

THE HERMENEUTIC OF SUSPICION AND RELIGION

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Preamble

In this paper I wish to examine a contemporary response to an important debate in the "science" of hermeneutics--"the art of rightly understanding the speech, chiefly in written form, of another" (Schleiermacher, 1977). The 20th century has witnessed what has been termed "a profound radicalisation of the understanding of texts" inasmuch as *hermeneutics*--the programmatic of interpretation and all that it had hitherto supposed about the nature and relation of text and its meaning--is itself problematised. The site of the contestation has been language, understood in the broadest possible sense of the medium that functions to convey meaning, textual and otherwise. A variety of responses maturing into formidable intellectual movements have emerged, and continue to be articulated, especially in philosophy, literary studies and the social sciences. As is well-known, this virtual explosion of theories of textual meaning and vastly differing models of linguistic understanding, or of the semiological processes, during the intellectual ferment known as Modernism, has had considerable impact in as areas as far afield as architecture, the arts, postmodernism, feminist studies, psychoanalysis, cross-cultural and post-colonial discourses, indigenist jurisprudence and even on geography and

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ecology or the geo-sciences. I will here confine my inquiry to a significant thinker rather than cover any particular movement or movements. I have chosen to discuss Paul Ricoeur's intervention in the debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Juergen Habermas concerning the proper task or calling as it were of hermeneutics as a mode of philosophical interrogation in the late 20th century. I will also take the opportunity of drawing some implications through this encounter with Hermes (the messenger of the gods), matured into *hermeneuein* for thinking on religion (as distinct from the God of theology).

Setting the scene

Heidegger throws a hammer into the work of classical (19th century) hermeneutics. From its beginnings in unravelling hidden meaning in the text, discerning the authorial intention and understanding the text more deeply than ordinary language would enable, by the early years of the 20th century hermeneutics (under the impetus of phenomenology, in particular) directs its focus more "toward discovering the epistemological foundations of the human sciences, or the methodological principles which lead to objective knowledge in the *Geisteswissenschaften*" (Gayle Ormiston and Alan D Schrift, 1990: 15). Thus, with Husserl and Cassirer, for example, the question of truth is subordinated to the question of meaning, significance and symbolic formation. The task of phenomenology in this context centres on an analysis of knowledge, but moves further into investigating all modes of apprehension or the 'phenomenology of perception' and the diversity of ethnological-psychological experiences, which includes myths and symbolic forms in cultural lifeworlds. Heidegger was initially sympathetic to the aims of this project (having been a former junior colleague of Husserl, and having met the neo-Kantian Cassirer in Davos in 1929), but his

emphasis shifted to the discourse of the *ontological* conditions--in contradiction to the linguistic, psychological, and anthropological structural formations--which underlie such knowledge or claims to knowledge. As Ormiston and Schrift explain, citing from Heidegger's *Being and Time*:

Heidegger views the hermeneutic projects of Schleiermacher and Dilthey as derivative of hermeneutics' primordial signification, "through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being and Dasein [authentic human existent] itself possesses, are *made known* to Dasein's understanding of Being". The hermeneutic of Dasein, "as an analytic of *existence*," is thus, for Heidegger, the point of departure for philosophy conceived as "universal phenomenological ontology". In other words, the first step on the way to fundamental ontology, as the uncovering of the meaning of Being, will be a hermeneutic inquiry into the structures of Being implicated in the activities of understanding and interpretation" (1990:15-16).

Heidegger, then, came to recognise more and more the pervasiveness of the hermeneutical circle with respect to understanding, interpretation and meaning, and distanced himself from the view that classical (i.e. mid-19th to early 20th century) hermeneutics held out the key to its own problem or presupposition. The problem is explained in the following way. A prior understanding always grounds interpretation; but the understanding itself is constituted by fore-structures. ("The entity which is held in our fore-having--for instance, the hammer--is proximally ready-to-hand as equipment."). Thus, understanding already presupposes in its fore-structures what interpretation is to provide. One has to acknowledge the grip of this circle while also working through to disclose the fore-structures, the presuppositions and so on, in the genuine apprehension of Dasein's encounter with Being and its own trajectory.

In short, Heidegger's preoccupations shifted towards a critique of epistemology (which builds on reason's undisclosing potentialities) and to the grounding-ontological quest (the encounter with Being), even as he deepened the tension between *Verstand* ("understanding") and *Vernunft* ("reason"), a distinction which Hegel had adopted from Kant. But *reason*, too, for Heidegger was not the formal and definitive process of (calculative) thinking, with its unassailable logic, appeal to argument, and universality of its codes, as the Enlightenment thinkers held. Rather, reason is the epistemic space within thinking (or *thought* thought-*ing*, *Denken*). The Romantic image of language as a natural transparency to reason, whose representations reason could therefore disclose with ease, looses its hold on post-Enlightenment philosophers. The emphasis, then, is on the possible absence of universality in epistemology and more towards the phenomenon of language as the "house of Being". This insight for Heidegger helps inquiry move toward newer and hitherto uncharted modes of knowing--but a knowing which is, as it were, for *being's* sake alone--and which occurs upon disclosure of the hidden--the unspoken, the *unthought*--through the powerful reflection (on history as on *Dasein's* conditions). The inquiry here also turns for aid to the searching phenomenological critique (in the Husserlian manner) and, more especially, its *Destruktion* ("de-structuring") of the history of metaphysics and classical ontology wedded to theology or, broadly, the *onto-theo-logos* contagion alongside modern humanism that has apparently bedeviled Western thought, ever since the pre-Socratics began to wonder.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger provides the following account of the hermeneutic circle of meaning and being:

In the circle of understanding... is hidden positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. We

genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our explication, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make this scientific theme secure by working out these anticipations in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, *BT*, 1978: 195; on pre-understanding, cf Ricoeur, 1987:57)

As to the precise role or genealogy of "Destruction" (often misunderstood as indicative of a nihilistic urge), Heidegger gives this account:

We understand this task [of loosening the hardened tradition and of dissolving its obscurities in order to make the question transparent in its own history] as that of the *destruction* of the traditional standing (*Bestand*) of ancient ontology, a destruction which is carried out *under the guidance of the question of being* and which works toward the original experiences in which the first and thenceforth the leading definitions or determinations of being were achieved. (*ibid* :section 6; parenthetical clarifications from Scharlemann, 1982:81)

So "Destruction" is aimed at getting behind the presuppositions of a tradition (its history of ontology) and unearthing or unmasking the hidden, the unspoken, the *unthought*, (its history of metaphysics), as well as gaining an inkling of the future goals, trajectory of hopes or aspirations of the culture (religion, the national project).

The suggestion that follows on from Heidegger's insights in this regard is that if "text" and its meaning are to be understood in a broader sense or context (and pre-text or pre-judgments) than just in terms of the markers on paper (or verbal ciphers in speech and oral enactments), or the authorial intention(s), then the inquiry perforce spills beyond linguistics into other modes of expressions and cultural productions or constructs, all of which may in turn

play a role toward interpretation and the understanding to be derived. In a special sense, language might be said to constitute this larger horizon in which the idea of text as a *linguistic* expression, on the one hand, and *text* as a *cultural-historical* artefact or production, on the other hand, converge if not coincide. But cultural and historical artifacts and their transmissions over time (or travel over space) are also imbued with pre-conceptions, prejudices, pre-judgment, occlusions and even errors of judgment within them. Now if our "readings" or expectations of meaning are conducted against this horizon or background of "language" then our interpretations cannot be said to be free of those very prejudices, presuppositions and biases, wittingly or unwittingly, as is too often presupposed in the hermeneutical enterprise. The interpreter as the interlocutor is another moment in the tradition as is the object s/he is attempting to interpret and understand. (This activity is all the more confounding if the object is the "subject" or self of the interpreter, or the Self writ large as in Hegel's idea of Spirit as Absolute Subject, or Brahman of the *Upanisads*.) Language, text, linguistic structure, interpretation and understanding are inextricably intertwined. All understanding (and translation) is interpretation and all interpretation is embedded in language which itself, history and culturally speaking, is not free from certain prejudices and presuppositions. Can a nail dislodge a bent nail stuck on a raw piece of hardwood?

A rather gloomy implication drawn by Walter Schultz in respect of the history of Western metaphysics with the advent of the Heideggerian philosophical hermeneutics is that modern Western metaphysics represented the end of a long tradition of speculative hermeneutics, and is therefore incapable of either being assimilated into it or criticised in terms of any phase of that. Western metaphysics, he believes, with Heidegger exhibits a meaningful historical

pattern moving towards an end which culminates with "Destruktion" or the strategy of dismantling to take "the step back" (to loosen hardened concepts and retrieve the lost dimensions of meaning formerly possessed in living languages, texts, cultures, speech of the gods, and so on). This is most explicit in Heidegger's essay, *What is Metaphysics?*, in which the metaphysical tradition is shown as culminating in 'Nothing', which is the "end-point of tradition", thus marking the "metaphysical endwork of traditional metaphysics" or tradition's terminus, after which it passes into another beginning. (Schultz, 1953/54; I). As J L Mehta remarks, "Heidegger's philosophy thus represents the historic moment of the self-abrogation, the 'reversal', of the metaphysical tradition and is itself conditioned by this tradition" (Mehta, 1992:54)

Gadamer: The Hermeneutic of Tradition

At this point, we may introduce Hans-Georg Gadamer who takes the Heideggerian critique of the classical interpretative schema a stage further, by putting this particular puzzle into phenomenological terms, and suggesting a solution by invoking the weighty role of *tradition* in the hermeneutical enterprise. Gadamer was an early pupil of Heidegger, and inspired as much by him as by the works of Husserlian phenomenology and Schleiermacher or the tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften* (though Gadamer is of a more sober and humbler temperament in comparison to the formidable passionate presence of Heidegger in his richly didactic and multiplianuanced writings). Much of Gadamer's thinking is articulated in his magisterial treatise *Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960, second edition with replies 1965; English translation issued in 1975 as *Truth and Method*, hereafter *TM*). This work culminates in a discussion of language

juxtaposed between intentional meaning and historical consciousness as a basis for a hermeneutic ontology .

Gadamer's way of putting the conundrum that we are confronted with in Heidegger is to suggest the following. Given that the elements that comprise the fundamental structures of our linguistic understanding are not entirely independent of the "text" we are attempting to understand, and being historically and culturally constituted, they are further not free from certain presuppositions and prejudices (i.e., Heidegger's *fore-structures, pre-understanding*). How, then, can we claim to arrive at a neutral, "Archimedean point", from which to proffer *the objective reading of the text qua text*? Either we say that everything is a "text," including our own modes of understanding and the disciplines and methods of inquiry we bring to bear on our subject-matter (i.e., the texts)--and, therefore, themselves stand in need of interpretation or "de-construction"--or that the concept of the text has to be extended in a way that does not leave out all the many modalities, influences, myths, cultural, historical and rhetorical tropes or expedient devices and all manner of "constructs," patriarchal overlays, etc., that might have gone into informing the deeper, unconscious, structure or background in the very formation of the "discourse".

The give and take of understanding a text occurs in the medium of language; but the medium of language is not so different from the matrix of conversation in which the speakers--if they do not share the same language-game--may find it difficult to follow and understand each other. And no one takes everything someone else says in a dialogue as unquestionable and absolute truth. Often the authenticity or inauthenticity of the speaker is established only after the dialogue has proceeded some way and one has had a moment or two to reflect on the testimony being presented in the course of the conversation. From such a

stance, it becomes possible to cultivate reflection, detachment from the texts and the tradition as well. This insight has immense ramifications for inter-textual and intra-tradition understanding. Tradition in this way is both de-mystified and understood as a "historical" process yet to be fully realised, and its hold therefore on authority, or claim to be grounded in "*logos*" (the absolute presence of Truth, or truth-claims about "things-in-themselves", the End, Finality, and ultimate purpose or *Telos*) is also softened somewhat, if not bracketed out and opened up for questioning. A tradition can be menacingly obscure and bewitching, if not also marked with exclusivity. A sense of alienation from the tradition is then an indispensable part of reading and thinking through the textuality (texts and the making of the texts) of the tradition. There is no such thing as pre-suppositionless understanding. Our understanding is not just an act of our subjectivity, but is more like an ingression or intrusion into the process of tradition in which the past and present are continuously mediated. And this matrix (i.e. tradition or community of understanding and mutuality) is itself in constant formation and transformation: we cannot anticipate a finality to any understanding, but hold up this *telos* as an ideal, or vice versa (the latter being more a Hegelian concern) (cf Gadamer, 'Text and Interpretation,' 1986).

Gadamer, nevertheless, did not believe that the difficulties outlined above should lead us to a hopelessly relativistic, anarchic and defeatist situation. His own contribution was to underscore the conversation or dialogue among traditions as "the horizon of expectation of the interpreter" and to emphasize the more universal or transcendental process of reflection, but never to go far away from the conditions that make history. The hermeneutic dimension of meaning is bound to the unending conversation or dialogical interaction of an ideal

interpretive community--an *ideal* that can perhaps never be achieved in *praxis* but which could yet anticipate the direction in which the hermeneutic act (and enactment) must move if it is not to become a meaningless montage of stereotypes and multipli-located non-sensical conversation stoppers (or towers of Babel). Gadamer's formulation of a "philosophical" or "ontological" version of hermeneutics gives ample room to concepts such as "hermeneutical consciousness" and intentional "meaning" (which draws him closer to traditional philosophy of reflection) while, in the critique of the subject (whether it be in the work of art or aesthetics, literature, history, etc.)--in which he follows Heidegger's *Destruktion*--he is at one with the "ontological turn" (as indeed Gadamer has often been charged with [cf the letter to Dallmayr, 1989: 97]). While a fixed subjecthood or subject-centred meaning in the interpretive availability of the "ear of the other" is not presupposed, nevertheless the intentionality of the other in conversation is placed in relation to the whole of our own meaning, or becomes temporally at least the horizon wherein holds the meaning of the other.

What could have presented themselves as the "bitter blockers" to adequate understanding and *Selbstverstaendnis* (self-understanding)--namely, intentions, subject or "auto" reference, and the embeddedness of a tradition of textual representation in presuppositions, pre-judgments and prejudices--are turned around by Gadamer to become the very links, devices and missing parts that actually enable and are *constitutive* of understanding. Prejudices are made transparent for what they are, and their limitations are thereby undermined. The walls of traditional frameworks need not keep the world closed off from hermeneutical access, in understanding and in reflection. This is what Gadamer calls "the happening of tradition" which admits to a kind of hermeneutic self-reflection on the part of language

in dialogue with (the author-ity of) tradition. Here, one will notice that the horizons of language and tradition are seen to converge, and that the world of the reader and the world of the text merge into one another (*ibid*). Gadamer characterised this non-analytic coming-together as the "fusion of horizons" (*TM*: 273ff, 337, 358), and later commentators have extended the metaphor to signal the meeting of disparate cultures, trans-tradition comparisons, and even the synthesis of the arts of different cultures (as in the "fusion" of world music).

However, Gadamer goes further and elevates tradition to a near-transcendental status for grounding our understanding, placing immense value on *ousia* or Being that, as it were, speaks through the audacious philosophical hermeneutics (not a historical necessity as with Hegel's parousiological *Geist*, but in various concrete historical, plural, self-and-other conscious, and non-hierarchised forms). The following often cited passage from *Truth and Method* brings out this point rather tellingly:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted—and not only what is clearly grounded—has power over our attitudes and behavior.... The validity of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over, but by no means created by a free insight or justified by themselves. That is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity... Tradition has a justification that is outside the arguments of reason and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes. (*TM* 249; *WM* 264-65; Caputo :259)

Habermas's attack on Gadamer

After the second (German) edition of *Truth and Method* appeared in 1965, the well-known and regarded contemporary German philosopher, Juergen Habermas,

launched an attack on it in *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (1967)--especially on the section discussing the rehabilitation of prejudice, authority and tradition, and the famous theory of the "historical-effective consciousness". Habermas hails from the Critical Theory or Frankfurt School (which is linked with Feuerbach, Kant and Marxist critiques, unlike Gadamer's phenomenological antecedents in Hegel, Heidegger and Husserl). Habermas' attack, Gadamer's clarificatory essays, and the ensuing debate are collected in volume entitled *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik* (1971). (Paul Ricoeur's essay, 'Hermeneutique et la critique des ideologies', 1973 (which reports this debate in note one), while bearing the same title, is not a translation but a commentary, indeed an intervention in the debate.)

Habermas begins by criticising Gadamer's position as relativistic and potentially repressive, suspecting that Heidegger's attack on realism and humanism (via his hermeneutic of Dasein) are somehow linked to his Nazism and, in the final analysis, that all attempts at interpretation, including Marxist ones, and preoccupations with defining words like "truth", "knowledge", or "philosophy" are nothing more than an apology for the *status quo* (Rorty, 1991: 28-30). Habermas's specific criticism of Gadamer's approach to the "hermeneutic" theory of knowledge through the idealised *tradition* makes the following points:

(i.) The idea of "tradition" reeks of foundationalism, as it seeks an impossible grounding in essentialist presuppositions.

(ii) In as much as the hermeneutic of tradition retains a decisive role for the subject, self-understanding and "our own meaning" it has not freed itself from valuation of the abstract, the subjective and, indeed, Being.

(iii) The concept of "tradition" leads one to ignore the dimension of *ideology* and the sway that powerful 'allies, forces and domineering groups within a tradition (textual, authorial, religious, cultural) have over the development of social justice and transformations anticipated in the conversations.

It follows, from (iii) especially, that there is no guarantee that the supposed goodness and fair-mindedness in human beings will prevail. Tradition can easily become a ruse (hence 'tradition-in-use') and, where it is absent, tradition can be re-invented (as Coomaraswamy did so ably in the Indian aesthetic and metaphilosophical context). The erstwhile or new understanding so derived serves as a further weapon or armoury with which to continue the regime of oppression and violence (e.g. in the march of Reason in Hegel's *Geistwelt*, and in the emergence and justification of patriotism, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, and fundamentalism). If we lose our distance, then we weaken our ability to criticise rationally the powerful, quasilinguistic (or discourse-saturated) forces of society that impact on our thoughts, regulate labour, dictate education, channel information, and perpetrate various forms of domination. Hence, Habermas worries about Gadamer's conservatism which shows in the latter's tendency to accede to the authority of tradition *even* as a rational possibility.

As should be apparent, the confrontation between Gadamer and Habermas turns on the assessment of tradition and the place of language within it: the hermeneutical stance becomes rather more positive and sanguine, while the critical theory of ideology views tradition with a hooded-brow of suspicion which, in Ricoeur's words, amounts to "seeing tradition as merely the systematically distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence" (Ricoeur

1981 (1987): 64; 1986: 301). The reference to "suspicion" here is deliberate, as it echoes Ricoeur's own characterisation of the "school of suspicion" or the doubters of the inexorably given (in history, metaphysics, and in consciousness, in which he sees Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, respectively), who opposed or fissured interpretation as restoration of meaning with interpretation as an "exercise of suspicion". From this dialectic we get the famous phrase "the hermeneutic of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970:32-35; 1981 (1987): 34), which can be extended to describe the Habermasian critique or doubt as well.

Habermas is thus deeply suspicious of Gadamer's understanding of language as an "event in tradition", which we essentially "suffer" as a historical condition and which we doubtless confront in lived experience. Habermas searches for a distantiating from tradition and the subjectively-involved conditions ("happenings", "events", etc.) that would make space for reflection, question dogmatic forces, and not conflate knowledge with authority. Unless there is a more universal epistemological and objective matrix from which to launch and check or scrutinise the ground-rules for this conversation or dialogue between tradition and reflection, there is no way of subduing the rule of subjectivity and preventing prejudices and pre-suppositions of a tradition from re-asserting and re-inscribing themselves.

This is a powerful criticism and Habermas did certainly identify a fundamental weakness in the Heideggerian-Gadamerian--that it stayed too close to a historicisation of understanding rather than make sufficient space for the critique of the historicity of understanding itself. It might look as if Habermas is looking for the "Archimedean point" or some kind of "idealism of linguisticity" which Gadamer had earlier rejected as a genuine possibility (Wachterhauser 1986:47). The point of

his contention here is that Gadamer himself attaches a "claim to universality" to hermeneutical enterprise, in practice at least; that is to say, the program of hermeneutic as formulated by Gadamer has universal applicability without setting its limits. Gadamer was as concerned to develop a theory as to suggest ways for its applicability or *praxis*.

Habermas, however, remains sceptical about Gadamer's formulation, and believes that the universal basis should be looked for in concerns for social justice, local or particularised concerns, communicative action, development of the means for human flourishing, and the appropriate attitude toward nature that this may call for. Habermas wants us, therefore, to rethink the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and its power over human affairs for which he develops the concept of *interest* (which itself is a larger conception related to labour and power in the spheres of social development). Its implications for hermeneutics is that one has to be upfront and critically reflective about the complicity of language in distorting communication and entrenching prejudice, authority and the domineering tradition. So Habermas opposes the Gadamerian Romantic ideal of tradition with the critique of ideology; prejudice (even in its positive legal sense of *praejudicium*) with judgment (in the Kantian critical sense); and understanding (*Verstand*) with reason (*Vernunft*)-- which is to say that, *contra* Gadamer, hermeneutics is stood on its head or subverted under the powerful methodology of communicative ethics developed by Habermas and his senior colleague, Karl Otto-Apel. But Gadamer himself is not averse to the thrust of reason understood as communicative action, for he too emphasises *Vernunft*. However, he would argue that what is *reasonable* emerges in the course of dialogue and understanding derived in the spirit of the tradition.

Ricoeur's hermeneutic of suspicion

It is instructive at this point to turn to Paul Ricoeur's intervention in this debate. Let us note that, in positioning himself in this debate, Ricoeur does not take sides, but rather tries to focus on the competing positions on hermeneutics articulated in recent times and especially in the Gadamer-Habermas debate. From where Ricoeur stands, the debate raises the question of "the fundamental gesture of philosophy" which is, at heart, a post-Heideggerian problem. The question is teased out thus: "Is this gesture an avowal of the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed under the reign of finitude? or rather is it, in the last analysis, an act of defiance, a critical gesture, relentlessly repeated and indefinitely turned against 'false consciousness', against the distortions of human communication that conceal the permanent exercise of domination and violence?" (1981 (1987):63; 1986:300). What is, then, at stake in this debate would seem to boil down to one of two alternatives: either hermeneutical consciousness (*pace* Gadamer) or a critical consciousness (*pace* Habermas). But Ricoeur questions this simple formulation of the alternatives, for not only is the philosophical stake too high to risk an error at this juncture, but also because it might be necessary (or our own calling in the aftermath of the disputation) to surpass the alternative, to take another turn. But Ricoeur shys away from any planned "annexation" or "syncretism" in attempting to open respective spaces on both sides to "speak" to each other, and to recognise the other's virtues and claim to universality. This bold gesture has earned Ricoeur an endearing recognition among philosophers and theologians alike.

Ricoeur therefore brings an interesting insight into this debate and helps to re-orient it from one concerned purely with method, to one touching the heart of philosophy.

which is the question of ontology in the concrete context of lived history. The task is not so much of "*Destruction*" as of "re-construction", or the "re-structuring" out of the latent layers of recollected consciousness, reminiscence, myths, symbolic forms, narratives, with the requisite engagement of reflection and criticism. Accordingly, Ricoeur sees four schemes through which the two seemingly opposing camps (of Gadamer and Habermas) can dialogue and be brought to closer appreciation of the other's perspective.

Firstly, he takes Gadamer's suggestion of "distanciation" or alienation from the tradition and shows this to be an important strategy for the emancipation of the text. The suggestion is that a text is a production of a number of moves, beginning with the intention of the author, the disposition of the original auditors, the cultural environment and the socio-linguistic conditions in which it arises. A decontextualisation is necessary before a recontextualisation can take place. Dialogue is not a sufficient condition; discourse has to be reframed and mediated through writing which is open to anyone's reading of it.

The second theme follows on from the recognised need of the critical attitude, in which discourse is pushed further towards objectification, "to the point where structural analysis discloses the *depth semantics* of a text".

Third, the hermeneutics of texts turns towards the critique of ideology, through interrogation and transgressing of the closure of the text. One no longer looks simply for the intentions of the author, but expects a world or reality (as the mode of being and power-to-be) to unfold out of it. This echoes Heidegger's trajectory of Dasein's own possibilities.

The fourth condition returns the element of subjectivity into interpretation, for understanding in the end is

concerned with self-understanding, mediated by the "matter of the text" against the horizon of the tradition. But such a self-understanding must be open to a rupturing of the subjective (or transcendental) illusion as well, i.e. to a critique of *false consciousness*, whether historical or contemporary. The critique of *false consciousness* can thus become an integral part of hermeneutics, conferring upon the critique of ideology that metahermeneutical dimension that Habermas assigns to it. (1986: 332; 1981 (1987): 94). Again, the theme of distancing or detachment becomes critical here. Ricoeur dwells on this concept at some length, complaining (in his essay "The hermeneutical function of distancing" (1981 (1987):131-144)) about its apparent radical absence in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

Ricoeur then goes further and turns the hermeneutic themes outlined here on the critique of ideology itself, lest it assumes a life all its own without contributing to understanding in any deep or significant way. So both a depth hermeneutic and a critical hermeneutic is necessary for there to be emancipation from the snares of tradition on the one hand and the oppressive potentialities within the discourse or the theory of ideology itself. (For instance, Marxism in the former Soviet Union was intended as a critique of bourgeois ideology; but in the present day it has outrun its function, yet Marxism continues to hold sway there, albeit as a replacement ideology.)

So Ricoeur combines the reanimation of traditional sources of communicative action with the reawakening of political responsibility towards a creative renewal of cultural heritage. His own summary of the "fusion" or *consensus* (which he refrains from calling a "synthesis" or "union") discusses the specific symbols from the two dominant religions of the West, Judaism and Christianity--namely, Exodus and Resurrection, which are eschatological symbols of liberation, salvation and hope. Ricoeur's essay

brings out this point most poignantly (the pauses between the quotes are interspersed with linkages that discern):

"... [I]n the end, hermeneutics will say, from where do you speak when you appeal to *Selbstreflexion* [self-reflexion], if it is not from the place you yourself have denounced as a non-place, the non-place of the transcendental subject? [This is Heidegger's question, following from Nietzsche's suspicions.] It is indeed from the basis of a tradition that you speak. This tradition is not perhaps the same as Gadamer's; it is perhaps that of *Aufklaerung* [the Enlightenment] whereas Gadamer's would be Romanticism. But it is a tradition nonetheless, the tradition of emancipation rather than that of recollection. [This is Gadamer's position spiced with the wanting ingredient of distanciation, anticipating Habermas, which is more marked in the next sentence.] Critique is also a tradition. [But Habermas is immediately qualified for the less concrete and more spiritual goals in the history of ontology.] I would even say that it plunges into the most impressive tradition, that of liberating acts, of the Exodus and the Resurrection. Perhaps there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and the Resurrection were effaced from the memory of mankind... If that is so, then nothing is more deceptive than the alleged antinomy between an ontology of prior understanding and an eschatology of freedom. [We are returned to Heidegger's gesture and ontology of pre-understanding in being, but less vengefully with what has preceded in the aftermath of the Nationalist Socialist ascendancy, the Holocaust; and so now with greater hope, or self-liberating remembrance of things past] We have encountered these false antinomies elsewhere: as if it were necessary to choose between reminiscence and hope! In theological terms, eschatology is nothing without the recitation of acts of deliverance from the past." (1981 (1987):99; 1986: 337)

Ricoeur has put this model for hermeneutics to fruitful use and produced excellent interpretations of phenomena

which neither phenomenologists before him nor theologians were quite able to deal with in their complexities. In his work, *The Symbolism of Evil*, he develops an interpretation of symbols, understood as cultural expressions which contain double meaning. The object of hermeneutics is to disclose, to explicate, to open out the symbolic (or "sacred") meanings in these double-barrelled or ambivalent expressions. "Evil" presents itself as one extremely reified challenge. In another of his major works, *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur shows how the metaphor of a philosophy of living can bridge the age-old divide between the poetic and the speculative discourses in philosophy. The history of this divide goes at least as far back as Plato and Aristotle respectively, and a hermeneutics of the metaphor can be seen to play a far greater role in understanding than had hitherto been realised.

Ricoeur returns to the theme of hermeneutic suspicion and, drawing from Derrida's unbounded 'deconstruction' to supplement Heidegger's own 'restrained criticism', he proposes this as a means of unhitching the latent in metaphysics and dead metaphors which accumulate and occlude a tradition's understanding of cosmology, and the deeper symbolic truth undergirding certain of its discourses. He points out:

"A simple inspection of discourse in its explicit intention, a simple interpretation through the game of question and answer, is no longer sufficient. Heideggerian deconstruction [*Destruktion?*] must now take on Nietzschean genealogy, Freudian psychoanalysis, the Marxist critique of ideology [post-Habermas], that is, the weapons of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Armed in this way, the critique is capable of unmasking the *unthought* conjunction of *hidden* metaphysics and *worn-out* metaphor." (1987:285).

The overall task is not a linguistic task (or the prerogative of "cultural studies"), rather it is a philosophical task (as part of the "fundamental gesture of philosophy"). Thus, if Habermas's use of the hermeneutic of suspicion is shot through with *ideologiekritik*, Ricoeur's would seem to have a more *creative* edge to it, but one which, in keeping with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, is full of hope and sagacity.

Applications in conclusion

I wish to conclude this essay with a brief discussion of the possible areas of application of the creative hermeneutic of suspicion, especially in non-Western contexts. The examples I draw upon take in seriously both the hermeneutic of tradition and the critique of ideology, which becomes paradigmatic in post-colonial critiques of Western ethnocentrism and other (more indigenist) kinds of authoritarian elitism. To take up the latter first, one could argue that the impersonal, abstract, ahistorical, atemporal concept of 'Brahman,' so dear to Vedanta philosophy is a 'dead' metaphor, in as much as it is grounded in *eidos*, *logos*, and *ousia* and therefore has its life or sustaining significance entirely within the discourse of metaphysics (as Heidegger would say of all grand metaphors of the subject). A culture- or, rather, ideology--of brahmanical hegemony and renunciative restraint bordering on the obsessive denial of the lived experience, was built or idealised on the basis of this dominant and powerful transcendental signifier. Its social praxis legitimated the rule of the priest, of a strident and pervasive caste hierarchy, and the marginalisation of women, the under-class and foreigners as others. A wondrous evocation that may have arisen in the poetic musings of the Vedic (nomadic Aryan) bards which, in the altar of later Vedic sacrificial fire, is transmuted into a substantive being (in the dis-guise of language) which,

finally, under the anvil of speculative philosophy, ascends to assume the throne on the highest rungs of metaphysics. Thus Brahman stands to be de-structured, dismantled, disseminated, deconstructed by being subjected to the same rigours of the hermeneutic of suspicion and critical ideology as Ricoeur has suggested. It may then be possible to recover the latent and to reanimate the tradition in more creative ways than has occurred either through the revivalism of neo-Vedanta or the Romanticism of 19th century philological Indology (Bilimoria, 1997a).

This last remark brings me to the second example. The large body of texts produced and translated in Europe since the 16th century concerning the cultures, literature, and peoples inhabiting the vast land mass to the east and south-east of Europe have nowadays been recognised to be suffused with "orientalism". This marks a peculiar hermeneutical act which the West ingressed upon the East. More specifically, the discourse of Orientalism underscores the wilful romantic construct of the East (the Orient or Asia) in the imagination of the West, as Europe's "other"--so was destined to be converted, civilised and controlled by the burgeoning Western religious, economic and political might. But if we leave out any part, conscious or complicitous, involved in the formation of these texts or of the related discourse, we could be doing grave "epistemic violence" to them. An incisive judgment along these lines has, for instance, been said of the 19th century British Raj's novel statutory judgment on *sati*, the Indian practice of widow burning, as constituting a legal "crime" which, however, failed to recognise the social motivations of the Hindu patriarchal order that perpetrated this culturally aberrant practice for so long (Spivak 1988). It is not as though such a censure was impossible within the Hindu and Pan-Indian tradition itself; indeed, there was evidence in traditional moral texts against such practices, and

indigenous leaders had rallied against the act on the grounds that *sati* violated women's rights. But is that tantamount to a criminal act under English Common Law? (see Bilimoria, 1997b)

By focusing on the discourse of Orientalism, we understand better the Occidental-West, its logocentrism, and its failure either to bring about genuine dialogue with the East or to generate authentic methods for reading, translating and understanding the "other". The same can be said about the judgment of early British settlers that the colonies of *terra australis* were not inhabited by any people (thus rendered as *terra nullius*), because the nomadic native Aborigines appeared not to have cultivated the land or invested any labour in it or asserted an instrumental interest in it. This massive legal and political prejudice, in the Gadamerian sense, is finally turned back on the incoming tradition for its own self-reflection, and to demonstrate that it (mis)judged "interest" in individualistic-utilitarian rather than in communicative-communitarian terms; and it perhaps paves the way for corrective reparation or "Reconciliation" of First and Second/Third Nations' respective claims.

. Third World studies and feminist movements have capitalised on such insights and trans-boundary critiques, and have been given a heavy political emphasis by Foucault's theorising premised on the generalisation that all knowledge is inextricably linked with power (and that power is invariably corrupting). They have, therefore, advocated and developed methods for a re-reading and "deconstruction" of much of the past history and "civilising" of literary productions, translatory enactments, and so on, resulting from the basically liberal-individualistic, imperial and patriarchy-propelled intrusions into the lives of women, slaves, marginalised groups, the "other", the outcastes, and the colonised subjects, both within the history of Western-

European societies but more damagingly in various countries throughout the world. History might be more authentic and closer to the truth were its voices to emerge, as it were, "from below" rather than from the pens of the privileged, the elite, the experts, and bow-tied academic researchers, who have a vested interest (unwittingly, perhaps) in perpetuating certain "myths" which reflect the dominant cultural force. The requisite hermeneutics for (re-)writing history from below has been technically popularised by South Asian radical social theorists as the "*Subaltern*" stance or voices of the submerged subject-positions.

Last, but not least, cross-cultural philosophers of religion have claimed that the Western invention of the sub-discipline or discourse of philosophy of religion with its expectations of a solid, irrefutable and logically sound "proof" (or, for that matter, "disproof") of the existence of God has triggered much unnecessary anguish, mimicry, and irreparable damage among non-Western, non-Christian peoples (Bilimoria 1996b). When directed at the "other" (i.e., non-Western religious cultures), this trenchant discourse has in part also helped to erode local traditions, folk understandings, indigenous hermeneutics, law, and social wisdom developed over many centuries. Such--and, more--sophisticated critical analyses have arisen in recent years from movements in philosophy and the human sciences, particularly from Europe and now increasingly influential in North America, India, and Australasia.*

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