Gadamer and Habermas
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Here is the question that Gadamer wants answered:

> *How can hermeneutics, once freed from the ontological obstructions of the scientific concept of objectivity, do justice to the historicity of understanding? (268)*

Note the difference between *explanation* (which seeks to give necessary and sufficient conditions for the reduction of a concept to more primitive concepts) and *understanding* (whose structure is circular and non-reductive). For Heidegger, understanding ↔ circularity ↔ temporality are inseparable.

Being and Time

Martin Heidegger

What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it the right way ... in the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, 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 the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (*Being and Time* 32:195)

Martin Heidegger

"Heidegger gave understanding an ontological orientation by interpreting it as an existential and when he interpreted Dasein's mode of being in terms of time" (296). Time is not a gulf to be bridged, but it supports the ground for events to unfold (297) $\longrightarrow$ recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding! (For example, it is much more difficult to assess the historical significance of current events than of historical events.)

Hermeneutic Circle

Here are a few points about the hermeneutic circle, a concept that (I think) originates with Friedrich Schleiermacher.

- at first, the hermeneutic circle describes interpretation as moving back and forth from parts of a text to the whole of a text. Neither can be understood without the other. This is not a question-begging procedure, as it would be in science or logic (the bus is late because it arrived three minutes after the scheduled time)

- but then, circles appear in hermeneutics in many other places: for example, when you are trying to understand the historical past, you must also try to understand the present, for which it is essential to understand the historical past

  the circle of understanding is not a "methodological" circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding (294)

Hermeneutic Circle

- another hermeneutic circle, according to Gadamer, is the way in which prejudices are essential for understanding and understanding is essential for discriminating between productive prejudices that enable understanding and prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings (295)
- "Heidegger derives the circular structure of understanding from the temporality of Dasein" (268) Heidegger writes, "in the circle is hidden a positive possibility" (269)
- the reason why circularity is virtuous, not vicious, for interpretation is because it is *existential*, i.e. "the circle possesses an ontologically positive significance" (269)

Prejudice

It is important to understand that for Gadamer, understanding of the text is already present as you read the text. You do not get to it as an afterthought.

> *Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as she penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (269)*

Objectivity refers only to the process, not to the outcome (compare this to Sartre's cowardice, which is the only objective moral failure). Inappropriate fore-meanings do not survive this process—as in Schechtman, when inappropriate narratives which violate the reality constraint do not hold up under interrogation (Gadamer on page 271: "the hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things").

Misunderstandings

There is some Popperian asymmetry detectable in Gadamer's analysis of misunderstanding. The reader must always be open to new meanings, just as Popper's scientist must always be open to new creative hypotheses. However,

> ... *meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way.*
> *Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a*
> *word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so*
> *we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about*
> *the thing if we want to understand the meaning of*
> *another. (271)*

Therefore, certain interpretive approaches and fore-meanings can be falsified. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding (291).

For Gadamer, a hermeneutics of suspicion is always derivative of a hermeneutics of trust (the contrast between the two is due to Paul Ricoeur, who wrote about this after Gadamer published *Truth and Method*). Gadamer says, "only when this assumption proves mistaken [the assumption that the text has integrity]—i.e. the text is not intelligible—do we begin to suspect the text" (294). Understanding is like speaking your native language: it is natural, constitutive of being. Misunderstanding is derivative and artificial, such as when someone speaks to you in a foreign language that you do not understand.

> *It is only when the attempt to accespt what is said as true fails that we try to "understand" the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion (294)*

Openness always includes situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it (271). For example, Martin Luther's list on the next slide cannot and must not be interpreted without the lifeworld including our experience of the holocaust.

On the Jews and Their Lies

1. to burn down Jewish synagogues and schools and warn people against them;
2. to refuse to let Jews own houses among Christians;
3. for Jewish religious writings to be taken away;
4. for rabbis to be forbidden to preach;
5. to offer no protection to Jews on highways;
6. for usury to be prohibited and for all silver and gold to be removed, put aside for safekeeping, and given back to Jews who truly convert; and
7. to give young, strong Jews flail, axe, spade, and spindle, and let them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.[9]

Tradition

Heidegger, according to Gadamer, secures the scientific theme by framing it within the understanding of tradition (272). The fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power (273). For the enlightenment, negative prejudice is distinguished from founded judgment by reference to justificatory method. The two sources of prejudice:

- human authority
- overhastiness

Romanticism

The romantic reversal of the Enlightenment's criteria of value perpetuates the abstract contrast between myth and reason (275)

- the world of myth
- unreflective life
- not yet analyzed by consciousness
- close to nature
- Christian chivalry
- simplicity of peasant life

Romanticism

The achievements of Romanticism (276):

- revival of the past
- discovery of the voices of the peoples in their songs
- collecting of fairy tales and legends
- cultivation of ancient customs
- discovery of worldviews implicit in languages
- study of religion and wisdom in India
- nineteenth-century historiography

However, Romanticism sees itself as fulfillment of the Enlightenment, achieving the kind of objectivity in historiography that was achieved in the natural sciences.

Overcoming the Global Demand

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the enlightenment, will prove to be itself a prejudice, the removal of which opens the way to an appropriate understanding of our finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness. (277)

Gadamer says that our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk (299).

Reason

Gadamer emphasizes that "reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms" (277, Habermas calls this idea "de-transcendentalized reason"). The fundamental epistemological question is not, what can I know detached from all experience; but: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? (278) Gadamer defends the role of authority. Gadamer is especially vocal about resisting the antagonism between reason and tradition/authority that has been built up by both the enlightenment and romanticism.

> . . . there is no such unconditional antithesis between
> tradition and reason . . . the romantic faith in the
> "growth of tradition," before which all reason must
> remain silent, is fundamentally like the enlightenment
> and just as prejudiced (282)

Authority is not based on abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge (281). Granting authority to a superior is an act of freedom and reason. This applies to morality and supplies us with a critique of both existentialism and reason-based moral views (Kant, Mill):

> *The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. (282) Romanticism was wrong by opposing tradition and freedom.*

Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein

Gadamer wants to abolish the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it (283). Wirkungsgeschichte. Difference between the history of mathematics and the history of the human sciences. You don't need to read Max Planck's papers to understand quantum mechanics, but you would want to read "Droysen and Mommsen" (285). Historiography is not only research, it itself established tradition. It is distinguished from natural science by having as its object the subject conducting the inquiry. "The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other" (299). Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.

Open Grammars

There is a school of thought that says that our thinking is constrained by language depending on the particular language (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis).

- colour terms
- Pirahã: lack of number terms
- "empty" barrels that contained explosive vapours
- Chinese and counterfactuals
- Swedish prepositions and Finnish cases

For nativist objections to linguistic determinism see Steven Pinker's book *The Language Instinct*, chapter "Mentalese."

> *First, let us do away with the folklore that parents teach their children language.* (The Language Instinct, 28)

Open Grammars

For Jürgen Habermas, linguistic determinism is undermined by language itself. Language rules (which Habermas calls a grammar) enable transcendance.

> *every ordinary-language grammar opens up the possibility of also transcending the language that it establishes (143)*

> *we are never enclosed within a single grammar ... the first grammar that one masters also enables one to step outside it and interpret something foreign, to make something that is incomprehensible intelligible (143)*

Reason is always bound up with language and always beyond the languages in which it is expressed (144).

Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein's language games: understanding is recapitulation of the training through which native speakers are socialized into their form of life. For Gadamer, this is not sufficient. Hermeneutics kicks in when the language game becomes problematic. Interpreters are like translators.

Jürgen Habermas

The lifeworlds established by the grammar of language games are not closed life forms, as Wittgenstein's monadological conception suggests ... Wittgenstein failed to recognize that the same rules also include the conditions of the possibility of interpretation. (147)

Dialectic, rather than monadology, leads to the possibility of revision and elastic renewal (148) ("language spheres are not monadically sealed but porous," 149).

Fusing Horizons

"Hermeneutic understanding, which is only articulated in situations of disturbed consensus, is as fundamental to the understanding of language as is primary consensus" (148).

Wittgenstein resisted positivism by introducing the practice of language games and Husserl's concept of lifeworld to linguistics. He did not go far enough by viewing language ahistorically and in terms of the reproduction of fixed patterns (149). The contrast with formal languages (communications, not derivations). The speech situation is not a model for a formalized language (150).

Understanding does not rest on empathy (as it did for Dilthey), but on "the attainment of a higher universality" (Gadamer, 151). "Understanding is always the fusion of horizons."

Hermeneutic Circle

- circular relationship of pre-understanding and the explication of what is understood—we can decipher the parts of a text only if we anticipate an understanding (152)
- the circle is neither subjective nor objective, but characterized by the movement of interpreter and tradition
- it is not an act of subjectivity because it proceeds from a common bond with tradition; this bond, however, is constantly being developed
- we have always already understood the tradition (Socrates' maieutics)
- hermeneutic understanding is the interpretation of texts with the knowledge of texts that have already been understood (153)
- the possible objectivity of experience is endangered by the illusion of objectivity

Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The actual meaning of the text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and those whom he originally wrote for. At least it is not exhausted by them, for it is always partly determined also by the historical situation ... the meaning of a text goes beyond its author

Arthur Danto, an American art critic, introduces the significance of narrative to Gadamer's idea of historical-effect consciousness. Narratives stand in contrast to what neo-positivists have called protocol sentences. The latter are

- neutral with respect to the time of occurrence
- narrative elements are irrelevant in the framing

Danto's machine or the ideal chronicler—worthless for historiography? (Comey's memos.)

Retrospective projections:

> The meaning that thus accrues to the events
> retrospectively emerges only in terms of the schema of
> possible action, namely, as if the meaning, incorporating
> the knowledge of those born later, had been intended.
> (158)

This may be problematic. Often what fascinates us about history is that we get to watch actors and empathize with them precisely in the sense that we want to understand their motives, desires, and beliefs before their intentions were either clear or fulfilled/thwarted. Examples: Gauguin, Anna Karenina, Brunhilde Pomsel. See Milan Kundera's essay "Paths in the Fog."

Danto emphasizes that history is of a piece and not divisible into pure descriptions and interpretations (159). Gödel's incompleteness theorems: a formal axiom system containing arithmetic can be complete, it can be consistent, but it cannot be both; and its consistency cannot be demonstrated from within the system.

Habermas seeks to expand on enlightenment principles (instead of rejecting them) by proposing a framework for communicative rationality. Communicative rationality rests on an ideal speech situation in which discourse is immunized against repression and inequality. Here are some rules (Habermas calls them presuppositions):

Communicative Rationality

- participants in communicative exchange are using the same linguistic expressions in the same way
- no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded by the participants
- no force except that of the better argument is exerted
- all the participants are motivated only by a concern for the better argument
- everyone capable of speech and action is entitled to participate, and everyone is equally entitled to introduce new topics or express attitudes, needs, or desires
- no validity claim is exempt in principle from critical evaluation in argumentation

Habermas's three moments of hermeneutic knowledge which it has in common with Aristotle's political-ethical knowledge:

- reflexive: it is always also self-knowledge and shapes who we are
- internalized: practical knowledge continues a process of socialization (Polyphemus)
- global: it is never restricted to particular parts of the lifeworld (the ability to operate a television vs the ability to raise a child)

Technical rules (fundamental predicates, invariant rules of application) vs practical rules (consensus, intersubjectivity, pre-understanding) (165).

Habermas's Critique of Gadamer

- Gadamer's agreement with the positivists that hermeneutics transcends science (167)
- the confrontation of truth and method should not have led Gadamer to an abstract opposition between hermeneutic experience and methical knowledge
- shifting the balance of authority and reason: Gadamer fails to recognize the power of reflection that unfolds in *Verstehen* (168)
- Gadamer's absolutization of hermeneutics (169)—this is in contradiction to a rule of communicative action
- the opposition between the legitimacy of prejudices validated by tradition and the power of reflection, which can reject tradition (170)

Sherlock Holmes

Holmes walks into the old second hand store and looks across the counter. The man standing there glances up before returning to his bookkeeping. Holmes turns to his companion and says, "That, my dear Watson, is the man we are looking for." "But Holmes, how on Earth can you know such a thing? You've not even spoken to him!" "Ah, but you see Watson, it is simple. I noticed that his beard is ragged and untrimmed, but its style implies that it is usually well kept. This means that he had little or no time this morning to undertake his usual particulars. He is wheezing slightly, showing that he was out of the shop this morning in the dense smog we have been having all over London. And, of course, he is wearing the stolen watch on a chain in his waistcoat." "Eee Gads Holmes, I just don't know how you do it!", exclaims Watson.

Deductive, Inductive, and Abductive Syllogisms

Deductive	Inductive	Abductive
All men are mortal;	Socrates is a man;	All men are mortal;
Socrates is a man;	Socrates is mortal;	Socrates is mortal;
∴ Socrates is mortal.	∴ All men are mortal.	∴ Socrates is a man.

The Problem of Induction

You see many white swans. What is your justification for believing that all swans are white? You may say, "I've used induction all my life, and it has worked really well—after seeing many white swans, the next swan was always white, so induction is predictive!" However, your reasoning is circular. You have used inductive reasoning to justify inductive reasoning.

The Problem of Induction

Karl Popper expresses this objection as follows: if in science we use inductive reasoning (as Hans Reichenbach claims), then there must be such a thing as an inductive principle. This principle cannot be a logical truth, for it is logically possible that induction fails.

Bertrand Russell, "On Induction"

The man who has fed the chicken every day throughout its life at last wrings its neck instead, showing that more refined views as to the uniformity of nature would have been useful to the chicken.

Something which is true not by logic alone is sometimes called a synthetic truth. Logic does not disallow the possibility of its negation being true. Propositions (the kind of thing that can be true or false) are therefore necessarily true (necessary), contingently true or false (possible), or necessarily false (impossible), although you need to be careful with these attributions (men and U.S. presidents).

If the principle of induction is both a general law and a synthetic truth, the only way to justify it is by induction! Therefore, if induction is at the heart of science, science is in danger of cardiac arrest. Popper's solution: ditch induction. Science is based on deductive reasoning. (Kant had a similarly ingenious solution for this problem: the synthetic *a priori*; but Kant was famously wrong about some things that he thought were synthetic a priori truths, such as that space is Euclidean. A proposition is true a priori if you can know that it is true without reference to experience.)

Scientific Method

Just as Mill did for ethics, Popper formulates a two-step procedure
for science based on art (the creation of hypotheses) and
experiment. The first step has echoes of the hermeneutic method
in it: there is an "irrational element" and "creative intuition"
(Henri Bergson). A scientific theory is first formulated "by
intuition, based upon something like an intellectual love
(Einfühlung) of the objects of experience" (32).

1. test the internal logical consistency of the system
2. test the character of the hypothesis—is it empirical or tautological?
3. test how the hypothesis stacks up against already existing scientific theories—is it stronger or weaker or inconsistent with them?
4. test deductive implications (modus tollens) (32f)

Testing does not confirm a theory or make it more probable. It only corroborates it. Both Relativity Theory and Quantum Mechanics are extremely well-corroborated, but mutually incompatible in their present version. GRT, for example, was yet again corroborated last year by the discovery of gravitational waves.

- Steady State theory vs Big Bang theory
  - radio waves bright radio sources are found more numerously in far-away galaxies
  - CMB before the universe broke up into chunks (stars and galaxies), it emitted radiation that can still be measured as cosmic microwave background

Rational Reconstruction

Rational reconstruction refers to the way Rudolf Carnap (a logical positivist) was trying to solve the problem of demarcation. According to Carnap, a sentence needs to be part of a linguistic framework. Here are some examples:

- "five plus seven is twelve" is a sentence in the linguistic framework of mathematics, its truth follows from the rules of the linguistic framework
- "I have hands" is a sentence in the linguistic framework of observable things such as tables, chairs, bodies, etc.
- "The positron is the antimatter counterpart of the electron" is a sentence in the linguistic framework of unobservables in theoretical physics (Dirac predicted its existence using mathematics, Carl David Anderson took a cloud chamber picture of its trail in 1932)

Rational Reconstruction

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The truth and falsity of a sentence can only be evaluated within a linguistic framework, thus the meaningless of the skeptic's quest to show that "I have hands" cannot be justified. Linguistic frameworks need clear rules about verification, thus statements such as "the church is the bride of Christ" are problematic (and with it all of hermeneutics?).

Hume's problem and Kant's problem. How do we distinguish between scientific questions and metaphysical speculation? The problem with positivism (verificationism) is that it pours out the baby with the bathwater. Universal statements about nature are as nonsensical and meaningless as Hume's "metaphysical twaddle" because positivists fail to give rules for how they might be established empirically (the problem of induction).

Poppers solution: falsifiability as a criterion of demarcations.

Unrepeatable, Unique Events

When Popper talks about science, his favourite example is always theoretical physics with its universal laws. Many theories in science are about singular statements: climate change, evolution, extra-terrestrial life, expanding universe.

Karl Popper

Any controversy over the question whether events which are in principle unrepeatable and unique ever do occur cannot be decided by science: it would be a metaphysical controversy. (46)

Here is an example of a prediction by evolutionary theory (although, if it were experimentally falsified, it wouldn't falsify evolutionary theory): high-ranking mothers should give more parental care to sons; low-ranking mothers to daughters.

The Role of Tradition

I have friends who claim that they have never experienced a supernatural phenomenon, but that they know and trust other people who have told them about experiencing a supernatural phenomenon. Popper's verdict is clear:

> *Can any statement be justified by the fact that K.R.P. is utterly convinced of its truth? The answer is no. (46)*

One problem that Popper faces is that falsifications are also subjectively experienced unique events. "There can be no ultimate statements in science: there can be no statements in science which cannot be tested" ((47). Statements of higher levels of universality are tested by statements of lower levels of universality, ad infinitum.

The Ad-Hoc Auxiliary Hypothesis Problem

$$\frac{\begin{array}{c} A \supset C \\ \lnot C \end{array}}{\therefore \lnot A} \text{ is valid but } \frac{\begin{array}{c} A \land B \supset C \\ \lnot C \end{array}}{\therefore \lnot A} \text{ is not.}$$

Falsification fails if you can introduce an auxiliary hypothesis (Duhem-Quine problem: it is impossible to test a scientific theory in isolation). Popper's solution: a scientist is not trying to keep a theory alive. Popper favours a view of science in which only the fittest theories survive.

The Necessity of the Accidental

Marquard argues that an element of the accidental is necessary for being human:

Odo Marquard

To get rid of what is accidental [Hegel] would mean ... to get rid of philosophers ... without philosophers there would be no philosophy ... one would philosophy, in the name of philosophy, of philosophy (109)

Later on, Marquard restates that one would "rid man, in the name of man, of man."

Four Sections

1. the program of making man absolute
2. unavoidability of usual practices
3. human beings are always more accidents than choice
4. human freedom depends on the separation of powers

The accidental emerges from an interesting property of the world as phenomenon (lifeworld, 121): that things could have been otherwise (Leszek Kołakowski: "quod tamen potest esse aliter"). The accidental is what is neither impossible nor necessary. Distinguish between the

- arbitrarily accidental
- fatefully accidental (Nina Lugovskaya's strabismus)

Si contingens, unde necessarium et vice versa. Again, we are confronted with what looks like an irreducible dualism. Sartre, following Kant: human beings are, without exception, not their accidents, but only and completely their choice (contra "moral luck").

- religion
- Descartes' methodical doubt: in dubito contra traditionem (when in doubt, against tradition)
- German idealism
- Marxism
- Habermasian discourse ethics

Note how Marquard takes Gadamer's side in the debate over tradition; and Popper's side in the debate over dogmatism/determinism/historicism (open society).

Here are some similarities between Marquard and Popper:

- both were converted from adherence to abolutist ideologies (Popper from Marxism; Marquard from National Socialism)
- both assign an important role to creativity and the accidental in epistemology
- both vigorously criticize historicism (the idea that there is an intention in history beyond the intention of individuals which determines history)
- both emphasize the fallibility of knowledge

- "human life is too short for executing the program of making man absolute" (115)—compare and contrast the solution of German idealism/Marxism for this problem and Marquard's

- what is the difference between an epistemological skeptic like Descartes and an anti-dogmatic skeptic like Marquard/Popper/Kołakowski?

- note Marquard's unease with environmentalism: environmentalism has as one of its premises the "eternal significance" of human action, and our existing usual practices are often in conflict with this premise

- what is the Eichmann argument and how does Marquard address it?

Questions

- "critique is, above all, conflict between usual practices" (118)—what echoes of Kant do you hear here, and also a few lines later when Marquard rips into "perfectionistic deontological demands"

- what kind of narrativist is Marquard? notice the difference between Aristotelian narratives (where form is imposed on content) and Marquardian narratives (where the contingent is necessary)

- note also similarities with Foucault: the significance of the contingent (versus Hume's necessity in the genealogy of morality, for example)

- note also similarities with Taylor: Marquard's emphasis on usual practices and tradition, which only make re-evaluation meaningful

Questions

- both Taylor and Marquard have a cautiously positive relationship with art and religion as human responses to mitigate arbitrariness

- skepticism ("Zweifel"): isosthenes diaphonia (in our course, for example, between the hermeneutic method and the scientific method)

- note Marquard's resistance to Mill's idea that there must be one principle of morality: "there is never only one such power at work, but always a number of them" (also for convictions, traditions, stories, souls, gods, points of orientation, freedoms—Marquard is a professing polytheist)

- finally, a nod to Jacques Derrida: "what makes a human being free is not zero determination—the absence of all determinants—or the superior force of a single determinant, but a superabundance of determinants" (124)

Human reason, says Marquard again with a bit of cheek directed at Immanuel Kant, is the abandonment of the effort to remain stupid.