

Hermeneutic Philosophy: History As The Singular Ground of Thought

ONE OF THE REAL PROBLEMS WITH WHICH PEOPLE WHO MAKE of philosophy a profession are faced is its seeming dispersal, its "end" in the special sciences. Martin Heidegger, in *On Time and Being*, has summed up this position:

The development of philosophy into the independent sciences, which however, interdependently communicate among themselves, ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. . . . The sciences will interpret everything in their structure that is still reminiscent of the origin from philosophy in accordance with the rules of science, that is, technologically.¹

In short, if this and other similar, rather despairing remarks be correct, the usual pursuit of philosophical matters in the schools would seem to be merely redundant.

But is there a proper role for those who claim as their pro-

fession philosophising? There would appear to be an affirmative answer which is not merely self-serving on the part of those whose jobs are at stake. Heidegger makes *his* response in the following way:

Perhaps there is a thinking which is more sober than the irresistible race of rationalization and the sweeping character of cybernetics. Presumably it is precisely this sweeping quality which is extremely irrational. Perhaps there is a thinking outside the distinction of rational and irrational still more sober than scientific technology, more sober and thus removed, without effect and yet having its own necessity.²

This is not Heidegger's call to the quest for Being *qua* Being; that would be the content of this way of thinking perhaps. Rather, this is that form of thinking which has been called "hermeneutical phenomenology and the analysis of the historicalness of Dasein. . . ."³ It is understood as the opposite of that philosophy which "turns into the empirical science of man, of all of what can become the experiential object of his technology. . . ."⁴

This hermeneutical philosophy addresses that basic problem of all modern philosophy, the knowing subject, which has been, it seems, *the* specifically philosophical problem (in a way quite different from previous strains of philosophising) since the time of Descartes. The manner of carrying out this inquiry reached an impasse, it can plausibly be argued, during the mid-19th century; the way in which the inquiry was being carried forward became counter-productive. Numerous thinkers of various traditions responded to the demand for a new foundation, one which found expression in Husserl's demand that thought return at last to the things themselves.

But it is perhaps Heidegger who best understood the need for this return to be an interpretive project. In order for philosophy to reform itself in response to its own dispersal in the positive

sciences, no new method could simply be posited, but rather, it was necessary to get at the most basic human phenomenon which as a content determined its own method of appearing as an object of reflection. This basic phenomenon — something increasingly estranged from philosophical speculation from the end of the 18th century on — was human interaction with the world, an interaction most fundamentally temporal in character.

At the same time, the project of understanding the knowing subject in his own subjectivity was hardly abandoned. On the contrary, this subjectivity is better understood in the interpretation of the interaction with the world than could possibly be the case where, implicitly or explicitly, such an interaction is precluded.⁵

What seems to me the most interesting implication of this emergent hermeneutical philosophy is the suggestion of a new pre-philosophical point from which to begin the strictly philosophical inquiry. Previously, this has been in the positive sciences; that avenue now appears to be effectively closed. However, if human temporality and historicity are the route into philosophical speculation, then human history, properly speaking, must furnish the basic data for that speculation. In what follows, some of the reasons for such a foundation to the reform of philosophy are discussed, and some of the most obvious evidences of its productivity are laid out.

I

History is a peculiar thing. It is, quite strictly, a thing: It is a gathering-together, specifically of events and assessments; it is temporal ("thing" is cognate with "thieh," another Germanic word, meaning "time"). History is, most especially, complex — as is to be expected of something presenting itself as it is naturally, before speculative analysis. As Ricoeur notes, *historia* is principally a kind of research;⁶ this requires amplification, though, noting the decisive character of history, involving assessments as to what it is that needs to be remembered (at a personal level) and what needs

to be transmitted (at the community level).

Gadamer shows the Janus-like character of history as reflective inquiry and decision-making:

At the beginning of all historical hermeneutics then, the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and knowledge, must be discarded. The effect of a living tradition and the effect of history must constitute a unity, the analysis of which would reveal only a texture of reciprocal relationships. . . . Modern historical research itself is not only research but the transmission of tradition.⁷

This is the first face of history, a universal aspect comprising the whole of what is available, taking history to be a ground. That history and tradition should be closely linked can be taken as a self-evident historical truth; it is precisely when primitive peoples can organise their thinking about what has gone before (and expand it in various ways) that they can be said to emerge from pre-history. What makes such emergent cultures historical, and indeed, comprises a good part of what is significant about them culturally, is the selection of certain aspects of common experience of the whole people as requiring transmission to successive generations, along with an interpretation of the transmission. Examples are obvious: the Homeric epics enshrine the heroic deeds of Mycenaean Greeks, transmitting them to the East-Greek-speaking successors of the Mycenaean culture. Along with the claimed facticity of the account goes an interpretation of the way in which one is to act in the world; the epics have a moral. More obvious still is the character of the oldest historical compilations of Chinese culture, the didactic character of which is only equal, not superior, I think, to the need to transmit certain fundamental Chinese experiences and their meaning. The Homeric transmission is poetic, to be sure; the same character of transmitted experience and assessment operates equally in the prose of Thucydides. While the basic historical com-

pilations of ancient China are largely in prose, the *Shih Ching* is a poetic collection, also of historical importance. The identity of historical reflection and tradition is clear.

Not all such transmissions are equally important; there is strong evidence of selection and ordering of historical accounts. This selection represents a ratification of the insight and style of the historian. Thus the Homeric epics, and the histories of Thucydides and Herodotus survive; where others have disappeared altogether or only survive as fragments. One is entitled to infer, I think, that the survival of some texts and the disappearance of others reflect the consensus over time from within a given society as to which accounts-*cum*-assessments best enshrine and explain the common experience of that people, and can be taken as a sure guide to proper action within that people's cultural milieu.

This leads to the second face of historicity:

Effective-historical consciousness is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. To acquire awareness of a situation, though, is always a task of particular difficulty. The very idea of the situation means that we are not standing outside of it . . . The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring the particular historical horizon so that what we are seeking to understand can be seen in its true dimensions. If we fail to place ourselves in this way within the historical horizon out of which tradition speaks, we shall misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us.⁸

The manner in which history and tradition come together has already been sketched; effective-historical consciousness is the personal embodiment, and thus the most basic aspect of that ratification mentioned above, of what is transmitted in history. It is also, of course, a contribution to that transmission in an assessment of that history. It is difficult simply because of the degree to which identity with the historian's transmission is needed, if it is to be

given credence, the degree to which a clear insight into the common cultural experience of the people among which one lives is necessary to that identity, and of one's own role in that cultural enclave. This second face of history allows the dialogical encounter with culture in the tale passed on by the past's assessor, seeing its significance and grasping its hidden meaning.

Immediately the issue of language comes up; one can see why language has become a central issue among quite diverse schools of thought. I use Gadamer to illustrate the matter (I could just as well use Wittgenstein):

The consciousness that is effected by history has its fulfillment in what is linguistic. We can learn from the sensitive student of language that language in its life and occurrence must not only be thought of as merely changing but rather as something that has a teleology operating in it. This means that the words that are formed, the means of expression that appear in a language in order to say certain things, are not accidentally fixed, since they do not once again fall altogether into disuse. Instead, a definite articulation of the world is built up — a process that works as if guided and one that we can always observe in children who are learning to speak.⁹

In short, language frames dialogical expression. One's thinking in such a situation is limited by the degree to which the subtleties of explanation, the hidden connotative material which itself is not explained but always understood in explanation, and which is always intended as part of the meaning in the historian's tale, is grasped by his interlocutor.

The picture of history from within the perspective of hermeneutical philosophy can be summarised so: There is a grand vision of a culture, operative in that culture, for that culture. It has an objective character, insofar as the historiographer (broadly con-

strued) has recorded a set of facts illustrative of some facet of the culture, and given an interpretation of those facts, from which the culture as a whole is to be grasped. At the same time, another person from within that culture embodies automatically (by virtue of up-bringing, if naught else) an understanding of what the historiographer has made objective. Entering into dialogue with the historian's tale, he is able to make objective to himself that which is part of his own subjectivity, and which en-frames his own activity in his world.

If this is so, the position that historicity is not merely a facet of human existence, but its central fact, makes of that fact the only possible beginning for any deeply penetrating inquiry into other aspects of the human domain. In scrutinising historicity and its object, all other aspects of human being also surface. Gadamer, commenting on Heidegger's analysis of Dasein, makes the matter clear:

In reviving the question of being and thus moving beyond all previous metaphysics . . . Heidegger attained a fundamentally new position in regard to the impasses of historicism. . . . Understanding is the original character of the being of human life itself. . . . Heidegger revealed the projective character of all understanding and conceived the act of understanding itself as the movement of transcendence, of moving beyond being. . . . The coordination of all knowing activity with what is known is not based on the fact that they are essentially the same, but draws its significance from the particular nature of the mode of being that is common to both of them. It consists in the fact that neither the knower nor the known are present at hand in an "ontic" way but in an historical one, i.e., they are of the mode of being of historicalness.¹⁰

Traditionally, human being is defined in terms of its seizing-hold-

of-something-in-an-expressible-concept (that is, "logon echon"). This activity is a response to the call of that which is seen as future. But such a response is couched in terms of a past, which in the first instance is not objective, but rather part of the understanding subject's own being. It is in becoming aware of this past-determined character of human being's response to the call of the future that the historicity of being, and the possibility of history (as something objective) is realised. At precisely the same instant, the possibility of human action as something understandable also surfaces; indeed, the means of explaining all other kinds of human activity is couched, finally, in historical terms. For example scientific explanation in the guise of, say, causal explanation, is fundamentally a history of some event, with an implicit prognostication both as to that event and of similar chains; such an explanation would make no sense whatsoever, were it not the case that human beings saw themselves and explained themselves historically, and perceived something analogous in quite other entities' coming-to-be — however inaccurate that analogy might in fact be. This is another aspect of the transcendent character of history-cum-historicity. One might put it thus: That historicity provides the *dandum* (in Pepper's adroit expression) which integrates the data of the present.

The intensely human character of subjective historicity, and its objective manifestation in history is demonstrated in the discussion of freedom. Whether freedom is the more common, naive sort in which a wide range of choice is deemed essential, or the more refined sort of which Leibniz speaks, where one freely assents to that which is determined by the creative act of God, in each case it is understanding which stands as the condition of the possibility of freedom. And understanding, as has been suggested above, is conditioned in turn by the embodiment of the nominally objective history of a culture through the historicity of the individual; this embodiment takes the form of the accession of the individual to tradition. Gadamer puts it neatly:

The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be embraced and cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, such as is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason. . . .¹¹

By a reasonable act, what is passed on — in effect, made available to one in tradition — is adopted as a framework within which to integrate the present facts which limit the possibilities for responding to the future, while at the same time constituting that future, insofar as it is conceived. As merely tradition, it is nothing, a *me on ti*; in appropriating it, I lend history — embodied as tradition by virtue of my own historicity — temporal reality.¹²

II

Thus far, there are no serious problems. But why must this become a *philosophical* matter? Why must there be a hermeneutical philosophy, rather than simply a more penetrating history, in the sense of the academic discipline? For surely most philosophers know rather less about history's basic data than do historians.

The answer appears to lie in the matter of integration of the historical fact with the present and future as a means of understanding, of course. That is, the question is really a matter of seeing how the data of the past become the framework of understanding, a matter which requires penetrating the objective character of history to the inner historicity which makes history possible. History is in this sense a "text" to be encountered and appropriated. Such an appropriation, in turn, is an interpretation.

How such an interpretation actually operates is not so simple, to be sure. Clearly, it must be linguistic in some sense; already it has been suggested that this historically based philosophising is intimately associated with the ancient concept of human being as *logon-echon*. Specifically, understanding is discursive. And "dis-

course is *the* event of language," as Ricoeur remarks.¹³ In his persuasive demonstration of the dialogue of event and meaning; he shows how understanding is not a fixed moment, but one which is in flux between an objective and subjective appearance.¹⁴ Ricoeur is principally concerned with understanding an author's meaning in a transmitted text; for him, then, these appearances are intentions, the former the intention of an author and the latter that of the interpreter. There is a real hiatus separating these two intentions. But it is possible to extend this narrowed view. After all, an author creates a small world which mirrors the larger cultural milieu in which he lives. E.g., Dickens and Engels both portray the English class structure of early 19th century England from the relatively novel bourgeois perspective. Dickens is the more scrupulous commentator for a number of reasons; his intentions are not so difficult to accommodate to those of a late-20th century reader interested in understanding the world Dickens portrays. Engels, on the other hand, has not only the intention of portraying a world through the medium of his reportage, but has in addition a good deal of metaphysical baggage which complicate his basic intention; overcoming the hiatus is thus made more difficult, the more so because of the general change in fashion on the subject of matters metaphysical. However, in each case it is the complex of event-and-meaning as it was at the time they wrote that such authors transmit in their text. That complex is history to a later interpreter, and so long as that interpreter is part of the same culture (broadly speaking), that history is implicit in the interpreter, part of what he needs to understand in himself in order to understand more generally the world with which he exists.

Of course, the matter is more complex, by virtue of the way in which a text reaches an interpreter. In the process of transmission, the text develops an intention "of its own," as it were. The more hands through which it passes, the more times it is interpreted or commented upon, the greater its own "life," with which the interpreter must deal.¹⁵ This simply confirms the objective-historical character of what presents itself for interpretation. In

understanding, seen now as a dialogical moment, a series of events, and of meanings which start with events provoking the author and his intended meaning, and continues through successive encounters with the text, and the intended meanings of records of such encounters, down to the complex of intended meanings in the interpreter's own encounter with what has gone before. In this last phase, of course, the historicity of the subject himself can become obvious and supersede the merely archaeological exercise.¹⁶

Thus it would seem that the usual model of hermeneutics, the interpretation of texts, is a particularly happy one. First, it emphasises the linguistic aspect of understanding. Second, the hiatus to be overcome in interpreting texts is in the first instance the temporal distance between the interpreter's "now" and the complex of past "thens" which make up the events-and-meanings to be understood.

At the same time, there would seem to be an overcoming of temporality — or historicity, or history — in a certain sense. That-which-has-been becomes coincident with the immediate event in the interpretive moment.

... To understand means primarily for two people to understand one another. Understanding is primarily agreement or harmony with another person. ... Understanding, then is always understanding about something.¹⁷

Gadamer thus affirms the role of divergent opinion in interpretation. This understanding at which two people arrive is a resolution of an initial divergence arising from differing perspectives. Similarly, in the encounter with the past, with its various meanings (whether enshrined in a text or otherwise), understanding occurs simultaneously with the resolution of divergent meanings between interpreter and interpreted. This resolution takes place at a "present" moment in time. Moreover, it would seem impossible that this temporal fusion should escape including, perhaps in a causal way, implications about the resolution of divergent meanings for

the perceived future. Gadamer's discussion of play illustrates this temporal transcendence:

The movement to-and-fro obviously belongs essentially to the game that there is an ultimate sense in which you cannot have a game by yourself. In order for there to be a game, there always has to be, not necessarily literally another player, but something with which the player plays and which automatically responds to his move with a countermove. . . . The game itself is a risk for the player. One can only play with serious possibilities. This means one can become so engrossed in them that they, as it were, outplay and prevail over one. The attraction of the game, which it exercises on the player, lies in this risk. One enjoys a freedom of decision, which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited.¹⁸

For the purpose at hand, this should be seen as an allegory of interpretation. The player(s) come(s) to the game, bringing with them a past; this much has already been discussed. But the present moment in which they play is determined by the future, the possible countermoves which might respond to their moves, and to which, in fact, the player's initial move is conditioned by anticipation. That is, in interpreting at a present moment what move ought to be made, understanding of the past (delimiting the options at one's disposal) and understanding of the future (seen as demands) fuse.

It is clear by now that this hermeneutic philosophy, grounded in the discovery of the peculiarities of human temporality goes well beyond mere history, and well beyond other, non-philosophical hermeneutics. One has, vis-a-vis the latter, neither the theological project proper to what Tillich has called orthodox and kerygmatic theologies, nor the juridical project of applying the general propositions of law to specific matters in a legal context. As

Gadamer notes in reference to his own intellectual heritage, "even in *Being and Time* the real question is not in what way being can be understood but in what way understanding *is* being, for the understanding of being represents the existential distinction of Dasein."¹⁹ Dasein is temporal; in its present it grasps its has-been and its can-be; this seems the essence of the hermeneutic in *Being and Time*, to get at this basic circle in human-being's understanding.

But this is to say, simply put, that hermeneutical philosophy, that particular kind of philosophising which begins in the discovery of the historicity of human being, and takes as its basic facts the history of human beings, is transcendental philosophy. It asks, in the first place, how interpretation is possible. Moreover, it asks after the very being of understanding beings; in so doing, it shows itself as ontology, and thus properly as a philosophical enterprise. Most importantly, it addresses the subject in his subjectivity, that which is not fixed, but subject to the vicissitudes of the time operative fundamentally in the interpretive activity, which is revealed as the most human of things human beings do, their essential activity.

In fact, it may be the case that for hermeneutical philosophy (unlike other hermeneutic projects) the text is of strictly ancillary importance. What is really at stake is the acting subject in the moment of interpretation; the subject is the one who brings past and future together in his play.

III

Now some sense of the way in which the hermeneutic philosophy at once stands in the philosophical tradition while taking it a step further begins to emerge.

Interpretation, in the sense operative here, is the name for a kind of fundamental human experience. That concept of experience — covered in German philosophy by the term, *Erlebnis* — is a relatively new one in the philosophical constellation.²⁰ This term covers the shift from a relatively objective rationalism in the 17th

century to a more powerful empiricism of a special sort in the 19th century, an empiricism more powerful than the limited scepticism of Hume, or the common-sense attitude of Locke. It shows up both in the positivism of Comte and the neo-positivism of the Vienna and New York circles and in the analytic schools of Anglo-American thought persisting to the present. Interestingly enough (considering the history of the origins of these latter schools), it is a thoroughly romantic notion, however hard it seems to identify the romantic element in the more modern formulations. Nevertheless, it is an empiricism linked to the notions of Self and self-realisation, so typical of the (especially late) 19th century philosophies. Glancing briefly at the developmental history of the concept of experience, it is easy to see how the 19th century conception is an extension and refinement of the 17th century conception of the Cartesian, non-temporal Cogito. The Self, in this historical development, remains distant from that which is experienced. The problems with the concept are manifold; the most obvious problem posed is that of verifiability. For in fact, the experience from which the Self is ultimately distanced is one of involvement with its most immediate object, itself as perceiving and interacting with a world — clearly a contradiction. The increasing eccentricity of this more commonly received opinion vis-a-vis the domain of ordinary facticity has been the proximate cause of a reassessment of the subject as experiencer.

Digressing briefly, it is interesting to note that many of these reassessments take the form of moral, as opposed to natural or metaphysical philosophies. It is most evident in those thinkers for whom taste has served as a model of human judgment, and represents a minority opinion in some cases, or a seeming shift in direction hard to reconcile with the mainstream in the case of majority-opinion thinkers. In the latter case, one thinks of the Platonic accession to a concept of "due measure" which as described in *Statesman* seems uncomfortably free of standards. In the former instance, one thinks of such thinkers as Castiglione, Gracian, Vico and Kant (of whom it is necessary to remember that it is with the

judgments of taste and end that the system reaches its acme). It is surely significant that inquiry into the thinking represented by these writers takes life again in the context of a demand for a new understanding of the subject and of experience, and is coincident with the emergence of the Husserlian battle-cry, "back to the things themselves!"

In any event, it seems clear that hermeneutical philosophy addresses this two-fold distancing of the old subjectivist philosophies, the distance of Self from its own experiences and from the objects of those experiences. Gadamer sums up the matter in this wise:

All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies, and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and direct its gaze "to the things themselves." It is clear that to let the object take over in this way is not the matter for the interpreter of a single decision, but is the "first, last and constant task." For it is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the distractions that the interpreter will constantly experience in the process, and which originate in himself. A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what there is.²¹

Gadamer is principally concerned in this remark with the dialogue of whole and part, the famous "hermeneutic circle." But it is the elements of that dialogue, as well as the dialogue and its circle,

which are interesting in the present context. First, there is the temporality of the whole process; it is with things present before the interpreter that interpretation is concerned, but it is also with what is projected before himself. That projection it seems most likely, is a temporal projection and not merely illusory. That is, the understanding as it emerges is constantly compared with what is anticipated in the future. The use of the word "expectations" confirms the point; such are always future oriented. The past, of course, is not subject to real change; the only change it can undergo is limited to that tied to its application in acting responsively to the future. In the context of the present remark, then, the past-time aspect is only implicit, though not altogether mute for that reason.

Second, though this remark emphasises the objectivity of the object and its preservation, it seems quite clear that it is with the overwhelming power of the subject's subjectivity that Gadamer is really concerned. In the first place, Gadamer sees the need to protect the recovered object from the sort of subjectivism which has dominated Western thinking since the early 19th century. But more importantly, he is anxious to focus on the modification of the subject's subjectivity in the dialogue. In fact, what is at stake is not simply the "message" of the text or of some other object. It is the manner in which that message is brought before the subject's consciousness and the way in which it is augmented.

This is clearly philosophical; this sort of project could not be carried out except within the bounds of a philosophy, one which is principally ontological in character. And in fact, this is where hermeneutical philosophy does begin:

Under the name of a "hermeneutics of facticity" Heidegger confronted Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, together with the distinction between fact and essence upon which it depended, with a paradoxical demand. The facticity of Dasein, existence, which cannot be based on or derived from anything else, and not the pure Cogito as the essential constitution of typical universality, should

represent the ontological basis of the phenomenological position — a bold idea but difficult to carry through.²²

To put that another way: The modern philosophical-hermeneutical project, which in all ways is tied to the interpreting subject, is to be understood as a means for getting at that subject ontologically. History, as a reflection of the fundamental temporality of the subject's being, is the route.

What is actually happening in the hermeneutic event that the subject's subjectivity comes under its own scrutiny? After all, "hermeneutics has its origins in breaches of subjectivity."²³ But Gadamer's editor misses the point when he indicates the actual overcoming is between subject and factual world of existence; that has been obscured only in metaphysical dreams. Rather, as Gadamer correctly puts it, it is the internal alienation of the subject from himself which stands transcendently to the other breaches in intersubjectivity, so that "there is neither the I nor the thou as isolated substantial realities."²⁴ Hermeneutical philosophy, as a corrective to the excesses of subjective idealism, takes aim at the mistaken understanding which produced the wholly unnatural and groundless breach as it is "discovered" in the older philosophy before it is dispersed in the special sciences. In this one sense, it can act as a corrective to the special sciences, insofar as the older metaphysics incorporated in them actually hinders their project.

Language enforces this loss of the Self to the subject. Gadamer speaks of the "I-lessness of language."²⁵ It is a neutral vehicle, at best. But since one also represents himself to himself in linguistic categories, one is lost to himself in language. The problem is not easily resolved; language remains rather inviolable, howbeit alterable. Thus the hermeneut is fascinated by language as he tries to find his way through it. Nevertheless, the purpose of the study remains aimed at something translingual. This can succeed insofar as texts are linguistic, but interpreted so only at one level. Through the fundamental historicity of human being, the interpre-

ter has a direct access which only needs to be recovered *through* the inquiry into language.

Finally, the subject's interpretation of his own subjectivity is clearly linked in the hermeneutical project with the *Umwelt* he creates, the texts he approaches being part of that *Umwelt*. The attitude one adopts, selections one makes, are simply steps in the process in untangling that *Umwelt*. Heidegger sums up the point of the project in general remarks from *Time and Being*:

Who are we? We remain cautious in our answer. For it might be that that which distinguishes man as man is determined precisely by what we must think about here: man who is concerned with and approached by presence, who through being thus approached, is himself present in his own way for all present and absent beings.

Man: standing within the approach of presence, but in such a way that he receives as a gift the presencing that it gives by perceiving what appears in letting-presence. If man were not the constant receiver of the gift given by the "It gives presence," if that which is extended in the gift did not reach man, then not only would Being remain concealed in the absence of this gift, not only closed off, but man would remain excluded from the scope of: It gives Being. Man would not be man.²⁶

It can be argued, of course, that nothing in the hermeneutical philosophy this paper has discussed is terribly new. The excesses of subjective idealism have been well known since its origin. Its special interference with access to the world, and that aspect of human being, have been largely objected to at all times.

The understanding of history as a way into the solution of this excess is not altogether new. The growth of history as a scientific endeavor precisely parallels the growth of the subjective idealism to which in a sense it stands opposed, setting up as objec-

tive human activity in the world and thus giving the lie to the sundering of realities with that world of action. And the understanding of the nature of history *propter se* enjoys a reasonably old and accepted status within different schools of thought. Equally, in other applications, hermeneutics is nothing new.

But the combination is new, and the philosophical implications have not yet been sorted out completely. First, history takes on a new importance as a ground for thinking. This is not the history of philosophical ideas, linked to a set of traditionally established philosophical thinkers, the study of whom is regarded as the academic preliminary to somehow more serious philosophical endeavors. Rather, history is now not so much redefined as brought into play on a new level of understanding of just what it reflects. History is understood as an objective expression of what is fundamentally human, historicity, and in turn, temporality. The role of the thinker in the schools is transformed in some ways; he can no longer set aside the history either of his discipline or as a larger discipline of its own, as something merely of the schools, but must make it his own central reflection by which his other endeavors are grounded. History — or better, personal histories — become the absolute minima of philosophical inquiry. To be sure, one must be careful of some attempt to “scientise” this historical inquiry; equally, one must avoid that sort of “psychologism” rightly condemned. What is sought is a ground which is prior to any science, and the “faculty” for which is prior to any psychology. It is, in the new parlance, an “archaeology” of the approach to the *Umwelt*, and to the subject.

Second, the approach which this paper has outlined is enormously productive. Three examples will help to show this. First, Kurt Hübner, professor of philosophy at the university in Kiel, has developed a notion of the “*historisch-aprioristisch*” in his *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft*. His careful investigation of physical science, and the various philosophical attempts to explain just what the scientist is doing led to the supersession of the usual philosophical account as basically unfounded. Hübner located the

necessary transcendental element in the collective human temporal experience expressed in a culture’s history, which is at once projective and retrospective. Doing this, he has resolved the hiatus between *a posteriori* descriptions of what scientists do, as presented by Popper and Lakatos, and the more “metaphysical” inquiries of Kuhn and Feyerabend, wherein the limiting conditions of science are described. Moreover, Hübner’s transcendental grounding of science goes a long way toward showing the identity of natural and social science, in that the ground he adumbrates must necessarily serve for all objective accounts of the *Umwelt*, both that which is self-manifesting and that which is the product of human activity. This in turn means that the best metaphysical accounts of the limits of social science, largely phenomenological in character, can be reconciled with the determinedly non-phenomenological accounts of natural science.

At an even more practical level, Eugene Gendlin, of the University of Chicago, has used his knowledge of the hermeneutic phenomenology to better understand and explain psychoanalysis. The structure of consciousness which is called “hermeneutic” — hence, historical consciousness — can be assessed, and the occurrence of certain sorts of hermeneutical understanding are an accurate bellweather of the success of the psychoanalysis. Similarly, though less obviously, Richard Sennett’s sociology, resting in the new interpretive understanding, has produced useful insights into the way in which society is actually structured and how that structure has mutated and can mutate.

Thus it seems correct to say that philosophy, as it evolves from its own previous state, in the face of a challenge to its meaningfulness in an age ruled by technology and in which the future is believed to yield to technologicistic analysis, seems to benefit practically in the discovery through hermeneutic philosophy of the way in which historicity and personal histories serve as the absolute foundation of thought.

NOTES

¹ M. Heidegger: *On Time and Being* (New York, 1972) p. 60.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ H.G. Gadamer: *Truth and Method* (New York, 1975) p. 229f.

⁴ Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁵ For interesting discussions of the effect of making human subjectivity timeless, see Sherover: *The Human Experience of Time*, esp. p. 157ff.

⁶ In *History & Truth*.

⁷ Gadamer, *op. cit.*, p. 251ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268, 270.

⁹ H.G. Gadamer: *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, 1976) p. 13.

¹⁰ Gadamer: *Truth & Method*, pp. 230, 232.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹² Heidegger: *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 19.

¹³ Paul Ricoeur: *Interpretation Theory* (Fort Worth, 1976) p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁶ One consciously engages in archaeology when one seeks to understand Plato or something like that, seeking to become sensitive to the nuances of times, places, linguistic dialects and the special histories they enshrine. This archaeology is less conscious in the case of a modern or near modern text; cf. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Gadamer: *Truth & Method*, p. 158.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95; cf. p. 91.

¹⁹ Gadamer: *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 49.

²⁰ Gadamer: *Truth & Method*, p. 55ff.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 225.

²³ Gadamer: *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. xii (ed. intro.)

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7; cf. pp. 3, 5, 48f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁶ Heidegger: *On Time and Being*, p. 12.

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