a temporal metaphor (s) in order to illuminate how the experience of living presence can have temporal depth regardless of the fact that the subject may be undergoing many short term temporal experiences, Merleau-Ponty states the following:

Hence, time, in our primordial experience of it, is not for us a system of objective positions, through which we pass, but a mobile setting which moves away from us, like the landscape seen through a railway carriage window. Yet we do not really believe that the landscape is moving; the gatekeeper at the level crossing is whisked by, but the hill over there scarcely moves at all, and in the same way, though the opening of my day is already receding, the beginning of my week is a fixed point. . . .¹

Living presence is a description of the experience of a living experienced "now" and not an attempt to theorize about the spatial metaphor "point in time." It is the synthesis or mutual harmonizing or the overlapping of lived past and anticipated future through the experience of presence and within the horizon of the passing of time.

In order to understand the temporal character of human experience, it is important that we note the temporal

¹M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. C. Smith (N.Y.: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 419.

relations between lived presence and past experience. In the following diagram, designed by Husserl, we are able to see how events which occurred in the past can be experienced in living presence.¹

The horizontal line moving from right to left (E-A) represents a traditional chronological time graph which displays the progression of moments from future to past. A² and B¹ represent the retention of past events A, A¹ and B in lived presence which is represented by the vertical line C. In this diagram, Husserl fills out, as it were, the temporal depth of the actual experience of presence as opposed to the abstracted, chronological and momentary present. C, rather than being expressed merely as an infinitesimal point, representing a "now" which is ever a "then" or a "not yet," is the time wherein A is retained as A² and B is retained as B¹.

The temporal complexity of human action includes not only past but also future referring assumptions. Though Husserl failed to note, on his diagram, the protention of

¹Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness, p. 49.

future in human action, those following after him, Heidegger for instance, have noted the future referring character of living presence. Below is a helpful diagram of both retention and protention within the subject's living presence.¹

Like the previous diagram, the movement from point E to point C represents movement from the future to the present and from point C to point A, movement from the present to the past. At point C, it is also the case that the just-passed (A^2 and B^1) and the anticipated future (D^{-1} and E^{-2}) are imbedded in presence.

Through the brief overview of temporality provided thus far, it has been our intention to introduce general concepts and emphases for an interpretation of human action that takes temporal reference in ordinary language and experience as fundamental to human being. In so doing, we

¹G. Johnson, of University of Rhode Island, is responsible for above graph.

are working on the assumption that there is an ostensible logical connection between the agent's description of a past experience or future protention and his present action. Thus, to say that "I am eating my twelfth pancake in a row," would be a true description only if, prior to the pancake I was presently eating, I had eaten eleven pancakes sequentially. Or if I said, while eating the fifth pancake in a row, that, "I am eating fifteen pancakes in a row today," the truth of the description of the present would depend upon the prespective description of the future. All that has been shown in this discussion is that in some cases the truth of the description of the present moment is dependent on past and future references. It has not been shown for all cases of descriptions having a temporal reference. In the next section, when we examine narrative understanding, it shall, however, be our thesis that the historicity of human action is both retrospective and prospective and that in order to understand fully the meaning of an action it must be contextualized within the larger horizon of the entire matrix of intentions.

The proponents of the resolute thesis ask whether the many possible events that appear imbedded into each particular event can be "sundered neatly and nonresidually into its consitutents?"¹ One such proponent, Bertrand

¹A. Danto, "Complex Events," in Language and Human Nature, ed. P. Kurtz (St. Louis: W. H. Green, 1971), p. 228.

Russell, poses a similar question in his famous example of a world that comes into existence with a population that has full blown memories of a past it never had: namely, is it possible to decontextualize temporally all events and find meaning (of some sort) in them as atomistic units?¹ The resolute theorists maintain that complex descriptions are capable of such atomistic resolution. They suggest that instead of the original description stating "the twelfth pancake in a row," we should have multiple statements describing the consumption of individual pancakes. In each case we would be concerned to describe what took place at each discrete moment independent of any other event at any other time. Further, they maintain that the technique of providing ostensible logical connections between events would be viewed as merely a convention for expressing certain empirical relations which exist between such events. Complex events, therefore, cannot carry a truth value. Before settling this issue, let us first discuss whether or not the resolute thesis is capable of adequately describing human action and specifically the intentional dimension that is so clearly displayed in the retrospective and prospective activities of human persons.

The resolute thesis appears to have significant shortcomings with its description technique of eliminating

¹B. Russell, The Analysis of Mind (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1921), p. 159.

all ostensible connections between events. This becomes quite apparent as we examine the very basic function of memory-belief.

I may remember that I promised to pick my brother up at the softball field at eight o'clock. To make such a promise is to perform a conscious intentional act. To maintain that I remember such an action is to claim to be in continuing contact with my own past conscious experience.¹ In making such a claim, I am, in effect, yoking together two truth statements describing two discrete events in time--the act of remembering in the present and the past act of promising. I am thus actually claiming that a logical connection exists between the two statements so as to compose an indivisible complex event.

To avoid the conclusion of positing a complex event, those who support the resolute thesis hold that the notion of a logical connection between the original action in the past and the present act of memory does not exist. It would only appear to be a necessary connection, therefore, because one cannot alter a past event. The memory claim, which is believed in the present, must be weakened and restated so as to be consistent with the grammar of belief. In so doing it is made congruous with the possibility that I may not have made any such promise to my brother at any particular time in the past. Further, "I must not only accept as a

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 83.

logical possibility that this memory-belief may be false; I must also be prepared to redescribe it and all my other memory-beliefs in a way that is consistent with this possibility."¹ A memory belief is to be treated as an event like any other event that takes place at a certain time, and the "that" clause is to be treated as non-referential.²

Olafson suggests that the greatest difficulty involved in the approach the resolute thesis takes toward temporally complex events is the manner in which it deals with referential language that refers to past or future events. He states:

If the act of reference has always to be described in terms that effect a logical separation between that act itself and the event or state of affairs that is referred to, it is not clear how this can be done without at the same time suppressing the internal relatedness that acts occurring at one moment in time may have to other moments in time.³

Such a thesis homogenises all temporal references by denying the logical interrelatedness of events which occur during different temporal phases. The ontological status of the predicates (memories and /or prospectations) has not been satisfactorily explicated with the logical notations which refuse to provide for intentional grammar locutions (i.e., something as basic as a "that" clause).

There have been numerous attempts to articulate the

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 84.

²Ibid., p. 84.

³Ibid., p. 84.

features of memory by logical positivists, empiricists, materialists, each of which fail to take into consideration the intentional dimension of memory-beliefs. The logical positivists fall into the difficulty discussed above; the act of reference has always to be described in a propositional form that effects a logical separation between, say, "remembering" and the referent remembered.¹ Classical empiricism, when discussing memory, postulates the existence of certain ideas and/or images in the mind. But once again, with this view, the question arises how such images take on the trait of images of a particular past event. Materialists likewise run amuck by explicating the ontological status of the predicates in terms of some physical theory such as behaviorism or neurophysiological theory, due to the fact that the words which compose the predicates are translated into non-linguistic present material events. How to derive reference to past events from present non-linguistic behavior is a difficulty they appear to be unable to resolve satisfactorily at present.

Without going into any further analysis of particular theses developed, we shall press the question concerning the plausibility of the "guiding principles" of the resolute thesis. From exactly what temporal position is the resolute thesis issuing its limiting decrees?

¹N. Malcolm, Memory and Mind (Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1977), pp. 203-4.

Unless the model too is collapsed into its own specious present, the references it involves to the original event in the series as well as the references to that same event that are implicit in the restrictions imposed on the descriptions of the mental events that follow upon it cannot be bracketed or neutralised in a way that events in the model are. They must be taken instead at full strength or the claim they involve will be transformed into the present experience of a claim in just the way that the episodes of remembering were transformed into the contents of so many successive presents.¹

We shall maintain therefore, in this thesis that any model of human action that can be constructed must be devised from within history itself and must be faithful to the agent's common sense description of his own actions. The resolute model fails to conform to either rule. Within that model there is an unresolvable difference between the person who is within the model (one who is stripped of all capacities for making temporal references that refer to something) and the person who employs the model. This person, the employer, constantly makes references to past and future events. It is only the person being described by the model that has all references to a different temporal phase described in such a way that it signifies his present believing contrary to his own description of what he would understand himself to be doing. There is therefore an illegitimate denial of equivalence between the person being described and the person describing.

¹Malcolm, Memory and Mind, p. 86.

CHAPTER II

NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING

In this chapter we shall develop as best we can a conception of Verstehen (understanding) that has its basis in the notions of intentionality, teleology and temporality. Intentionality, as we spoke of it in the last chapter, is the pairing of noesis and noema: the construction of a person-world relation via the synthesis of the structures of human consciousness (noesis) and the world perceived (noema). Teleology was referred to as the kind of order that human intentions give to actions in space and time. Specifically, we suggested that teleology is best understood by referring to the logical relationship not between particular events and some final cause, but, rather, between ends and means which structure human rational action. And, temporality was understood to mean that synthesis or mutual harmonizing or overlapping of the past as lived and anticipated future within the experience of presence and the horizon of the passing of time. The particular conception of Verstehen which we shall now work toward developing will be called "narrative understanding." By narrative understanding we shall mean that: because human action is temporally complex--

having reference to both the future and the past--to understand the meaning of a complex human action or event requires that it be "framed," as it were in the context of those other past and future references in a manner that is correlative to its location in the agent's own life.

As a vehicle for comprehending what we mean by the term "narrative understanding," let us briefly examine a criticism of Verstehen that was presented by the well known social scientist Theodore Abel. Abel's thesis against Verstehen is as follows: ". . . that the method of understanding or Verstehen has at best a heuristic value in that it suggests possible explanations for some human actions while lacking any means for the critical evaluation or verification of the hypotheses which it generates."¹ He provides an illustration to substantiate his thesis. On one particular inclement day observer (O) notes that his neighbor (N) leaves his house, chops several logs of wood, returns inside his house with the cut wood in his arms and proceeds to ignite the wood in his fireplace. (O) concludes that due to the low temperature outside (N) "began to feel chilly and in order to get warm lit a fire."² Such an interpretation, Abel argues, is inconclusive in view of the quasi-infinite possible motives (N) may have had in chopping the

¹T. Abel, "The Operation Called Verstehen," in Readings in the Philosophy of Science, H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck (N.Y.: Appelton-Century Crofts, 1963), pp. 677-8.

²Ibid., p. 679.

wood on that particular day. He may have merely wanted to get some exercise or gather various wood samples in order to test their different burning temperatures. In fact even if (N) told us why he cut wood on that particular occurrence it would not be sufficient because he may be lying or his motivation may have been unconscious. Verstehen, Abel suggests,

. . . Thus typically involves a translation of items of observed behavior into internal "feeling states" which have accomplished such behavior in one's own case; and we generalize this experienced sequence in a "behavior maxim" which we then apply to another case like that of the neighbor who builds a fire . . . the inference we thereby make is causal in character and . . . is based only on association in our own experience for which no wider statistical warrant has been established. Understanding as such provides no "verification" or "objective validity" for the "behavior maxim."¹

Abel's treatment of his own example is very suspicious indeed. In his argument he has insisted on substituting internal "feeling states" in place of the various actions which (N) performed. The result of such a translation is that the equivalent internal states are impossible to contextualize temporally in order to be interpreted meaningfully and fail to enable one to do more than merely note their chronological order. Furthermore, Abel's criticism that Verstehen's, (what we call narrative understanding), is only of heuristic value, lacking a schema for verification, is effective only if one supposes that the narrator or

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, p. 198.

historian is somehow able to transcend temporal experience and postulate explanations from a (some) detached position. We shall return to discuss in further detail the plausibility of this supposition, but, as concerns Abel's argument above, we shall argue that in light of the intentional relation between (N) and the wood and the temporal context of (N's) actions, there is no necessity to accept Abel's subjective and ultimately skeptical position. The meaning of the action can be discovered by adequately narrating the events which took place. The heuristic value of the narrative emerges as the temporal context broadens. "Verstehen," therefore, "is best when we have a long-term stretch of situated action to understand; it is poorest when a slice of opaque action is abstracted from its situation and duration."¹ In fact, it is essential in order to have a narrative description that the sentence(s) describing the event refer to either a past or anticipated future term or phrase which in turn describe events which have occurred or are anticipated. The narrative sentence therefore describes a present action in light of one of those two or both tensed terms. To simply say that "At time (t_2) (N) cuts four logs," would neither be a narrative description nor informative as to the "why" or intentional structure involved. However if at time (t_1) (N) was shivering inside his house and at time (t_3) he was

¹G. Johnson, "Historicity, Narratives, and the Understanding of Human Life," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, p. 10, (forthcoming).

gaily warming himself in front of a roaring blaze, the narrative would begin to take shape and the plausibility of the description substantiated.

Remember what we stated in our discussion of teleology: namely, that in avoidance of the indefinables involved in working out the relationship between the ultimate telos or subject of historical understanding (as presented in the writings of the great teleological thinkers such as Augustine and Hegel) and our own individual and collective experience (the awareness of ourselves as temporal), we held that basic to the analysis of any theory is its application to ourselves. We are working with (based upon argumentation) a notion of agent teleology and therefore when, in retrospect, we examine various human events which have transpired, we presume that the particular type of order that human intentions give to events in time and space is best understood by reference to the logical relationship between the ends and means which structure human rational action. In one sense, therefore, Verstehen or narrative understanding is not sufficient to provide some "final verification" or "objective validity" to substantiate its interpretation of historical events. Rather, it aims at an interpretation that provides the most inclusive and intelligible explanation for human events and at the level of common sense attempts to explain why the events occurred in this or that manner.

Another convenient way of speaking about descriptions

which exhibit the structure of narratives is that of the whole-parts relationship; or the relationship between individual actions and the larger temporal context in which they reside. For example in Roland Bainton's Erasmus of Christendom, Bainton informs us that: "In May of 1515 he [Erasmus] wrote to Cardinal Riario on behalf of Reuchlin, a man venerable and venerated, of unsullied reputation, esteemed by the Emperor Maximilian, deserving of an abundant harvest from his noble studies in which he is preeminent in Germany."¹ The explanation of why Erasmus wrote on behalf of Reuchlin to the Cardinal Riario is not present in the above description. Provisions for an explanation take form, however, if we examine Bainton's comments which describe more fully the temporal context of Erasmus' action. Bainton informs us that one of the important sub-issues at stake in Luther's Ninety-Five Theses of 1517 was the "continuation of a controversy already well advanced between the humanists and the obscurantists over the question of freedom to pursue the study of Hebrew literature."² Principal characters in the debate were John Reuchlin--a leader in Hebrew studies among Christians--and John Pfefferkorn, a newly converted Jew and zealot for the destruction of all Jewish books. Maximilian fits into the story as it was he who established a committee in

¹R. Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom (N.Y.: Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 151.

²Ibid., p. 151.

order to establish the issues of the debate. Erasmus involved himself because of his designs for an education program which would promote the study of Hebrew through the Collegium Trilingue at Cologne. The larger the temporal context, the more details are highlighted and grasped as having a particular meaningful role in characterizing the overarching temporal framework.

The smaller the temporal context, such as our first mention of Erasmus' letter, the more shallow the explanation, the larger the deeper. The ideal example of narrative understanding could be described as the program of perpetually enlarging the temporal context of the action including within that context all other "variables" that in some way pertain. Ultimately, this is an infinite task which encompasses not only the historical subject's life world and the narrator's life world but also the entire history of all human life worlds. Certainly it is obvious that our brief example is an incomplete interpretation of Erasmus' response to the debate which was ensuing at that time. To explore more fully his career in the church, his work in both ancient and modern languages and his influence upon the universities of his time would further deepen the narrative. A description of the contribution which he made to his period in history and reflection upon the effects of his publications on the history of western civilization would add yet more to the quality of the narrative. By understanding better the period

in which Erasmus lived we understand better his activities within his environment; by understanding his activities better we understand more deeply why the early Enlightenment and Reformation were, to some extent, as they were. By understanding the context we better understand the action and by understanding the action and its consequences we understand the context more fully.

The name "hermeneutic circle" was used by the philosopher-historian Wilhelm Dilthey to describe the movement from part to whole and back again which we saw exhibited in our effort to better understand Erasmus' action of writing a letter. Take for example a sentence. The meaning of a sentence is dependent upon the meanings of individual words yet the meaning of each word is dependent upon its relation to the others in the sentence. In the same way a sentence has meaning as it is placed within a paragraph and the meaning of the paragraph is dependent upon the individual sentences. As with out example of Erasmus' letter, in each case the meaning of the individual term (action, event, word) is better understood and more adequately interpreted as the temporal horizon enlarges.

Dilthey's profundity is evident not only in his being the first to articulate the hermeneutic circle, but further in his position that it was implausible to speak of narrative history without attending to the contribution of the narrator. Bainton states that upon writing his letter in behalf of

Reuchlin ". . . Erasmus made it entirely plain that he was not endorsing Reuchlin's Cabalistic speculations which he regarded as sheer fantasy . . . the cause of Erasmus was clear. He would defend Reuchlin's freedom without endorsing everything for which he stood."¹ Yet those who were contemporaries of Erasmus interpreted his actions in extremely different ways. Bainton states that Erasmus' course of defending Reuchlin on the principle of liberty and particular religious views "drew upon him distrust from both sides."² The Dominicans who attempted to overthrow Reuchlin in favor of Pfefferkorn viewed his act as contemptuous and attempted to suppress his work for the development of languages in the universities while the "lusty young humanists" viewed his actions as a mockery of the Dominican monks and those who tried Reuchlin.³

In both cases due to their own presuppositions and religious or philosophical commitments, the actions of Erasmus were construed differently. Because the narrator or interpreter is likewise involved in a hermeneutical circle, the first being the parts-whole dialectic of the event described by the interpreter, one must therefore speak of the hermeneutic circle characteristic of historical understanding as double. Prior to performing an action, agent (A) has certain past

¹Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom, p. 152.

²Ibid., p. 152.

³Ibid., pp. 132-3.

and future referring assumptions concerning the meaning of the action. At the moment in which (A) performs the action he understands it in a way which may be very different from when he is able, in retrospect, to place his action in a context with other actions and events. This is due to the fact that the action is able to be situated within a context which includes many events that were impossible to anticipate at the time of the performance of the action.

Erasmus at the time when he wrote the letter on behalf of Reuchlin, may have perceived his action as a gesture on behalf of freedom for academic pursuits and especially for the academic affairs of those universities to which he was associated. Later, however, at the time when Luther was engaged in debate with Erasmus' foes, the Dominicans, with the issue of free speech as the central principle in dispute, Erasmus may have looked back upon the small effort of writing a letter on behalf of a fellow scholar as the first step in clarifying what could be considered the central issue of both the Reformation and the Enlightenment; i.e., freedom of expression.

It is clear, therefore, that narrative understanding is concerned not only with the historicity-laden intentionality of the historical subject under historical analysis but also with the historicity-laden intentionality of the narrator or historian. The process involved in achieving narrative understanding, in light of the double hermeneutic, has been

a subject which has concerned recent philosophers of history. We shall discuss briefly the work of two such philosophers, R. G. Collingwood and H. G. Gadamer, who have written impressively on how exactly this process of narrative understanding takes place. We shall begin with Professor Collingwood.

Collingwood, in his classic The Idea of History, maintains that historical understanding has a specific logic of question and answer.¹ The hermeneutic rhythm of question and answer is initiated from within the context of the narrator's pre-understanding, and particularly his pre-understanding of the retrospective whole within which a particular action took place. For instance, in the preface to Bainton's work on Erasmus, Bainton states:

I shall probably never have undertaken this assignment were Erasmus lacking in contemporary relevance. He is important for the dialogue which he desired never to see closed between Catholics and Protestants. He is important for the strategy of reform, violent or non-violent. . . . The more intolerant grew the contenders, the more he recoiled and strove to mediate. He ended as the battered Liberal. Can it ever be otherwise? This is precisely the problem of our time.²

This statement and others like it reveal Bainton's pre-understanding of the world of Roman Catholic and Protestant debate and Erasmus' role as mediator. Further, now that we understand Bainton's pre-understanding of the retrospective

¹R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (N.Y.: Oxford U. Press, 1977), pp. 269-82.

²R. Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom, p. viii.

whole (the context of Erasmus' life and actions) we can understand why he would interpret Erasmus' position with regard to Reuchlin as one which strove for mediation between racist fanaticism on the part of the Dominicans and superstition on the part of Reuchlin. Such an interpretation of the particular act was wholly consistent with his (Bainton's) pre-understanding. (This is not to suggest, however, that Bainton's pre-understanding was not well informed and supported by evidence.)

Though the logic of question and answer begins with pre-understanding on the part of the narrator the particular pre-understanding grows and changes as the questions which the narrator poses become informed by the prospective meaning context of the human event which occurred. With the new information which is gained in response to the narrator's question the original question is reformulated so as to be more specific in its probing to understand better the occurrence itself. A good question is one that leads not only to an initial answer, it is one that also leads on to another specific question, an improved question that leads to an improved answer, and so on.¹

What assumptions is one making concerning the origins of the question answer dialogue when it is proposed that the hermeneutic rhythm of question and answer is initiated from within the context of the narrator's pre-

¹R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, pp. 269-82.

understanding? Questions come into being when what we assume to be the case concerning something and information about the object of our assumptions conflict. At first when the historian initiates his questions toward the historical text, or other various evidences, his questions are deeply imbedded in his own historicity-laden assumptions (both reflective and unreflective) about a particular action or event in the past. That is to say, that the pre-understanding creates or provides us with certain questions as opposed to others. Implicitly, it is also suggesting that "pre-understanding" has itself a narrative structure.¹

A more simplified way of making our point is to say that the initial question which a historian asks about a historical event greatly reflects the historian's own growth as one having a certain pre-understanding and, specifically in this case, training in history as an academic discipline. Not only are such factors relevant in understanding why certain questions are favored over others and why some questions are never formulated by some historians, but also in understanding the factors involved in the selection of one particular question for one particular historical period and not another. This sort of "selectiveness" evidences certain assumptions which the narrator is maintaining about the effectiveness or appropriateness of one period of history to answer his question over against some other epoch. Of

¹Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 337.

course the extent to which our inherited prejudices affect the "selecting" process and the practical effects a biased selecting process has upon the outworking of historical research are complex topics deserving much more space than we have provided. In general, however, we shall call this process of reciprocity whereby the text of human event and the historian interact and make increasingly more specific demands upon each other the hermeneutic of question and answer.

The philosopher H. G. Gadamer has been very influential in developing the notion of what we have thus far referred to as the pre-understanding of the historian. He has in Truth and Method written a great deal on an area which we have already mentioned, namely; the narrative structure of "pre-understanding."¹ True to both Dilthey and Collingwood (at Collingwood's finer moments), Gadamer argues persuasively for the historicity-laden character of every effort to achieve understanding of the inherent teleology within human events, actions, literary texts or aesthetic objects.² Like Heidegger before him, Gadamer links the intentional relations between persons and the world with temporality through the historicity-laden structure of language. Our understanding of the world, he maintains, is determined by our intentional relations with it. This relation however has a fore-structure

¹Gadamer, Truth and Method.

²Collingwood, The Idea of History, pp. 236-7.

of concepts which are rooted in the language we learn and employ as we grow toward death. We are "thrown" into the world and the world into which we have been thrown is fundamentally linguistic. In this "linguistic world" which composes a particular world view or tradition of approaching the world and which exists at a certain period in history, we are equipped with the means to understand our environment.

What an-other's action means is interpreted, says Gadamer, by the narrator within the context of the narrator's own historically situated perspective and with the conceptual "gear" of that particular changing-growing-horizon. It is thus impossible to offer a purely objective, atemporal, transcendent or prejudice-free description of what "actually" took place. This shall be argued more extensively in our discussion on distanciation.

An interesting question which we cannot take up in this thesis is whether or not is is adequate to describe the life-worlds or traditions into which we are "thrown" involuntarily as "fundamentally linguistic." Is it not the case that involved in membership in any particular tradition of approaching one's world are included many non-linguistic emotions, perceptions and experiences, or, at minimum, ones which are not primarily linguistic? An extensive study of the development of hermeneutic philosophy and especially the differences between the 20th Century French and German traditions would be informative concerning this question.

Two Important Issues

At this juncture in our discussion there are two important issues which should be elaborated more fully. First, Gadamer distinguishes between an interpretation giving rise to a genuine understanding from one blindly biased by one's own prejudiced pre-understanding. This distinction, of course, will require that we discuss briefly not only the differences between an authentic and an illegitimate interpretation but also the larger issue of connaturality: namely, that narrative understanding is possible even when the pre-understanding of the historian is radically different from the perspective represented in the text or action under study. Second, most hermeneutic thinkers fail to distinguish explicitly between the historical chronicle, which is often construed as exemplifying a mode of understanding, with describing the "actual" events which occurred and the historical narrative produced as an interpretation of the historical events in accordance with the structures of the agent (intentionality, teleology and temporality). It shall therefore be of interest to us to examine why this distinction is suspect by various philosophers. We shall continue by discussing each of these issues in the order in which they have been introduced.

Authentic and Illegitimate Interpretations (Connaturality)

Gadamer makes the point that "Alles Verstehen is Auslegung:" all understanding is interpretation.¹ Yet he also maintains that there is a difference between an interpretation which actually refers to and dialogues with an other (be it a text, person or action), and a pseudo-form of understanding which manipulates the meaning of the object of historical interest without any actual reference to the object itself. Gadamer supports the position that there is such a thing as an illegitimate interpretation. An illegitimate interpretation would occur when the historian or narrator imposes upon the object of historical interest the conceptual structures of his own pre-understanding without any genuine effort to dialogue with the "other." In so doing the historian avoids confrontation with the actual historical object with which dialogue may in fact imply a meaning substantially different from the one imposed upon it. The interpreter's failure to interpret the object or event under analysis in a manner appropriate for the ontological structures evident in the object, is correspondingly a failure by the interpreter to render a legitimate interpretation. The principle proof or evidence which Gadamer employs to bolster the distinction between an authentic and an inauthentic or illegitimate interpretation is that the dialogue

¹D. Hoy, The Critical Circle: Literary, Historical and Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley: U. of Cal. Press, 1978), p. 51.

between the historical subject and object can in fact and at times does have the effect that genuine alterations are made in the position held by the historian. It is wholly different in the case of the historian who, blind to the object's ontological structure, manipulates the meaning of the action in order to make it consonant with the assumptions of his tradition. In this case absolutely no alteration of viewpoint is required or expected on the part of the narrator. Gadamer concludes that in actual practice the interpretive dialogue between the narrator and the historical object is one which ever fluctuates between an emphasis on the fore-structured, pre-understanding received through tradition and the legitimate understanding achieved when the narrator confronts the ontological structures of the object and subsequently is compelled to alter his position in correlation with the information presented. The degree to which the narrator fluctuates between these two poles of emphasis would be critical in evaluating the authenticity of the interpretation produced.

Of course, one argument against Gadamer's "validation" of an authentic interpretation is that one could alter one's hermeneutic approach toward an historical object, in response to the ontological status of that particular "other," and yet be no closer to ascertaining a more correct interpretation than before such alterations. Such an argument is effective in case either that: 1) the adjustments which the interpreter

has made in his interpretation are mistaken and fail to correspond to the specific ontological structure of the object, or, more seriously, 2) that the entire subordination of epistemology to ontology is an erroneous philosophical position. Such a position maintains that the ontological status of the subject of inquiry prescribes itself how it is to be understood and that epistemology or hermeneutics must be the subordinate effort responsibly to develop a way of interpreting the meaning of the human world as subject matter. To attempt to deal systematically with the latter argument would require a second thesis beyond this one. We shall, however, take up an aspect of the question in our upcoming study of "distanciation" or critical distance, in this chapter. With regards to the first argument, we can affirm the possibility of error in the hermeneutic approach and simply reply that in reaction to such error corrections can and should be made.

Gadamer maintains that authentic interpretation (i.e., narrative understanding) can be attained regardless of apparent differences in the pre-understanding of the narrator and the historical object. This is due to the fact that the generic structures of intentionality, teleology and temporality are shared by all human beings. At the same time, Gadamer states in Truth and Method, that he opposes the thesis of connaturality. Such a thesis maintains that in order for genuine understanding to take place, there must be specific shared

ontological structures between the interpreter and that which is interpreted. His rejection of connaturality is quite explicit in the following quote:

It is quite mistaken to base the possibility of understanding a text on a postulate of 'connaturality' that supposedly unites the creator and the interpreter of a work. If this were really the case, then the human sciences would be in a bad way. The miracle of understanding, rather, consists in the fact that no connaturality is necessary to recognize what is really fundamentally meaningful in a tradition. We are able to open ourselves to the superior claim¹ the text makes and respond to what it has to tell us.

In rejecting the thesis on connaturality Gadamer illegitimizes his thesis that interpreters are able to "open themselves" and "recognize what is really significant and fundamentally meaningful" in the object he is interpreting. He illegitimizes his thesis unless it can be shown, which it easily can, that Gadamer is rejecting one articulation of connaturality in favor of a better one. The form which he is rejecting is precisely that of Schleiermacher's. The factor which makes interpretation possible, according to this schema, is the capacity of the interpreter to rediscover the subjectivity of the author and his intended meanings in the text or event itself. Gadamer rejects the identification of connaturality with the claimed capacity of the interpreter to be re-united with the author on account of some shared subjectivity. And certainly Gadamer is well justified in rejecting such a representation of connaturality. Implicit

¹Gadamer, Truth and Method.

in his description of the "miracle of understanding" is a redefinition of the process by which understanding between the very different occurs. This redescription suggests that it is possible for understanding to take place even amidst extreme differences between the narrator and the historical object under study. Narrative understanding is accomplished when a common language is established between persons (agents) sharing the common structures of existence; namely intentionality, teleology and temporality. By common language we mean something far more primary than "English" or "Portuguese" (though, Olafson notes that many times, when natural languages fail to be shared between the historian and the historical object, translation is possible through the establishment of equivalences).¹ The deeper point is this, "When a historian addresses himself to the past . . . the guiding assumption is that here too a common language--a shared vocabulary of action descriptions exists, or that it can be brought into being through a process of semantic adjustments within the language the historian uses himself."²

The Narrative Structure of Chronicles

It should not be surprising, considering the development of narrative understanding, that neither Gadamer, nor we ourselves, shall support the position that "there is something

¹Olafson, Dialectic of Action, pp. 218-9.

²Ibid., pp. 218-9.

one might call a pure description in contrast with something else called an interpretation."¹ Collingwood characterizes this position as historical study under the direct influence of philosophical positivism. The positivist historians maintain, says Collingwood, that interpretations require laws and philosophical assumptions, whereas all that is necessary in order to understand history is the collection of facts which have taken place in time.² According to Collingwood, the positivistic historian adopts two rules of methodology for doing history.

1. Each fact is to be regarded as a thing capable of being ascertained by a separate act of cognition or process of research.
2. Each fact is to be thought of not only as independent of all the rest but as independent of the knower, so that all subjective elements (as they were called) in the historian's point of view had to be eliminated. The historian must pass no judgement on the facts: he must only say what they are.³

The adoption of the first rule, early in the century when it was initially employed, had the effect of dicing up the entire

¹A. Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1965), p. 115.

²Collingwood, The Idea of History, p. 131.

³Ibid., p. 131.

field of the historically knowable into an infinite number of singular facts each to be separately analyzed. By implication, no historical research was considered important or serious if it did not deal with either some one particular microscopic issue or at most a set of microscopic issues.¹

Mommsen was perhaps the greatest of the positivist historians and the one who in his work best exemplifies the effects of the first hypothesis. Adoption of the second rule above implies the restriction of historical study to the realm of external events. This is of course merely a restatement of the principle of extensionality which we discussed in chapter one. The principle of extensionality requires that the validity of an explanation and the truth claims of its premises cannot be contingent upon either the manner in which the event is described or descriptions that incorporate a reference to the end state the occurrence of which is to be explained. The weakness of the second rule was pointed out when it was examined in light of intensionality.

The great shortcoming of the positivistic historians is that they never really asked the fundamental epistemological question "how is historical knowledge possible?" The conception of dealing with the facts and nothing but the facts may (perhaps) be legitimate in the natural sciences wherein prediction and the reproduction of evidence via experimentation is possible. Let us leave to one side the

¹Collingwood, The Idea of History, p. 131.

positivist view of natural science. However, prediction and the reproduction of evidence is foreign to historical study. In the end, the positivistic historians, though praiseworthy for the exacting and informative research which helped historical studies get back to the events themselves as opposed to grand historicist schemes, have relied on a false analogy between "facts" of the natural sciences and the "facts" of historical understanding.

A view which developed as an offshoot of historical positivism, when it became apparent that doing history was more than "pure description" of events in time was presented in the historical writings and philosophy of W. H. Walsh.¹ This particular position, distinguished between the role and function of the chronicler and the historical narrative. It maintains that it is the job of the chronicler to 'just give descriptions of events,' and it is left up to the historian (though in fact the historian may perform both the function of the chronicler and the narrator) to interpret the descriptions of past events and produce from them some semblance of a narrative account. But again, concerning this view's representation of the function of the chronicler, we must ask the same question; namely, whatever can it mean just to give an account of what happened and nothing more than that?

In his text Introduction to Philosophy of History,

¹W. H. Walsh, Introduction to Philosophy of History (London: Hutchinsons U. Library, 1951).

Walsh presents the position which we have just articulated.¹ According to him, history qua chronicle merely records events which have occurred, while history qua narrative interprets them. The project of the former is pure description, of the latter responsible interpretation which is faithful to the facts. Walsh states concerning these two possibilities for historical study, the following:

The first is that the historian confines himself (or should confine himself) to an exact description of what happened, constructing what might be called a plain narrative of past events. The other is that he goes beyond such a plain narrative, and aims not merely at saying what happened, but also (in some sense) explaining it.²

Take note that we have substituted the word 'chronicle' for Walsh's term and 'historical narrative' for the action which Walsh refers to as 'explaining' the events under scrutiny. Also take note that both the positivistic historians and Walsh imply that narrative understanding, as we have developed it thus far in this chapter, is not the most fundamental sort of coherent knowledge possible for the interpreter concerned with the meaning of human actions. Is it possible, however, for them (Walsh and the positivistic historians) to speak on one level about mere events and on another about the interpretation of events as if these two processes were totally distinct? Is there such a thing as an interpretation-

31. ¹Walsh, Introduction to Philosophy of History, p.

²Ibid., p. 31.

free fact? In order to answer these questions we shall need to return to an examination of Walsh's position as represented above, and, more specifically, discuss the notions of chronicle and narrative in order to find out how exactly they are similar and different.

In order to discuss more critically Walsh's comments above, we need to set forth two apparently necessary conditions of any narrative or chronicle. First, the piece must report events which have already happened. Second, this same piece must present them in their proper chronological order, or, at least, enable us to tell in what order the events actually occurred.¹ These two components may provide the necessary conditions for both a chronicle and a narrative, but they fail to provide the sufficient conditions for a chronicle to be accepted (or a narrative for that matter) as a piece of informative history. For example, the following chronicle, though informative in some small way, is so minimally informative that it is useless to the historian whose work it is to produce a narrative account.

1. "In 1501 Sir Thomas Moore became a barrister."²
2. "Morgan City was founded in 1850."³
3. In 1934, Henry Morgenthau Jr. became Secretary of the U.S. Treasury.⁴

¹Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History, p. 117.

²Encyclopedia Britanica, 15th ed., s.v. "Thomas Moore."

³Ibid., s.v. "Morgan City."

⁴Ibid., s.v. "Henry Morgenthau Jr."

Though clearly a chronology, it is obvious that beside the first two components we have delineated, a third must be included if it is to be employed by the historian; that the chronicle must necessarily explain what happened.

But that a chronicle which fulfills all three of these conditions can still fall short of what is necessary for a chronicle to be useful to the historian--i.e., an informative chronicle--is easily demonstrated.

1. In 1571 Sultan Selim II contributed to the Ottoman decision to attack Cyprus because of his hatred for Venice.¹
2. Alwin Nikolaïs studied dance with Truda Kaschman around 1935.²
3. In 1983 M. Patrice Farley baked bread at her home in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

Though in a sense, implicit in the development of the notion of narrative understanding we could say that ultimately all three event-explanation accounts above could be linked together in one great ideal narrative, the three criteria which we have established cannot be said to constitute sufficient conditions for an informative chronicle which would be useful in the actual practice or writing historical narrative.

Experiencing his own difficulties in distinguishing plain narrative (informative chronicles) from chronicles which explain events (historical narrative), Walsh in the same Introduction to Philosophy of History is compelled to

¹Encyclopedia Britanica, s.v. "Sultan Selim II."

²Ibid., s.v. "Alwin Nikolaïs."

call upon Ranke, the famous positivist historian, for assistance. Responding to this compulsion, Walsh, as we shall see, only serves to weaken his case. Walsh states "that chronicles have as their purpose to report in the famous phrase of Ranke's 'precisely what happened' and leave the matter at that."¹ In order to make a point, though at the expense of both Walsh and Ranke, let's take the phrase above literally and squeeze it for all its worth or lack thereof.

Literally, Walsh and Ranke could be interpreted as maintaining that the properly functioning chronicle is one which not only provides an account of a "happening," but one which mentions everything that took place at that particular happening. Not only does such a conception of chronicle fail for its lack of any limiting schema whereby one "happening" is distinguished from every other, but also for its failure to qualify exactly what type of information is informative for providing an account of a "happening." With regards to the latter criticism, the failure to 'set limits,' as it were, on the sort of information that contributes to the description of a "happening" results in what we might call a "criteria-less chronicle." Danto, below, provides a delightful example of Walsh's and Ranke's "criteria-less" chronicle.

¹Walsh, Introduction to Philosophy of History, p. 32.

Suppose I wish to know what happened at a court trial. I may ask my informant to leave nothing out, to tell me all. But I should be dismayed if, in addition to telling me of the speeches of the attorneys, the emotional attitude of the litigants, the behavior of the judge, he were to tell me how many flies were in the courtroom, and show me a complicated map of the precise orbits in which they flew. A vast tangle of epicycles. Or mention all the coughs and sneezes. The story would be submerged in all these details. I can imagine him saying: 'At this point a fly lighted upon the rail of the writers box.' For I would expect something odd to follow: the witness screams displaying a weird phobia. Or a brilliant attorney takes this as an occasion for a splendid forensic display (As this fly, ladies and gentlemen...). Or in trying to brush him away a bottle of ink gets spilled over a critical piece of evidence. Whatever the case, I shall want to know: what about the fly?

If, however, as was the case with Danto's informer, there is no "what about" as concerns the fly, that, in fact, it was mentioned only because it was one of the many things which occurred over the span of the trial, then the above uninformative chronicle is of no value in understanding what took place at the trial.²

Based upon the arguments presented, a distinction shall be made which Walsh, in both his original quote and in the second quote above, failed to make: namely, a distinction between the chronicle and the informative chronicle. As it turns out, the type of historical literature which is produced in the attempt to take literally the injunction by both Walsh and the positivist historians (merely record events!"), is uninformative to the historian and criteria-

¹Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History, p. 131.

²Ibid., p. 131.

less. Informative chronicles, however, are a different story. The objective of the informative chronicle is to supply a report of events, relevant for the particular "happening" under study, with a minimum of interpretation taking place. With that said concerning the objective of the informative chronicle, we shall make no attempt to minimize the presence, within the informative chronicle itself, of the structures reflecting intentionality, teleology and temporality. Structures which in subtle ways order the potential randomness.

Without compulsion to specify exactly how informative chronicles and narratives differ, we can nonetheless affirm that the suspicion with which hermeneutic philosophers have dealt with various positivist conceptions of chronicles has been well founded. As a minimal characterization we shall say that the informative chronicle is structured in such a way that it is enabled to present coherent data for the emplotment of the narrative historian. Those organizational structures or employments often place special emphasis on one particular event or series of events and describe the remaining events of the sequence (those chronologically antecedent as well as those which follow afterwards) in direct reference to its occurrence.

An excellent example of the informative chronicle is found in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea. In the third and early fourth centuries (A.D.), he set forth in his

Chronicles, a chronicle wherein all significant events at the time were structured within a single chronological framework.¹ The framework of the chronicle had as its basis the birth of Christ, as opposed to the other chronicles of his period which were dated in accordance with Olympiads or the other events in Rome. Later in his life, Eusebius composed another work called Praeparatio Evangelica in which he produced a very simple narrative (almost like what we have referred to as an informative chronicle) of a world history that has as its structuring theme the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.² All historical events recorded here are shaped in relation to the theme of the Incarnation.

Of course, an even more subtle informative chronicle with which we are all familiar and which clearly bears the mark of an organizational structure, is our current calendar. The birth of Christ is the horizontal point from which all of history past, present and future is, in the very act of dating, interpreted.

Hayden White, in his analysis of the historical narrative provides a model which we can adapt to illustrate the point we are making about informative chronicles. He suggests in this model that too often what has been characterized as objective, non-manipulated chronologies that simply record what actually happened, "are themselves

¹Eusebius Pamphili, The Ecclesiastical History (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1973-5).

²Ibid.

linguistically ordered in such a way that subtle relations between events are established which only later are made explicit by the historian."¹ White's first illustration provides an example which typifies the positivist understanding of chronicles.

Thus we have the set of events,

1. a, b, c, d, e, . . . , N²

However, as we have said, this is seldom an adequate example of the emplotments which take place in informative chronicles. Sentences (2-6) illustrate more accurately the structural content of the chronicle.

2) A, b, c, d, e, . . . , N

3) a, B, c, d, e, . . . , N

4) a, b, C, d, e, . . . , N

5) a, b, c, D, e, . . . , N

6) a, b, c, d, E, . . . , N³

Those letters which are capitalized indicate an event (or set of events), within the chronicle, which are given the status by which they are empowered with explanatory force. White continues in his explanation of how such informative chronicles would "work themselves out" if a historian were to base his narrative upon these particular skeletal accounts.

¹H. White, Tropics of Discourse (Baltimore: John Hopkins U. Press, 1978), p. 92.

²Ibid., p. 92.

³Ibid., p. 92.

We might say that any history (historical narrative) which endows any putatively original event (a) with the status of a decisive factor (A) in the structuration of the whole series of events following after it is "deterministic." The emplotments of the history of "society" by Rousseau in his Second Discourse, Marx in the Manifesto, and Freud in the Totem and Taboo would fall in this category. So too, any history which endows the last event in the series (e), whether real or only speculatively projected, with the force of full explanatory power (E) is the type of all eschatological or apocalyptic histories. St. Augustine's City of God and the various versions of the Joachite notion of the advent of a millenium, Hegel's Philosophy of History, and, in general, all Idealist (in the Utopian sense) histories are of this sort. In between we would have the various forms . . . [all of which] . . . endow the series¹ with a perceivable form and conceivable "meaning."

In the case, therefore, of both the (our) Christian calendric form and the various literary structures which chronicles employ to order events, are evident the components of narrative understanding that we have been discussing; i.e., intentionality, teleology and temporality. Obvious in informative chronicle, as in narrative, are the intentional relations between events listed in the chronological sequence as well as the intentional relations between the chronicle itself and its author. In the same way the temporal references both backward and forward in time between the agent(s) actions and the objects(s) (as the case may be), and, also, the historicity-laden character of the chronicler is evident. Finally in both the chronicle record and the act of chronicling itself a teleological structure is

¹White, Tropics of Discourse, p. 93.

present.

Whether one would wish to commit himself to White's reduction of all possible linguistic structures for the composition of chronicles (and narratives for that matter) to those of a distinctively "fictional" sort (Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, Satire), or, whether one would be compelled to admit that chronicles are necessarily composed by means of any specific linguistic techniques, is not the real issue at this juncture in our discussion. Rather, the central point is that, contrary to the positivist misconstrual of chronicle, as the objective presentation of the actual event evident in the structure and composition of any informative chronicle the same three features that are fundamental to narrative, namely intentionality, teleology, and temporality.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Gadamer fails to single out chronicle as a form of historical understanding that objectively describes "real" events. This is not to say no distinctions exist which differentiate understanding reflected in the writing of chronicles and narratives. However, such distinctions, especially between the informative chronicle and the narrative, are far more minimal than may have been previously assumed. More important that distinguishing, or should we say failing to distinguish, in any significant way between the type of understanding involved in writing an informative chronicle and a narrative is the consequent position we have arrived at concerning the

possibility of a non-narrative understanding of human events. Implicit in our conclusion concerning the extension of narrative understanding to the arena of chronicle composition is the assumption that there is no such state or place called "objective distance" in narrative understanding. This point harkens all the way back to Abel's criticism of Verstehen that its failure to be useful in historical study was due to its failure to provide some sort of critical distance between the historian and historical object. "Critical distance" or "distanciation" implies the notion of the ontological capacity of the historian or social scientist to stand apart from the object and thus speak objectively concerning its meaning. Because of the seriousness of this assumption let us now discuss in more detail some of the epistemic and ontological issues involved in such a claim. We shall be forced to limit our discussion, unfortunately, to the most recent debate between J. Habermas and H. G. Gadamer concerning the subject of distanciation.

Distanciation

The issue of "critical instance" or "distanciation" has become a major concern in recent years for philosophers in the social sciences. In the project of interpreting social meanings can we speak of a conceptual apparatus which enables the interpreter to stand apart from the subject being interpreted? Is there such a place or state called "objective

distance" in narrative understanding? Is there in fact a need for "objective distance" in understanding social meanings? Or, are interpreters, in fact all persons, bound to a finite understanding which includes the assumption of a particular tradition or pre-understanding for one's evaluation of the world? Such questions as these set the stage for the classic clash between H. G. Gadamer and J. Habermas. In order to come to grips epistemologically with the implications of our articulation of narrative understanding, we shall attempt to review the hermeneutical theory of Gadamer in contrast with that of Habermas. In the discussion which is to follow the limiting theme shall be the problem of distanciation.

The point of conflict between J. Habermas and H. G. Gadamer has often been characterized as the conflict between enlightenment, emancipatory reflection and romantic historicism. Gadamer is not particularly fond of this characterization. The main reason for his dissatisfaction lies in what he conceives to be a false antithesis between reason and authority. "Reflection," maintains Gadamer, "is not always and unavoidably a step towards dissolving prior convictions."¹ Such a position grants reflection a power far beyond its capacities. In his text Truth and Method, Gadamer makes the following claim:

It is true that it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is based ultimately,

¹H. G. Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics (Berkeley: Univ. of Cal. Press, 1977), p. 33.

not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on acceptance and recognition--recognition, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, i.e., it has priority over one's own. . . . [authority] rests on consideration and hence on an act of reason itself which is aware of its own limitation, accepts that others have better understanding. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience; it rests on recognition.¹

The "power of authority" has nothing to do, according to Gadamer, with force or blind faith but rather with its capacity to provide more mature, reasonable and informed judgments. In acknowledging tradition as the fundamental source of values he is not in any way opposing tradition or authority to reason. As he states "preservation is as much a freely chosen action as revolution and renewal."² A tradition is rather a battery of values, commitments, beliefs and the entirety of influences upon one's self and one's culture, which must be tested, doubted, and compared with values from other traditions and then modified when necessary. A tradition, like a collective pre-understanding, is something which must be consciously and unconsciously grasped and maintained. Though in ideal terms there is one great narrative which is discovered at the conclusion of the infinite question-answer dialogue, in actuality we find ourselves in

¹Gadamer, Truth and Method, p. 248.

²Ibid., p. 25.

a world filled with traditions different from our own.

Gadamer posits hermeneutics as the subordination of epistemology to ontology. Against Habermas' critical distanciation he "does not simply plead the advantages of tradition; he argues that participation in a cultural heritage is a condition of possibility of all thought, including critical reflection."¹ He argues further that in order to call into question a tradition, one in which the questioner himself dwells, one presupposes and furthers its life. Reflection is every bit as contextually dependent as any other human action or mode of thought. Gadamer's claim of hermeneutics to universality is grounded in the view that:

Understanding and coming to an understanding do not refer primarily or originally to a methodically trained behavior towards texts; rather they are in the form in which the social life of men is carried out, a social life which--rendered formally--is community in dialogue. Nothing is excepted from this community, no experience of the world whatsoever.²

As T. McCarthy so lucidly states: "Gadamer's universalization of hermeneutics rests on a logical argument against the possibility of methodologically transcending the hermeneutic point of view. Any attempt to do so is inconsistent with the very conditions of the possibility of understanding."³

Against emancipatory methodologies Gadamer maintains

¹T. McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas (Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1978), p. 187.

²Gadamer

³McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p. 193.

the inescapability of historical efficacy. Because human being is situated in historical process it is impossible for us to distance ourselves from one place in the process so as to examine the past objectively. Ricoeur suggests that "... [Gadamer's] concept of effective history belongs to an ontology of finitude. It plays the same role as the 'thrown object' and the 'situation' play in Heidegger's ontology."¹ Such an ontology of finitude means both that there is no position of overview which provides an objective or complete picture, and, on the other hand, there is also no such thing as a situation with no view at all. Any time there is a situation there are horizons present which are able to expand or contract.²

The hermeneutic experience, says Gadamer, is neither an objective nomological science nor is it the dialectical absolute knowledge of a universal history. Rather, as based upon the model of human conversation it could be referred to as dialogical. Not unlike conversation, hermeneutical dialogue involves an equal and reciprocal relationship between interpreter and text (or object). As conversations are always about something, the dialogue likewise assumes that a common question joins the two together. As D. E. Linge states:

¹P. Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1981), p. 74.

²Ibid., p. 74.

. . . The hermeneutical conversation begins when the interpreter genuinely opens himself to the text by listening to it and allowing it to assert its viewpoint. It is precisely in contrasting the otherness of the text--in having its challenging viewpoint--and not in preliminary methodological self-purgations, that the reader's own prejudice (i.e., his present horizons) are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self consciousness.

. . . collisions with the other's horizons make us aware of assumptions so deep rooted that they would otherwise remain unnoticed. This awareness of our own historicity and finitude--our consciousness of effective history--brings with it an openness to new possibilities that is the precondition of genuine understanding.¹

A dialogue is the agreement between two parties who are from unique horizons (i.e., they accept unique authorities) to place themselves in the other's point of view and confront themselves with their present horizon and prejudices. It is only in the tension between an other and myself that prejudice becomes operative and vulnerable for evaluation.

The universality of hermeneutics and dialogical evaluation--as opposed to critical distanciation--go together. Unlike Habermas interpreting subject who is capable of distancing himself from his own ontological situation, Gadamer presents human being as a being who dwells in the environment into which it has been thrown. The "throwness" of human being cannot be transcended completely by reflection or methodologies of any objective sort. Rather, bit by bit via ongoing conversation with persons thrown into other horizontal vantages the person is empowered rationally to

¹Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. XXII.

compare, test, and if found justifiable, reject elements of his own tradition in favor of the superiority of another. Habermas maintains that critical theory provides the individual with an emancipatory methodology whereby he is able to transcend completely his horizon through reflection. Against such a position Gadamer maintains that "the reflecting subject takes for granted a host of concepts, judgments, principles and standards that are not themselves made thematic; he cannot call everything into question all at once." He thus concludes . . . "Habermas ascribes to reflection a power that it could only have on ideal premises."¹

Another device which Gadamer employs both to illuminate the character of interpretation and to criticize the subject--object dichotomy in the process of human understanding is the "game." In a game the participants, the players, are absorbed in the "back-and-forth" action. That there are rules and procedures of the game of which the player is aware does not preclude that the player is aware of himself as "merely playing." In fact, says Gadamer, the player that cannot, while fully aware of the rules, become fully involved --selflessly involved--in the game is referred to as a "spoil sport." A "spoil sport" cannot play a game. If one had to choose the real subject of play it would be the game itself for ". . . what is essential to the phenomenon of play is not so much the particular goal [a certain answer achieved] but

¹ McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p. 187.

the dynamic back and forth movement [numerous finite interpretations] in which the players are caught up--that the movement itself specifies how the goal will be reached."¹

The hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur who has over the course of the Habermas-Gadamer debate attempted to mediate between their positions, has written an essay on the subject of the similarities between interpreting a text and a human action. He states, on behalf of Gadamer's position, that the action or text-as-game liberates, autonomizes the text from any one set absolute interpretation. Like the game, each textual interpretation lives in its dialogue with the reader or interpreter. The infinite varieties of game experiences, or interpretations, is not to say that each is a product of subjective projection, but instead reflects the inexhaustibility of a text's possibilities. We will return to Ricoeur's ideas in the next chapter and at that time clear up what Ricoeur means by the "autonomy" of the text.

In the end--at least as far as this quick overview takes us--Gadamer identifies prejudice and horizontal finitude as more characteristic of human being and understanding than Habermas' ontology, which supports a notion of human being as capable of objective (distanced) judgments.

Language is the foundation of human understanding, it

¹Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. XXIII.

is the world in which human being dwells. The entire notion which Habermas presents, which we shall now turn to, that there is a social reality "that does not bring itself to representation in a consciousness that is linguistically articulated" is to Gadamer absurd.¹ As Gadamer puts it "reality does not happen behind the back" of language; it happens rather behind the back of those who live in the subjective opinion that they have understood 'the world' (or can no longer understand it); that is, reality happens precisely within language."²

Habermas' central dictum against Gadamer is that the social sciences cannot be reduced to Verstehenden sociology. In the tradition of Dilthey, Gadamer's hermeneutics reduces the social sciences to merely the discovery and articulation of meaning. Hermeneutics does not relegate all meaning to subjective, intentional meaning but as a result of making the language of tradition the "all-encompassing," Gadamer, sublimates the interpretation of "transmitted meanings."³ Habermas' own position maintains that "social action can only be comprehended in an objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labour and power

¹Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics, p. 35.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p. 183.

[or domination]."¹ The meanings of tradition burst beyond the dimensions which Gadamer sets when culture is rightly viewed as a complex of social, economic and political conditions. And if one does view culture in this light, Habermas suggests, traditional meanings, one discovers, can be vehicles for both revelation and expression as well as concealment and distortion. Habermas states it this way:

The objectivity of a 'happening of tradition' that is made up of symbolic meaning is not objective enough. Hermeneutics comes up against walls of the traditional framework from the inside, as it were. As soon as these boundaries have been experienced and recognized, cultural traditions can no longer be posed as absolute. It makes good sense to conceive of language as a kind of meta-institution on which all institutions are dependent; for social action is constituted only in ordinary language communication. But this meta-institution (language as tradition) is evidently dependent in turn on social processes that are not exhausted in narrative relationships. Language is also a medium of domination and social power. It serves to legitimate relations of organized force. In so far as the legitimations do not articulate the relations of force that they make possible, in so far as these relations are merely expressed in the legitimations, language is also ideological. Here it is not a question of deceptions within language, but of deception with language as well. Hermeneutic experience that encounters this dependency of the symbolic framework on actual conditions changes into the critique of ideology.²

The distortion of language does not come simply from language usage as such, but from the relations of language, power and labour. These distortions are unrecognizable to the members of, or interpreters within a particular language community.

¹J. Habermas, Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften (Frankfort: Subkamp. Verlag, 1970), p. 287.

²Ibid., p. 287.

Such distortions can be unveiled and analyzed phenomenologically, holds Habermas, only through appealing to the conceptual apparatus of a psychoanalytic sort: "To illusion as distinct from error, to projection as the constitution of a false transcendence, to rationalization as the subsequent rearrangement of motivations according to the appearance of a rational justification." As opposed to the hermeneutical form "misunderstanding," linguistic distortion in the critical social sciences is referred to as "systematically distorted communication."¹

Gadamer's dialogical model, Habermas maintains, because it so absolutizes the individual within his/her linguistic tradition, is incapable of surmounting the "systematically distorted communication" which the individual speaks and lives. The dissolution of ideology, therefore, can only be accomplished through the employment of procedures which focus not only on understanding but are also concerned with criticism. Such procedures employ methodological apparatus which is underivable from a hermeneutics of ordinary language. Rather, "such a theoretical apparatus must develop a system of reference that transcends tradition by systematically accounting for the empirical conditions under which tradition develops and changes."² Paul Ricoeur in the

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 84.

²McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Junger Habermas, p. 183.

essay "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" paraphrases Habermas with the following, which nicely summarizes Habermas' critique of Gadamer and the relationship between critical methodologies and hermeneutics:

The understanding of meaning requires the detour of a reconstruction of the processes of desymbolization, which psychoanalysis retraces in the inverse direction along the routes of resymbolization. So psychoanalysis is not completely external to hermeneutics, since it can be expressed in terms of desymbolization and resymbolization; but rather it constitutes a limit--experience, in virtue of the explanatory force linked to the reconstruction of the primitive scene. In other words, to understand the what of the symptom, it is necessary to explain its why. This explanatory phase invokes a theoretical apparatus, which establishes the conditions of possibility of explanation and reconstruction: topographical concepts (the three agencies and the three roles), the economic concepts (the defense mechanism, primary and secondary regression, splitting off), genetic concepts (the famous stages and successive phases of symbol organization) . . . The metaphychology concludes Habermas, can be founded only as a meta-hermeneutics.¹

Gadamer's objection to this program, which is repeated over and over in his "debate" essays focuses on Habermas' contention that hermeneutics must be superceded by the critique of ideology due to the existence of systematically distorted communication. Gadamer avidly opposes Habermas' insistence on establishing a false antithesis between understanding as the affirmation of horizontal prejudice and critical reflection as the emancipation from such traditional limitations. For Gadamer, ideology is accessible within the finitude of hermeneutical understanding.

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 85.

Hermeneutics, without needing to employ the crutches of psychoanalysis and other social science apparatus, provides a quality of understanding which involves the rational criticism and rejection of unjustifiable bias or prejudices as well as the recognition of justified authority.

It is Ricoeur's position that the differences between Habermas and Gadamer are not as great as supposed. He, like Gadamer, proposes that the "goals" of ideological critique, i.e., the critical analysis of systematically distorted communication, can be accomplished via a well articulated hermeneutic. He also propounds, in critique of his fellow hermeneutic philosopher, that Gadamer has been lax in expanding or enlarging upon his notions of interpretation as "game" and "the text as a world in dialogue with the interpreter." In his essays "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" and "Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation" Ricoeur attempts to construct a critical hermeneutic based upon the nature of the Literary Text. In chapter three we shall discuss in detail Ricoeur's hermeneutic developments not only as concerns the problem of distanciation, but also his application of narrative understanding to the biblical text.

Before concluding, it may be helpful to summarize the arguments presented in behalf of hermeneutics against critical theory. 1) Habermas fails to recognize sufficiently the finitude of reflection. As temporally bound, reflection

is never able fully to purge itself of prejudgements attained through tradition. 2) Garamer maintains that Habermas is incorrect when he speaks of the "real" conditions which shape language as the conditions "behind language." Language, he maintains, is not a dimension of society but the "universal medium" of social existence. Labour, power, and technology are not behind but rather mediated through language. 3) The assumption that the existence of systematically distorted communication is inaccessible to hermeneutical understanding is an incorrect and unnecessary assumption. Hermeneutic philosophy is able to bridge the chasm of miscommunication via semantic adjustments as mentioned earlier in our discussion of connaturality. 4) Even the very notion of the critique of ideology is based in a clear tradition and is not emancipatory at all. It is based in the tradition of the Enlightenment. 5) Finally, Habermas establishes a false antinomy between reminiscence (tradition) and hope (emancipation). Eschatology, however, is vacuous without the tradition of the past with its studies of the great acts of deliverance.¹

Let us, at this time, recall prior to beginning chapter three, the progression which our discussion has thus far made. In the first chapter we attempted to work out the design of an ontology that was responsive to the structures

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 100.

of human action. These structures consisted of intentionality, teleology and temporality. Based upon those ontological structures of human actions, in chapter two a notion of narrative understanding was developed. As has been said before, narrative understanding is the development of a hermeneutic of human action which corresponds to the ontological makeup of human being and action. In that it is principally the historian's task to interpret the meanings of human actions in past history, we did have occasion to note the extreme similarity between the interpretation of, say, "neighbor (N) who cut and ignited logs on that particular inclement day," and the action by Erasmus of writing a letter. Even though in the former case we were dealing with the interpretation of a (supposed) actual event and in the other strictly with historical texts, in both cases the same ontological structures were evident. Further, because those same structures were evident, it appears to be the case that the process of understanding both actions and texts take the form of narrative description or interpretation.

In the chapter which is to follow, we shall examine the plausibility of the following two hypotheses. First, because understanding human action takes the form of a narrative description (which is in fact a specific literary genre), it follows that the process of understanding a human action is modelled or best typified by the process of interpreting a narrative text. Second, since at its most

basic level, the Scriptures of the Judaeo-Christian tradition compose a narrative of the Divine-human relationship, it will be profitable and appropriate to examine various hermeneutical assumptions which influence biblical interpretation techniques in the effort to ensure that the ontological structures of both the interpreter and the biblical text are neither betrayed nor ignored.

In surveying the recent philosophical literature written by hermeneutic philosophers, it is disappointing to note the lack of attention which they have given to the last two hypotheses proposed above. This is especially true in the case of the application of hermeneutics to the biblical text. As a result of this lack, we shall be forced to focus almost completely on the recent writings of Paul Ricoeur. Beginning with his attempt to strike a resolution in the debate concerning distanciation, we shall chart his philosophical program to its culmination in biblical criticism.

CHAPTER III
IMPLICATIONS OF NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING
FOR THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Ricoeur's article "The Model of Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," first published in 1971, was an explicit attempt to discuss the ontological similarities between human actions and literary texts and to draw out the implications similarities may have upon the interpretive approach employed for both action and text.¹ Ricoeur's effort shall be of acute interest to us in this chapter for it is at this issue that we will begin charting the direction which Ricoeur's particular hermeneutic philosophy is moving in its attempt to interpret the Christian Scriptures. In this chapter we shall attempt the three-fold task: 1) explanation of Ricoeur's essay as it concerns the similarities between texts and actions and also a brief introductory word about the fruits which such a comparison may have for biblical interpretation, 2) discussion of Ricoeur's notion of biblical discourse as it relates to the idea of revelation, and 3) articulation of Ricoeur's program for the re-unification of

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, pp. 197-222.

modern-secularist man with the Christian Word.

Interpreting Actions and Texts

Allusion was made late in the last chapter to Ricoeur's attempt to bridge the gap between Habermas' and Gadamer's contrary positions regarding distanciation. A brief articulation of exactly how Ricoeur attempts to build such a bridge will prove helpful for a better understanding of his notion of the relationship between text and action.

In the last chapter it was merely stated that "Ricoeur attempts to construct a literary hermeneutic based upon the nature of the literary text." What that precisely means is that within the "being" of a text itself are qualities which are distanciatory in character. In other words, the literary text is not confined to the limiting factors under which it was created. According to Ricoeur, the text is characterized by "a three-fold autonomy; with regards to the intention of the author; with respect to the cultural situation and all of the sociological conditions of the production of the text; and finally with respect to the original addressee."¹ Upon completion, the text is immediately freed from the horizontal intentions of the author, of the tradition within and perhaps for which it was written, and, upon being read, the text is on each occasion recontextualized. From this position Ricoeur distinguishes his own concept of the

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 91.

emancipatory text from the Gadamerian notion of the dialogue.

Reading a written document is different from being part of a living dialogue. Even in dialogue we can never, except by inference, penetrate the interiority of other persons. But there is at least a common situation, a common cultural context.

When a discourse assumed written form, however, it begins a new career. The meanings of written discourse are no longer bound, if they ever were, to the intention of authors or the apprehensions of the first readers.¹

In acknowledging the emancipatory or distancing quality of the text, one is forced to recognize that at the very heart of the hermeneutic circle is the critical moment; the capacity for criticism of one's own tradition as well as others is possible due to the mediation of the text.

Ricoeur, in this same article, suggests that like the text, human actions have the three-fold autonomy. With regards to the action's independence from its author, Ricoeur argues, as we did in the last chapter when we spoke of Erasmus' letter, that in retrospect, the meaning(s) of actions may be interpreted in a significantly different fashion than when they were originally performed. In like fashion, oftentimes the meaning of a text grows away from the original intentions of the author. It is not uncommon, in fact, for the author himself (of either a text or action) to reinterpret the meaning(s) in retrospect. Concerning the autonomy of the action's meaning from the context (socially) within which

¹P. Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, ed. L. S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), p. 16.

it was performed, Ricoeur states the following:

An important action, we could say, develops meanings which can be actualised or fulfilled in situations other than the one in which this action occurred. To say the same thing in different words, the meaning of an important event, exceeds, overcomes, transcends, the social conditions of its¹ production and may be re-enacted in new social contexts.

Important actions, like texts, have a durable quality.

Their meanings are not only capable of transcending social barriers, but, in a sense, temporal ones as well. Finally, Ricoeur suggests that both texts and actions are "open works."² Much like the way Collingwood speaks of the infinite question-answer dialogue, the meanings of actions and texts are ever open to new questions and complex relationships as they are viewed in retrospect.

Now that we have sketched out the general direction which Ricoeur has taken in the debate about distanciation and have elaborated the implications of his view for the interpretation of texts and actions, we shall now be interested to discover how exactly Ricoeur applies this for the development of a biblical hermeneutic. A biblical hermeneutic is necessary because the life and actions of Jesus (Hebrews, Paul Apostles) are understood through the mediation of Scripture texts. Our narrative understanding of Jesus et al. occurs through the mediation or interpretation of

¹Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, p. 208.

²Ibid., p. 208.

Scriptures. Ricoeur, in his essay "Preface to Bultmann," in The Conflict of Interpretations,¹ lays out the development of the mediations for the interpretation of Scriptures something like this:

And the last level (#4) of interpretation is of course the history of the Christian tradition up to and including today. Each level of interpretation was and is the attempt to interpret the past actions of God and persons involved with him in light of the events and concerns at that particular time.

We shall hesitate until the second section of this chapter to deal specifically with Ricoeur's work on biblical discourse. At this time we shall trace out the broad lines of his overall approach to the literary text and make some comments about the text of Scripture itself.

Ricoeur rejects the assumption made by both Schleiermacher and the early Dilthey, that in order to understand the meaning(s) of a text one must understand the intentions of the author. Ricoeur likewise rejects the position which suggests that the goal of a hermeneutic is to grasp the text's meaning(s) in the same fashion as the original hearers

¹P. Ricoeur, The Conflict of Interpretations (Evanston: Northwestern U. Press, 1974), pp. 381-401.

or readers. In distinguishing Ricoeur's hermeneutic from that of both Schleiermacher's and the early Dilthey's approach, L. S. Mudge states that "Whereas in Schleiermacher and Dilthey 'interpretation' means Verstehen understood as a kind of empathy with the writer, Ricoeur is in search of a theory of interpretation in which 'understanding' seeks to help in objective 'explanation' and returns deepened and enlarged."¹ Whatever does Mudge imply by the term "objective explanation?" Though perhaps stated too militantly, Mudge's opinion is that (in Ricoeur's view) the object of interpretation, for the interpreter, is not the author's inward intended meaning for the text, nor the receptive expectation of the addressee, nor even the reflection which the text provides of the tradition within which it was produced. Rather, the object of interpretation is the text itself.

Initially, of course, at the original occurrence of the act being recorded in a text, there is a relationship which exists between the event and the meaning.² Following the completion of the act, the act is surpassed by the meaning. The interpreter is therefore able to interpret without psychologizing (presupposing the author's intended meaning behind the words of the text), because, Ricoeur maintains "the utterance meaning points back toward the utterer's

¹Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 18.

meaning thanks to the self-reference of discourse to itself as event."¹ Ricoeur's point is all of this is actually less complex than it may appear: the object of interpretation is the text and the text alone, disassociated, as it were, from all original ties. The originary conditions of production are important only insofar as the text itself explicitly or implicitly makes reference to them. The text is the autonomous object and it is fully able, if studied critically, to inform the interpreter how it is to be interpreted. The questioning process of the interpreter proceeds not on the basis of "why the author wrote 'this' or 'that'", or even "how do you suppose those who received the text understood it?" Rather, the question which must be asked is "how does the text witness in its various literary genres?" This particular question will be for us the seminal question of the second part of our discussion in this chapter.

Interpreting the Biblical Text

Basic to Ricoeur's work on biblical hermeneutics is his attempt to construct a position which would avoid: 1) interpretations which are culture bound, and 2) those which overly objectivize the Scriptures in the effort to eradicate the role of interpretation altogether. True to his commitment to narrative understanding, as we have developed it in this thesis, he is concerned that the effective

¹P. Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: 1976), p. 13.

presence of both hermeneutic circles--the originary context to which the text itself refers as well as the interpreter's own context--are acknowledged and appropriately dealt with in the hermeneutic process. Ricoeur maintains that if one recognizes the double-sidedness of the text as both autonomous from its original setting (except when the text itself acknowledges indebtedness for its expressive character) and as a being which contains its own inherent structure (discourse genres), one discovers that it is through the text, more than any other transcending medium, that we are able to be liberated from the "confines" of our finite traditions and seek a fuller explanation of the meaning(s) of our existence. The text frees itself from its origins due to the supercession of meaning over event and it escapes the manipulative hand of the interpreter by evidencing a semantic encodation of its own, which, when left unrecognized in a poor interpretation, testifies to the lack of responsiveness by that interpretation to the text.

In the case of the biblical text, the interpreter who ceases his attempt to psychologize the text must still go one step further. He must allow the text itself to speak out and testify to its own meaningfulness through the various discourse genres which constitute it. The move has to be made to allow the text to speak and not to superimpose upon its message either original influences, or a sort of monolithic model of inspiration whereby all of Scripture is

interpreted as "propositions from the mouth of God himself." Avoiding both these pitfalls, Ricoeur suggests that the objective of biblical hermeneutics is to "stick close 'to those modalities of discourse that are most originary within the language of a community of faith,' without neutralizing the variety in order to extract a theological content."¹ In order, therefore, to rediscover the Word of God today, we must re-attend ourselves toward the manner in which the various discourse genres in the Bible reveal to us not only the person of God and his covenant with a people, but our own true identities.

In a sense, Ricoeur's central dictum in biblical hermeneutics is close to Luther's in the 16th century: a plea to return to the biblical text and to be influenced by it above all other sources of knowledge. When one returns to the text itself and leaves the level of theological assertion which incorporate concepts borrowed from speculative philosophy (eg. "God exists," "God is immutable," "God is omnipotent"), one finds the text to be rich with a variety of discourse forms. It is Ricoeur's thesis that in analyzing these discourse genres we can be confronted with the Word and can avoid, at least initially, imposing a systematic theology on the text.

These originary expressions are caught up in forms of discourse as diverse as narration, prophecy, legislative texts, wisdom sayings, hymns, supplications, and

¹Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, p. 17.

thanksgiving. The mistaken assumption here would be to take forms of discourse as simply literary genres which ought to be neutralized so that we can extract their theological content. . . . To uproot this prejudice we must convince ourselves that the literary genres of the Bible do not constitute a rhetorical facade which it would be possible to pull down in order to reveal some thought content that is indifferent to its literary vehicle.¹

This is precisely the fallacy which fundamentalist theologians have made in the past, says Ricoeur namely, after having legitimately credited to the Bible (or recognized within the Bible) a revelatory character, they reduced their definition of revelation to the notion of Scripture as dictation or as something whispered into the ear of the transcriber by God. This reduction of the notion of revelation is a deprivation, says Ricoeur, of the enrichment which would be obtained through a more critical study of the other forms of discourse which are not so easily interpreted in terms of a voice behind the voice of the author.²

In terms of the text itself, Ricoeur argues against the reduction of revelation to the prophetic genre by examining how the other discourse genres present themselves as "inspired" or revelatory. He suggests that in biblical narratives, unlike the prophetic which have a double author, the narrative is presented non-autobiographically, in such a

¹P. Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," in Essays on Biblical Interpretation, ed. L. S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 90-1.

²Ibid., pp. 90-1.

way that the author is transparent: as though the events recounted themselves.¹ A different theology of revelation is needed than the two already described for the very different prophetic and narrative genres when we examine the prescriptive discourse. By "prescriptive" discourse, Ricoeur means the legislative texts of the Old Testament. The following is an example of the genre of prescription found in the Bible:

You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the Lord your God. If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving to you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded and if it is told you and² you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly.

It is very difficult to ascertain a precise theology of revelation for this sort of discourse because the legislative utterances themselves are "placed in the mouth of Moses and within the narrative framework of the sojourn at Sinai."³ In a sense, therefore, it is inappropriate to speak of the legislative discourse as God's revelation of the law through Moses in a typically prophetic fashion, but, rather, "the law of a redeemed people." We could of course say the same

¹Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 77.

²Deuteronomy 17: 1-41 (NASB).

³Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," pp. 82-3.

for much of what passes as prophetic discourse is that it is nearly always the case that God's speech is directly related to and appropriate for a people in a certain context. Very rarely, in fact does God simply utter to his prophets a word that is not acclaimed to the concerns and affairs of either the prophet or the prophet's social environment. Ricoeur, speaking again of prescriptive discourse, maintains that it is not possible to eradicate the narrative character of the decalogue without doing damage to that particular genre of discourse in the biblical text.

The discourse genre of wisdom literature is more difficult to reduce to the prophetic notion of revelation than either the narrative or the prescriptive. In the wisdom genre, the sage does not even hint that his speech is the very speech of God. In opposition to the "dictation" motif of prophetic discourse, the sage typically suggests that the wisdom which he speaks forth is the effect of meditating upon the great narrative of God's interaction with the people of Israel and in some senses with all persons from all nations.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, "go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it," when you have it with you. Do not devise harm against your neighbor, while he lives in security beside you. . . . For the crooked man is an abomination to the Lord; but He is intimate with the upright.¹

The sage implies that ". . . wisdom precedes him, and, that,

¹Proverbs, 3: 27-9, 32 (NASB).

it is through participation in wisdom that someone may be said to be wise."¹

Finally, hymnic discourse could be described as praise addressed to God based upon his prodigious accomplishments in the narrative of human understanding. It too distinguishes itself as a genre of discourse unique from the prophetic in that "It is addressed to God in the second person. Without limiting itself to designating him in the third as in narration, or to speaking in the first person as in prophecy."²

Make me know thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths.
Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art
the God of my salvation; for Thee I wait all the day.³

Through this analysis of just some of the various discourse genres in the biblical text, Ricoeur is attempting to make evident the pluralistic and polysemic concept of revelation employed in the Scriptures. To accept such a thesis, he maintains, is to make yet another stride toward the liberation of the text; and this liberation is not only one which frees (in a limited sense of course) the text from the hermeneutic circle of its origins (from author's intentions, social conditions and the perception of those who received it), but as well, from restrictions and

¹Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," p. 87.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³Psalms, 25: 4&5 (NASB).

prejudices of our own contemporary traditions. It is through the literary text that we are enabled to distance ourselves from our own horizontal prejudices (at least far enough for genuine criticism) and through the biblical text in particular that we are confronted with the original meanings of our human existence.

With all of this said concerning Ricoeur's view of the complex relationship between the biblical text and the interpreter, it is not enough. The biblical text itself maintains that there is a deficiency in mankind whereby he is unable to find the testimony of Christ crucified and risen from the grave intellectually credible. Granting this biblical notion, Ricoeur pushes yet further to discuss the limiting factors within the Western tradition which inhibit our capacity and desire to believe, understand, hear and participate in the Word of God for Man.

Overcoming Suspicion

The great difficulty facing biblical hermeneutics as it applies to the hermeneutic circle of the interpreter, says Ricoeur, can be summarized in the question, "why are we deaf to the Bible today?" In one sense the society of mankind, since expulsion from Eden, has been unable to hear the Word. In the words of St. Paul, "the preaching of the Cross is folly" for the world (the world both at the time when Paul wrote and now). Ricoeur, like Karl Barth, the German

neo-orthodox theologian and fideistic apologist, interprets Paul's notion of folly to mean that the biblical discourse of incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is one which has no correspondence with our experience.¹ Since the message preached fails to correspond, it is unable to justify or testify to itself in a manner that is intellectually or intuitively compelling. Reflecting upon this lack of correspondence between the testimony of Christianity and the experience of modern man, Ricoeur posits the biblical Word as "the eruption of something from the other side, from the totally other in our culture."²

In another sense, however, our estrangement from the biblical message is more extreme than the estrangement implied by the apostle in the term "folly." In his essay entitled "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," Ricoeur locates one reason for the extended estrangement of modern man in his loss of sensitivity to the language of symbolism. Because of the Cartesian dichotomy between subject as manipulator and object as that which is to be manipulated, we perceive ourselves as autonomous inquisitors of the world around us. Language is merely a tool employed for interrogation. Univocity in language usage is valued to the point

¹P. Ricoeur, "The Critique of Religion," in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ed. Reagan and Stewart (Ft. Worth: The Texas Christian U. Press, 1978), p. 219.

²Ibid., p. 219.

that all other usages are held in contempt. Consequently, with such a view of language, it is most difficult for us to read the language of Scripture as having to do with reality, full as it is with figure, metaphor, vision and myth.

A second reason for the modern alienation from the language and import of Scripture, suggests Ricoeur, in his essay "The Critique of Religion," lies in the influence which the triad of thinkers, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, have had upon western culture.¹ Described as "hermeneutists of suspicion," they have "taught us to suspect that religious language may not mean what it appears to say at all: that it may be a coded version of something else of which we would prefer not to be aware."² Marx's lasting contribution to the history of thought, Ricoeur states, is not his theory of class struggle, but rather his discernment of the subtle relationship between domination and ideology. His hermeneutic of suspicion rendered religion as a sort of encoded language of domination and submission. And Nietzsche's contribution to both philosophy and philology, which we have already mentioned, was his extension of the rules of exegesis beyond the text to culture--because culture, he maintained, is itself a text. In Nietzsche's view, the task of philosophy is the exegesis, the deciphering of the cloaked signs and

¹Ricoeur, "The Critique of Religion," pp. 213-222.

²Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, p. 4.

the hidden intentions of the strong and weak will. The impulse of religion was in actuality not God but a form of resentment by the weak willed--losers in a contest of power. The final thinker of the three hermeneutists of suspicion, Freud, made his major contribution in his analysis of cultural phenomena. ". . . The interest of Freud is always to wonder, faced with a cultural phenomenon how this cultural phenomenon pertains to the history of human desire, . . . be it as a factor of prohibition, of inhibition, of frustration, of fear."¹ Iconoclasts, all three, their struggle against false consciousness focuses on a critique of religion as disguise for domination, hatred, and fearful insecurity. It is only in the cautious and meticulous scrutiny of one's beliefs in light of their critique of religion, argues Ricoeur in much the same fashion as Bonhoeffer, that the faith of modern man matures.

Ricoeur, in his essay "The Language of Faith," refers to both ways in which modern man is estranged from the biblical Word. He speaks of the effects of the Cartesian dichotomy and the hermeneutic of suspicion as "the de-construction of the assurances of modern man."² Beyond the destruction done to our capacity to believe, as it were, the unbelievable,

¹Ricoeur, The Philosophy of Ricoeur, p. 217.

²P. Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," in The Philosophy of P. Ricoeur, ed. Reagan and Stewart (Ft. Worth: The Texas Christian U. Press, 1978), pp. 223-238.

Ricoeur suggests that de-construction leads the way to re-construction. Such a re-construction is begun when, in response to the hermeneutics of suspicion, we employ suspicion ourselves in order to inspect critically those traits which characterize our own cultural hermeneutic circle. Interestingly, Ricoeur does not turn upon the critique of religion provided by the hermeneutics of suspicion with suspicion. He appears genuinely to accept their criticisms and allows this recognition to alter the approach which he takes toward the interpretation of Scripture. He states that,

I think that any modern hermeneutics is a hermeneutics with a double edge and a double function. It is an effort to struggle against idols, and, consequently, it is destructive. It is a critique of ideologies in the sense of Marx; it is a critique of all flights and evasions into other worlds in the sense of Nietzsche; a struggle against childhood fables and against securing illusions in the sense of psychoanalysis. . . . Long ago this was the task of the second Isaiah when he tied the preaching of Yahweh to the flight against the Baals, and consequently joined iconoclasm to preaching.

He does, however, turn with suspicion toward the influence which "Cartesian" philosophy has had upon the process of secularization. Principally, Ricoeur challenges the pre-supposition that it is the task not only of the logician but in fact of all who employ language to "struggle against equivocation, to struggle against double meaning, in a way

¹Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," p. 224.

²Ibid., pp. 234-5.

that perfects a language which is perfectly univocal."¹

This attitude, as represented in the quote, toward language has the effect of extending or at least attempting to provide a rational explanation for all areas of human thought. In a sense, therefore, this brings about a reduction--especially in the area of theology--from the "mysterious" to the "problematic."² From Ricoeur's perspective, to accept univocity as the goal to strive for in language usage is completely necessary for the logician. The coherency of any argument depends upon the consistency of meaning. However, if one is unwilling to accept a "monolythic concept of revelation" wherein all forms of biblical discourse are interpreted as being propositional, then one's position regarding language must allow for the possibility of multivocal significations.³

Ricoeur is unwilling to accept a notion of revelation which prescribes that all of biblical discourse is to be interpreted as propositional in nature. The acceptance of such a position, he maintains, is the common mistake of those who accept a unified theory of revelation (which we have already discussed): one which assumes that all of revelation is to modeled after prophetic discourse.

¹Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," p. 233.

²Ibid., p. 225.

³Ibid., p. 233.

There are two types of equivocation in our language usage, maintains Ricoeur, "there is equivocation by default, by vacillation of the meaning . . . and an equivocation due to an excess of meaning."¹ In the case of the former, the logician is the one who battles against equivocation for the sake of cogency in argumentation. The equivocate is for the logician to fail. In the latter case, Ricoeur maintains that equivocation is unavoidable. This unavoidability is due to the kinds of language usages represented in both symbolic and the broad, diverse usages in ordinary language. Referring to Ricoeur's position concerning ordinary language, L. Dornisch states, "Ordinary language has an incurable ambiguity, amphibious construction, and a confusion inherent in idiomatic expressions and in metaphor."² Ricoeur appears to be arguing that over the course of the history of mankind's existence language has become supersaturated with meaning. Like the many sidedness of symbols, ordinary language bursts with multiple possible renderings. Thus, it is the work of the hermeneutist, as opposed to the logician, to recall the richness of meaning to language. In one sense, by remembering the multiple possibilities of word meaning, one obscures and makes the

¹ Ricoeur, "The Language of Faith," p. 234.

² P. Ricoeur, Biblical Hermeneutics, in "Semia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism," 1975, no. 4, 27-148.

task of interpretation more difficult. In another sense, says Ricoeur, not only does it enhance the language of man and allows one to transcend the reductive limitations of contemporary secularism, but also it frees man to hear again a more "original and primal word."¹ "To let speak a language which though addressed to us we hear no longer, which though spoken to us we can no longer speak."²

Ricoeur speaks of the "liberation of the significant potential held in suspense in the myth" as the "second naivete." The first naivete is lost forever as a possibility for modern man due to the necessary suspicion with which we must approach the masked motives of our private, social and religious existence. A second naivete, however, is possible following the application of suspicion toward all unduly restrictive limitations present in the traditions of our age, and by allowing the text itself via its particular discourse genres to direct us in the ways it should be interpreted. A second naivete is possible through a hermeneutic which exposes and explores the multivocal significations of language and in particular, myth. When this occurs, modern man will be enabled to hear and be confronted once again with the "folly of the Cross" without all of the restrictive intellectual prejudices of his age. In a culture

¹Ricoeur, The Philosophy of Ricoeur, p. 235.

²Ibid., p. 235.

which has abandoned myth and employs language as a tool alone, the Scriptures speak but cannot be heard or believed. Hermeneutics, suggests Ricoeur, establishes a context for the world of the text and the world of the interpreter to converge and the reader understand once again.

CONCLUSION

The format of this thesis has actually been quite simple. Beginning with the structures of human action intentionality, teleology and historicity, we proceeded to construct a philosophical account of narrative understanding which would take these into consideration when endeavoring to interpret actions or their consequents such as texts. We concluded with an application of such a hermeneutic philosophy to the biblical text. Unfortunately, the complexity of our discussion often obfuscated the simplicity of our project. In this thesis we have re-considered the plausibility, in light of various alternatives, of interpreting human actions and symbols on the basis of the agent's own description and experience. In so doing we discovered that such actions are temporally complex involving many layers of meaning. Letters like Erasmus', have meanings which extend far beyond the original. Analysis of the reciprocal relationship between the part and the whole (the hermeneutic and double hermeneutic circle), has led us to discover that a longer term narrative account of an action lends to a deeper understanding of what a particular action means over against methodologies which fragment and dice up complex events.

What has been surprising about the development of this thesis and in general the overall direction which hermeneutic philosophy is presently taking, is the flexibility (applicability) of narrative understanding not only for history, literary criticism and theology but virtually every discipline in which human action is evident. This thesis hopefully contributes to the development of a better balanced integration of the approaches employed in the human sciences by carefully examining the most basic components of human action and initiating the development of a hermeneutic which is responsive to those same components.

Perhaps the aspect of this thesis which has been most original has been the careful attempt to allow both the plurivocal meaning of actions and expressions in the human world to remain in tension with a notion of both the ideal narrator and the ideal narrative. In the context of such a tension relativism is constrained while the ontological structures of human rational action and its consequents remain fundamental for philosophy as well as the interpretive disciplines that seek to understand the human world.

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