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BORDERS OR HORIZONS? GADAMER AND HABERMAS REVISITED

FRED R. DALLMAYR*

INTRODUCTION

What is the status of borders, boundaries, or demarcations? Do borders mandate separation and exclusion, or are they more like hyphens indicating a difficult kind of collusion, a correlation without sameness? Do they mean to keep the stranger out, or are they more like gestures honoring and welcoming the other's strangeness? In many ways, Western modernity is a high tide of borders and demarcations functioning as signs of exclusion. Politically, nation-states were divided from nation-states, Catholics from Protestants, ethnic loyalties from other ethnic loyalties—all in the name of autonomy and rigorous self-identity. In the philosophical domain, René Descartes drew sharp boundaries around the "thinking ego" (*ego cogitans*) in an effort to keep at bay all forms of non-mental otherness—including nature ("extended matter") and dubious assumptions impinging on mind's autonomy. The Enlightenment reinforced these boundaries by postulating a clear division between light and darkness, between reason and prejudice or tradition, and between revolution and all types of "old regimes." The most formidable demarcations as signs of exclusion were established by Kant's critical philosophy, with its insistence on the contrast between reason and sensation, between knowledge and faith, and between moral autonomy and nature (or natural causality). In Kant's own presentation, the reason-faith distinction was meant to grant broad room to religious belief or fideism. However, as other thinkers (including Hegel) noted, the same demarcation could also have the effect of rendering faith pointless and outmoded—which was precisely the conclusion drawn by later positivism.

There can be no doubt that boundaries—including the boundaries of Western modernity—can have beneficial effects, by

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protecting vulnerable forms of agency. In social settings marked by hierarchy and inequality, borders can serve as ramparts shielding the weak against the strong, the marginalized against hegemonic elites. Many of the achievements of modern liberal democracy—above all individual rights and liberties—are the result of careful border demarcations. It is equally clear, however, that borders can turn into prison fences and possibly into bastions of (external and internal) aggression. The latter result was dramatically demonstrated by events during the twentieth century when exclusionary aggression reached a climax of violence and destruction. The perils of this outcome were not entirely lost on contemporary observers and witnesses. At least partly in response to political events, some European philosophers began to revise the exclusionary role of borders—not in the direction of a “melting-pot” fusion, but of their nuanced treatment as markers of both differentiation and contiguity.

This rethinking was evident in the motto of Husserl’s phenomenology “to the things themselves”¹—a motto which boldly sought to regain access to the “thing-in-itself” (excluded by Kant) as an open horizon of inquiry. Even more resolutely, the same trajectory was pursued in Heidegger’s philosophy, especially in his hyphenated formulations of human existence as “being-in-the-world” and “ek-static” openness.² The following pages seek to examine the status of borders and horizons in the respective works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas. For this purpose, the focus is placed on the so-called Gadamer-Habermas debate initiated by the early Habermas—a debate that has been often reviewed, but rarely from this angle.³ While the first Part recapitulates some of Gadamer’s teachings, chiefly with respect to a “universal hermeneutics,” the second Part reviews some of Habermas’s critical rejoinders and initiatives aiming basically at a parcelling of forms of human knowledge. In the concluding Part, an effort is made to highlight the significance of the debate for the ongoing process of globalization and the possibility of a “dialogue of civilizations.”

1. See EDMUND HUSSERL, *LOGISCHE UNTERSUCHUNGEN* (1900–01) (two volumes).

2. See MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *BEING AND TIME* 32-33 (John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson trans., 1962) (1927).

3. For some discussions of the debate, see Dieter Misgeld, *Critical Theory and Hermeneutics: The Debate Between Habermas and Gadamer*, in *ON CRITICAL THEORY* 164, 164-83 (John O’Neill ed., 1976); PAUL RICOEUR, *Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology*, in *HERMENEUTICS AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES: ESSAYS ON LANGUAGE, ACTION AND INTERPRETATION* 63, 63-100 (John B. Thompson ed. & trans., 1981); see also FRED R. DALLMAYR, *Life-World and Critique*, in *BETWEEN FREIBURG AND FRANKFURT: TOWARD A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY* 13, 13-24 (1991).

I. GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS

As is well known, Gadamer's *Truth and Method* sought to differentiate hermeneutics from a mere method or methodology—a method which necessarily distances the knower from the known, while specifying a path for the “subject” to grasp or come to know its “object.”⁴ This concern with methodology was still prevalent in earlier forms of hermeneutics, including the “historicist” version of Wilhelm Dilthey who construed hermeneutical understanding after the model of a psychic-mental transfer whereby the interpreter would gain access to intended meaning-structures of the past. By following this path, the interpreter, in Dilthey's view, would gain “objective” knowledge of historical meanings—an objectivity paralleling (though radically different in kind from) the objectivity achieved in natural science. This narrowly methodological preoccupation was thrown into disarray by Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which insisted that interpreter and past meanings are both embroiled in an underlying temporal happening and that “understanding” is a basic feature of human existence as such (undercutting the distinction between human and natural sciences).⁵ With this insistence, Heidegger jeopardized and eroded the centrality of the Cartesian *ego cogitans* (as well as Kant's and Husserl's “transcendental consciousness”) together with its radical demarcations from “external” nature, world, and fellow-beings. As Gadamer comments, by renewing the “question of being” and by construing being as temporal, Heidegger “burst asunder the whole subjectivism of modern philosophy—and, in fact, as was soon to appear, the whole horizon of questions asked by metaphysics, which tended to define being as what is [objectively] present.”⁶ By moving in this direction and by inaugurating a “hermeneutics of facticity,” Heidegger “went beyond both the concept of mind developed by classical idealism and the thematic of transcendental consciousness purified by phenomenological reduction.”⁷

4. See HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *TRUTH AND METHOD* 9-19 (Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall trans., Crossroad 2d rev. ed. 1989) (1960).

5. See HEIDEGGER, *supra* note 2, at 385-423.

6. GADAMER, *supra* note 4, at 257.

7. *Id.* at 258. As Gadamer adds, understanding for Heidegger

is not a resigned ideal of human experience adopted in the old age of the spirit, as with Dilthey; nor is it, as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of philosophy in contrast to the naivete of unreflecting life; it is, on the contrary, the *original form of the realization of Dasein*, which is being-in-the-world.

Id. at 259.

Given *Dasein's* embroilment in the world (as a temporal happening), understanding and interpreting cannot be a neutral method starting from scratch, but only an ongoing process of re-interpreting. Differently phrased: understanding always presupposes a pre-understanding before proceeding to a critique of meaning. This is the sense of the so-called "hermeneutical circle," which, as Gadamer observes, is not a vicious but a productive circle, an inevitable precondition of understanding as such.⁸ To centerstage this circle, of course, does not equal an endorsement of arbitrary fancies or subjective constructions—which would mean a relapse into the problems of methodology. Rather, like human *Dasein* itself, understanding is a temporal process, involving an ongoing testing of pre-understandings against the demands of texts or historical events, that is, a dialogical-dialectical interchange between interpreter and *interpretandum*. In Gadamer's words: "All [genuine] interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary [whims] and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought"; for this purpose, "it must direct its gaze '[to] the things themselves'" (in Husserl's formulation) and must steadfastly remain attentive to the thing or topic (*Sache*) "throughout all the...distractions [to which interpreters are prone to be subject]."⁹ Seen from this angle, hermeneutics is not a mode of psychological empathy, nor is it a branch of subjective idealism; rather, it is part of *Dasein's* basic world involvement, of its radical openness or exposure to transformative learning experiences. As Gadamer adds: "[Anyone] trying to understand is exposed to distraction from [pre-understandings or] fore-meanings [*Vor-Meinungen*] that are not borne out by the things themselves."¹⁰ Working out interpretive possibilities in order to have them "confirmed 'by the things'... is the constant task of understanding": There is no other "'objectivity' here [but] the confirmation of... fore-meaning[s] through the labor of 'working through' (*Ausarbeitung*)."¹¹

As one should note, "fore-meanings" or prejudgments in Gadamer's view can be modified and corrected, but never completely erased or eliminated (through a return to some kind of blank slate or *tabula rasa*). This is the gist of his much-discussed rehabilitation of

8. *Id.* at 266.

9. *Id.* at 266-67 (trans. slightly altered as indicated).

10. *Id.* at 267 (trans. altered as indicated).

11. *Id.* (trans. altered as indicated).

“prejudice” (in the sense of prejudgment)¹² and his critique of the radical “prejudice against prejudices” characterizing modern Enlightenment.¹³ For proponents of modern Enlightenment, reason is radically self-constituting and self-legitimizing in that it grants legitimacy to nothing outside its jurisdiction. All un-enlightened assumptions—including religious beliefs and cultural traditions—are basically suspect and discredited: they must either pass through the filter of reason, and hence become “rationalized,” or else will be discarded as spurious or obsolete. By adopting this stance, rationalist Enlightenment reconfirms the stark demarcations of Cartesian philosophy: whatever exceeds the confines of the sovereign *cogito* must either be appropriated/assimilated, or else be excluded and controlled.

What is missed in this approach is the possibility of a genuine learning experience through reason’s exposure to what is unfamiliar or alien—including its own (prerational) prejudgments. To reopen this possibility was precisely the point of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* with its emphasis on human finitude and the insertion of *Dasein* in world and temporal happenings (antedating rational constitution). From Heidegger’s angle, Gadamer comments, reason is “not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates”; prominent among these circumstances is *Dasein*’s “alien-ness” (*Fremdheit*) to itself.¹⁴ Seen in this light, he adds sharply, self-reflection (in the sense of rational self-constitution) is

not primary and [thus] not an adequate basis for [hermeneutics], because through [it] history is [internalized or privatized] once more. [But i]n fact[,] history does not belong to us; we belong to it. . . . The focus of subjectivity [*cogito*] is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the . . . circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*¹⁵

Given *Dasein*’s insertion in temporality, the rehabilitation of

12. *Id.* at 277-307.

13. *Id.* at 271-77.

14. *Id.* at 276.

15. *Id.* at 276-77 (translation slightly altered as indicated). Despite these sharp comments, one cannot deny that Gadamer sometimes blunts the edge of his argument by resorting to very conventional vocabulary (such as “historical consciousness” or “historically effective consciousness”) and by substituting often very “ontic” description for Heidegger’s ontological account. On some of these points, see FRED R. DALLMAYR, *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction: Gadamer and Derrida in Dialogue*, in CRITICAL ENCOUNTERS: BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS 130, 130-58 (1987).

prejudgments is closely linked with a valorization of “tradition” and of a certain “authority” exerted by texts or injunctions antedating reason’s self-constitution.¹⁶ In adopting this approach—it is important to stress the point—Gadamer does not counsel a leap from autonomy into unfreedom, from reason into irrationalism. Basically, his hermeneutics seeks to undercut or problematize the rigid bifurcation between reason/freedom, on the one hand, and authority/tradition, on the other. As he notes, only from the vantage of an abstract rationalism could the notion of authority “be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom” and be equated with “blind obedience.”¹⁷ In actuality, genuine authority for Gadamer is predicated not on a simple “abdication” of reason but rather on “an act of acknowledgement and knowledge”: namely, on the uncoerced recognition that the views of a text or teacher can rightly lay a claim to our attention and hence deserve to be pondered carefully and seriously.¹⁸

The same considerations apply to the role of tradition.¹⁹ In view of *Dasein*’s temporality, human relationship to the past for Gadamer is not characterized by a mode of radical “distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition”; differently phrased: *Dasein*’s historical situatedness does not imply an “objectifying process” of detached analysis but rather reflects the fact that tradition “addresses” *Dasein*, which in turn “lets itself be *addressed* by tradition.”²⁰ Contrary to certain Enlightenment teachings, human “maturity” (*Mündigkeit*) does not signify a total self-mastery in the sense of a radical “liberation from all tradition.” Here, again, one has to resist binary construals. Genuine tradition, for Gadamer, is not the “dead hand” of the past but a lived experience that involves “always an element of freedom”; as a process of transmission, preservation, and renewal, it implies “an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one.”²¹ Once this is admitted, the “abstract antithesis” between tradition and historical knowledge needs to be discarded; the “effect (*Wirkung*) of a living tradition” and its reflective transmission must be seen as a dialectical continuity.²²

16. GADAMER, *supra* note 4, at 277-82.

17. *Id.* at 279.

18. *Id.* at 279-80.

19. *See id.* at 281-82.

20. *Id.* at 282.

21. *Id.* at 281.

22. *Id.* at 282 (emphasis omitted). Regarding the rehabilitation of “authority,” compare also HANNAH ARENDT, *What Is Authority?*, in *BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE: SIX EXERCISES*

Here a central feature of Gadamerian hermeneutics comes into view: the dialogical-dialectical character of understanding and its embeddedness in an “effective” or effectively operative history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*).²³ Hermeneutical understanding, in his account, does not mean an act of psychic empathy (a transposition of *ego* into *alter*), nor an act of assimilation (of *alter* and *ego*), but rather a process of reciprocal questioning at the intersection between self and other, between familiarity and strangeness (*Fremdheit*). Hermeneutics, hence, is basically marked by tension: for example, the tension between a traditional text’s distance or strangeness and its familiarity as part of a tradition: “The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.”²⁴ This locus is also important for the role of prejudgments, namely by sorting out productive from unwarranted or misleading prejudices. In being open to strangeness or unfamiliarity, hermeneutical understanding allows itself to be addressed and to be called into “question”—which is “the first condition of hermeneutics.”²⁵ The same condition implies a questioning of initial, perhaps misleading “fore-meanings” and their replacement by more productive judgments—which in turn become resources for continued questioning or inquiry. In Gadamer’s words: “The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open. . . . [O]ur own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk.”²⁶ Throughout this reciprocal questioning historical temporality manifests its effectiveness (*Wirkung*) by framing or structuring the interchange, mainly by disclosing “*the right questions to ask*.”²⁷ The same historical effectiveness also prevents closure or the final termination of questioning. Here a Hegelian motif comes into play (though without recourse to “absoluteness”). As Gadamer notes, the task of philosophical hermeneutics might be described as the effort “to retrace the path of Hegel’s phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality [*Substantialität*] that determines it.”²⁸

IN POLITICAL THOUGHT 91, 91-141 (1961); especially her comment that “[a]uthority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom.” *Id.* at 106.

23. See GADAMER, *supra* note 4, at 295-307.

24. *Id.* at 295 (emphasis omitted).

25. *Id.* at 299.

26. *Id.*

27. *Id.* at 301.

28. *Id.* at 302. Elaborating on this point Gadamer adds: “All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call ‘substance,’ because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity [*Andersheit*].” *Id.*

Observations of this kind clearly underscore a main point of *Truth and Method*: that hermeneutics is not merely a limited methodology, tailored to specialized modes of inquiry, but rather a general philosophical perspective relevant to the broad range of human experience (in both its theoretical and practical dimensions). Given its extensive scope, hermeneutics can properly be described as “universal”—although it is important to note the peculiar character of its universality. As a participant in ongoing human experience, hermeneutical understanding cannot claim the status of an abstract “meta-theory,” of a universal framework or schema under which particular events or phenomena can be subsumed. In an emphatic manner, such a status is asserted by (variants of) modern philosophy of science, particularly by the project of a “unified science” providing a comprehensive explanation of all aspects of reality; in modified form, a similar ambition prevails in Kantian and neo-Kantian types of rationalism as well as in versions of structural social analysis. In contrast to these schemas, hermeneutics has to pursue a more subdued, and partially inductive, path; shunning meta-vistas, universalism in this case can only mean a particular openness and responsiveness: an openness to the diverse horizons “addressing” or impinging on human understanding. This reticent kind of universalism was carefully elucidated by Gadamer in the decade following *Truth and Method*. His essay *The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem*²⁹ (1966) pointedly invokes the Aristotelian model of inductive generalization (as discussed in *Posterior Analytics*). To illustrate the emergence of the general out of particulars, Aristotle used the example of a fleeing and dispersed army that somehow, without unified superior command, comes to a halt and takes a stand again. “How,” Gadamer queries,

does one arrive at a universal? . . . How does it happen that . . . “words” . . . have a general meaning? . . . When is the principle present as a principle? Through what capacity? This question is in fact the question of the occurrence of the universal.³⁰

In Gadamer’s account, this “occurrence of the universal” stands in contrast to the stylized theories and meta-theories that, in the modern context, oppose a detached spectator to an increasingly objectified universe. This spectatorial detachment is manifest in modern aesthetics where art and the arena of artistic experience tend

29. HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem* (1966), in *PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS* 3 (David E. Linge ed. & trans., 1976).

30. *Id.* at 14.

to be “alienated into an object of aesthetic judgment” or taste.³¹ A similar detachment or alienation operates in modern historiography, which tries to offer an objective account of all historical data, perhaps even a meta-theory linking these data in an explanatory framework. Reduced to methodology, even hermeneutics sometimes parades as a neutral “science” of understanding in which substantive contents are alienated into objective targets of analysis. In opposition to these theoretical and meta-theoretical pretensions, Gadamer invokes the notion of “hermeneutical experience,” which—far from being a synonym for subjective egocentrism—points to the open-ended or “horizontal” character of human understanding. Replicating themes from *Truth and Method*, his essay insists on the “secondary” status of aesthetic judgment vis-à-vis the “immediate truth-claim” of art, that is, the challenge or address issuing from the artwork itself. As he writes, in a near-poetic vein, “our sensitive-spiritual existence is an aesthetic resonance chamber that resonates with the voices that are constantly reaching us, preceding all explicit aesthetic judgment.”³² History is a similar resonance chamber, in that the past is always illuminated by present and future hopes, showing (in Heidegger’s terms) “the primacy of futurity for our possible recollection and retention.”³³ In these and other ways, hermeneutical experience reveals itself not as a closed circuit, but as a gateway opening up to new visions, including dimensions of alterity (*Fremdheit*): “The nature of the hermeneutical experience is not that something is outside and desires admission. Rather, we are possessed by something and precisely by means of it we are opened up for the new, the different, the true.”³⁴

In Gadamer’s presentation, hermeneutical experience denotes a primary mode of embeddedness (prior to theoretization), a mode that is preeminently displayed in language as the matrix of human being-in-the-world (or, with Heidegger, as the “house of Being”). As he states forcefully: “Language is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world” (which is not a subjective-intentional production).³⁵ Along the same lines, he speaks of the “linguistic constitution of the world,” adding that “[i]t presents itself as the consciousness that is

31. *Id.* at 4.

32. *Id.* at 8.

33. *Id.* at 9.

34. *Id.*

35. *Id.* at 3.

effected by history [*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*] and that provides an initial schematization for all our possibilities of knowing."³⁶ What is important to note here is that, just like experience, language for Gadamer is not a prison-house but again a gateway to infinite explorations. "While we live wholly within a language," he emphasizes, "the fact that we do so does not constitute linguistic relativism because there is absolutely no captivity within a language—not even within our native language."³⁷ The latter aspect is demonstrated by our ability to learn foreign languages and by the experience on distant journeys when we manage to "master [a] foreign language to some extent."³⁸ What Gadamer opposes here is the axiom of the "incommensurability" of language games—an axiom fashionable in some skeptical and/or deconstructive quarters and often associated with the claim of radical cultural relativism. The axiom is clearly incompatible with hermeneutics, which steers a difficult course between abstract (meta-theoretical) universalism and a debilitating particularism. Here is an eloquent passage that deserves to be lifted up:

Any language in which we live is infinite in this sense [of opening up vistas], and it is completely mistaken to infer that reason is fragmented because there are various languages. Just the opposite is the case. Precisely through our finitude, the particularity of our being, which is evident even in the variety of languages, the infinite dialogue is opened in the direction of the truth that we are.³⁹

The crucial and even primordial character of language for human being-in-the-world was examined roughly at the same time in another essay titled *Man and Language* (1966).⁴⁰ In this context Gadamer notes first of all a certain "lag" of philosophical reflection: the fact that Western philosophy traditionally has not placed language at the center of its considerations. This situation changed only slowly during the Enlightenment period when Herder and von Humboldt began to construe human "nature" as basically linguistic; however, even then that nature tended to be seen largely in terms of "consciousness" and subjectivity. Only more recently has the depth-

36. *Id.* at 13.

37. *Id.* at 15-16.

38. *Id.* at 16.

39. *Id.* The last sentence points to a complex notion of "truth," transgressing correspondence or adequation in the direction of an ontological mode of disclosure or *aletheia*. Compare in this respect HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Was Ist Wahrheit?*, in 1 KLEINE SCHRIFTEN: PHILOSOPHIE, HERMENEUTIK 46, 46-58 (J.C.B. Mohr 1967).

40. HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *Man and Language* (1966), in PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS, *supra* note 29, at 59.

quality of language come into view. “For it is part of the nature of language,” Gadamer states, “that it has a completely unfathomable unconsciousness of itself.”⁴¹ This means that—rather than being merely a handy tool or utensil—language challenges and addresses us in complex ways. Although we can “theorize” about language, raising it to an object of scientific analysis, the problem is that “we can never really do this completely.”⁴² For, “all thinking about language is already once again drawn back into language”; and “this residing of our thinking in a language is” precisely “the profound enigma that language presents to thought.”⁴³ In his essay, Gadamer highlights three main features of language that are crucial for hermeneutics. The first feature is the “essential self-forgetfulness” of language in that the focal concerns of linguistic science—such as grammar and syntax—are not at all “conscious to living speaking.”⁴⁴ The second aspect is the basic “I-lessness” or non-egocentric character of language, the fact that language comes to life in dialogue—which, in turn, is not just an intentionally controlled exchange but rather exhibits the quality of a “play” (*Spiel*).⁴⁵ For, when participants are carried along by dialogue, it is no longer their will or intention that is governing but rather the topic (*Sache*) itself that “plays them into each other.”⁴⁶ The last feature is the “universality of language,” which “is not a delimited realm” of discourse or “of the speakable, over against which other realms [that are] unspeakable might stand.”⁴⁷ Like hermeneutical experience, language and dialogical saying have “an inner infinity and no end.”⁴⁸

II. HABERMAS’S CRITICAL REJOINDERS

As articulated in these and related writings, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics clearly signaled a broad-scale attack on the “unified science” program (promoted by logical positivism); in doing so, it also mounted a challenge to the self-conception of the social sciences that, during this period, were increasingly coming

41. *Id.* at 62.

42. *Id.*

43. *Id.*

44. *Id.* at 64.

45. *Id.* at 65-66.

46. *Id.* at 66.

47. *Id.* at 67.

48. *Id.* In stressing the speakable, Gadamer does not question the correlation of the “said” and “unsaid”: “Nothing that is said has its truth simply in itself, but refers instead backward and forward to what is unsaid.” *Id.*

under the sway of positivist or narrowly empiricist paradigms. In a nuanced and carefully calibrated way, the latter challenge was taken up by Jürgen Habermas whose dual role as philosopher and sociologist nearly predestined him to the task. Barely a year after *Man and Language*, Habermas published an extensive review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, a review which moved from an initial endorsement of key Gadamerian insights through a crescendo of reservations to the formulation of a critical counter-model along social-scientific (or social-theoretical) lines.⁴⁹ Among the positive elements of Gadamer's perspective, the review focused first of all on the role of language or "linguisticity" (*Sprachlichkeit*) seen as the shared matrix of understanding. In order to break through the barriers of particular grammars, Habermas noted, it was not necessary to abscond into the kind of meta-language favored by structural linguistics (and logical empiricism). Rather, to preserve the "unity of reason" in the multiplicity of languages, ordinary language itself furnishes the needed resources, in the sense that "every ordinary . . . grammar [provides] the possibility to transcend the language it determines, that is, to translate from and into other languages."⁵⁰ Following Gadamer it was hence legitimate to say that "we are never locked within a single grammar" and that the idea of a "monadology" of language games was illusory.⁵¹ In opposition to this mistaken idea, it was important to affirm (with Gadamer) that the first grammar we learn to master already puts us in a position "to step out of it and to interpret what is foreign, to make comprehensible what initially is incomprehensible, to assimilate in our own words what at first escapes them."⁵²

Habermas in this context explicitly referred to Hegel's "dialectic of the limit"—where "limit" denotes both boundary and linkage.⁵³ As he observed, this ambivalence of "limit" was adequately captured in Gadamer's hermeneutics and especially in the notion of "hermeneutic experience" seen as the corrective through which reason, though

49. Jürgen Habermas, *A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method*, in UNDERSTANDING AND SOCIAL INQUIRY 335 (Fred R. Dallmayr & Thomas A. McCarthy eds., 1977) [hereinafter Habermas, *Review*]. The review was first published in German in *Philosophische Rundschau* in 1967, and was subsequently incorporated into JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *ZUR LOGIK DER SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN* 251-90 (Suhrkamp 1970). For an English version of the latter study, see JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *ON THE LOGIC OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES* (Shierry Weber NicholSEN & Jerry A. Stark trans., MIT Press 1988) (1970).

50. Habermas, *Review*, *supra* note 49, at 335.

51. *Id.*

52. *Id.*

53. *Id.* at 336.

language-based, escapes the “spell” (or prison-house) of a given grammar.⁵⁴ Wedded to the task of translation, hermeneutics appropriately mistrusts any relinquishment or “mediatizing” of ordinary language; refusing the exit route into meta-language, it makes use instead of the “tendency to self-transcendence” embedded in ordinary linguistic practices.⁵⁵ Hence, without denying its linguistic “incarnation,” reason can also cleanse itself of the “dross” of a linguistic particularity—namely, by “passing over into another” (through translation).⁵⁶ At this point, the Hegelian idea of “limit” shades over into the hermeneutical notion of “horizon,” which is always open-ended and transgressive. In Habermas’s words: “Horizons are open, and they shift; we enter into them and they in turn move with us.”⁵⁷ Contrary to Wittgenstein’s “monadological” conception, ordinary languages are not tightly closed circuits but rather open-ended life-forms endowed with a “horizontal” quality linking them with what is other or alien (*Fremdheit*).⁵⁸ Reiterating central Gadamerian teachings, the review stated:

[P]roper to the grammar of a language game [is] not only that it defines a form of life but that it defines a form of life as one’s own over against others that are foreign. Because every word that is articulated in a language is a totality, the horizon of a language also encompasses that which it is not—it discloses itself as particular among particulars. For this reason, the limits of the world that it defines are not irrevocable; the dialectical confrontation of what is one’s own with what is foreign leads, for the most part imperceptibly, to revisions.⁵⁹

In Habermas’s account, the horizontal quality is operative not only laterally between different language communities, but also temporally between generations and historical epochs. In this connection, “horizon” refers to the complex interlacing of temporalities, and translation shades over into the notion of “tradition” (*Überlieferung*). In contrast to reductive learning models, learning a language does not merely involve a rigid process of socialization but also an initiation into the interpretation and even

54. *Id.*

55. *Id.*

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.* at 339.

58. *Id.*

59. *Id.* As Habermas adds: “Gadamer uses the image of a horizon to capture the basic hermeneutic character of every concrete language—far from having a closed boundary, each concrete language can in principle incorporate what is linguistically foreign and at first incomprehensible.” *Id.* at 342.

creative transformation of linguistic rules—rules which are designed “to overcome, [but] *thereby also to express*, distance.”⁶⁰ Seen from this angle, interpretation is a mode of “application”—but with a difference; in Gadamerian terms, language performance implies an application of linguistic rules, which, in turn, “further develops [these] rules historically.”⁶¹ Differently phrased: language application is a practical act or a form of participatory *praxis*—which stands in sharp opposition to the meta-stance of an external observer and also to the mere implementation of technical rules or formulas. In Habermas’s words, technical rules are “abstractly general” and can be compared to theoretical statements “whose conditions of application are expressed in general terms”; in this case, it is possible to “subsume cases under something abstractly general.”⁶² The situation is different with practical, including linguistic, rules. For here, generality shapes the particular “only to the degree to which it is itself first concretized by this particular”; only in this manner does the general gain “intersubjective recognition.”⁶³ The *Review* acknowledges at this point the connection between Gadamerian hermeneutics and Aristotelian teachings, especially Aristotle’s notions of *praxis* and practical (ethical-political) knowledge (*phronesis*). For both Gadamer and Aristotle, we read, language performance and related activities “are components of the same form of life (*bios*)”; and the latter is always “a social form of life that is developed through communicative action.”⁶⁴

In elaborating on the participatory aspect of language, Habermas also comments on the difference between hermeneutics and “objective” or objectifying methodologies—including the methods (previously discussed) of “aesthetic consciousness” and “historical (or historicist) consciousness.” Regarding the latter, he focuses first of all on historicist versions of hermeneutics as championed by Schleiermacher and Dilthey—whom he charges with “aesthetizing . . . history” while “anaesthetizing . . . historical reflection.”⁶⁵ Against this defect, he notes, “Gadamer brings to bear, subtly [but] relentlessly, Hegel’s insight that the restitution of past life is possible only to the extent that it is a reconstruction of the present out of its

60. *Id.* at 339.

61. *Id.* at 340.

62. *Id.* at 354.

63. *Id.*

64. *Id.* at 353.

65. *Id.* at 344.

past.”⁶⁶ A similar defect afflicts phenomenological and linguistic approaches in sociology—which tend to “move to the side of historicism”; unwilling to embrace hermeneutical insights, they “succumb to objectivism, since they claim for the phenomenological observer and the language analyst a purely theoretical [spectatorial] attitude.”⁶⁷ In this respect, “Gadamer’s first-rate critique of the objectivistic self-understanding of the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*)” appears right on target.⁶⁸ In a more circuitous way, the same critique also applies to Arthur Danto’s construal of historiography in terms of narrative or narratology.⁶⁹ According to Habermas, Danto was quite correct in debunking the concept of an “ideal chronicler” who would be able to describe historical events by using a “temporally neutral observation language”; for such a language would exclude the very “interpretation that alone makes it possible to comprehend an observed event as an historical event.”⁷⁰ What vitiated Danto’s approach, however, was his attempt to exclude the interpreter’s practical engagements from his historical narrative. From an hermeneutical angle, the historian’s work is only “the last rung on a ladder of interpretations” whose first rung is the reference system of the historian who, in principle, “cannot be independent of his horizon of expectations.”⁷¹ More sharply phrased: the historian cannot grasp anything that he or she knows of history “independently of the framework of his own life-practice (*Lebenspraxis*).”⁷²

In light of this sensitive and appreciative reading of Gadamer’s work, the *Review*’s conclusion is bound to come as a surprise. Although preceded by reservations cautiously inserted into the exegesis, the concluding argument somewhat abruptly shifts gears in the direction of a more social-scientific (and objectifying) mode of analysis. Without directly abandoning hermeneutics, Habermas decides to restrict its scope to a compartmentalized domain among others—a division accomplished no longer under hermeneutical-participatory but under theoretical (or meta-theoretical) auspices.⁷³ As a result, the fluidly open-ended or “horizontal” quality of

66. *Id.*

67. *Id.*

68. *Id.*

69. The reference is to ARTHUR C. DANTO, *ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY* (1965).

70. Habermas, *Review*, *supra* note 49, at 347.

71. *Id.* at 348.

72. *Id.* at 350.

73. *See id.* at 354-56.

hermeneutics gives way to theoretically stipulated forms of inquiry; as a corollary, the Hegelian “dialectic of the limit” makes room for delimiting boundaries (more along Kantian lines). Despite an admission that hermeneutics cannot be assigned one-sidedly “either to theory or to experience,” the *Review* finds in Gadamer’s work a deficit of rational theory—a topic which Hegel could address “with greater legitimacy.”⁷⁴ Despite the earlier recognition of the role of distance and strangeness (*Fremdheit*) in hermeneutics, Habermas now stresses a more rigorous or disciplined type of exodus or alienation: “A controlled distancing (*Verfremdung*) can raise understanding from prescientific experience to the rank of a reflective procedure”—which is the way in which its insights “enter into the social sciences.”⁷⁵ The defensible critique of spectatorial objectivism, from this angle, cannot justify the suspension of that “methodological distancing of the object,” which is the hallmark of science.⁷⁶ At this point, the accents of Gadamer’s title are resolutely shifted from “truth” to “method,” making the former in large part a derivative result of the latter. In Habermas’s words: “The confrontation of ‘truth’ and ‘method’ should not have misled Gadamer to oppose hermeneutic experience abstractly to methodic knowledge.”⁷⁷ The legitimate resistance to positivist scientism, in any event, “brings no dispensation from the business of methodology in general.”⁷⁸

The defense of method (*vis-à-vis* “truth”) is paralleled in the *Review* by the vindication of reason over “prejudice” and of emancipatory freedom over “tradition.” In Habermas’s account, the rational appropriation of the past “breaks up the nature-like (*naturwüchsige*) substance of tradition and alters the position of the subject in it.”⁷⁹ In modernity, this breaking-up has been powerfully promoted by science and scientific reflection through which the fabric of tradition has been “profoundly altered.” These and related developments have shifted the balance between tradition and reason and also between authority and reason—something Gadamer fails to see because he does not “appreciate the power of reflection that is developed in understanding” and that “shakes the dogmatism of life-

74. *Id.* at 354-55.

75. *Id.* at 355.

76. *Id.*

77. *Id.* at 356.

78. *Id.* In this context, Habermas targets the influence of Heidegger, especially Heideggerian “ontology,” as responsible for Gadamer’s privileging of “truth” over “method.” *See id.*

79. *Id.*

practices.”⁸⁰ Bypassing the nuanced distinction between tenable and untenable “prejudgments,” Habermas now charges Gadamer with an incipient anti-rationalism and with the “rehabilitation of prejudice as such”—adding that “Gadamer is motivated by the conservatism of that first generation, by the impulse of a Burke that has not yet [fully] turned against the rationalism of the eighteenth century.”⁸¹ Countering questions or critical queries addressed at the Enlightenment “project,” Habermas in this context champions rational self-reflection as the gateway to complete rational transparency and hence also to human freedom or emancipation. Reason or reflection, in his account, acts as a kind of solvent or detergent cleansing the “dross” of the past; once exposed to this solvent, pre-understanding “can no longer function as a prejudice.”⁸² As Habermas adds, celebrating the legacy of Kant and Fichte:

Gadamer’s prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection. The latter proves itself, however, in being able to reject the claim of tradition. Reflection dissolves substantiality because it not only confirms, but also breaks up, dogmatic forces. Authority and knowledge do not converge. . . .

This experience of reflection is the unforgettable legacy bequeathed to us by German Idealism from the spirit of the eighteenth century.⁸³

As one should note, Habermas’s celebration here does not cover idealist reflection *in toto*, but only a kind of formal or meta-reflection (minus Hegel’s “objective” and “absolute spirit”). Parcelled off from the domain of pre-reflective experience, this meta-reflection in turn allows the parcelling out or compartmentalization of domains of methodological knowledge or inquiry. As Habermas observes, reflection today “can no longer comprehend itself as absolute spirit”; in the wake of the “linguistic turn,” language has come to function as a sort of limited or “contingent absolute.”⁸⁴ Hence, Hegel’s notion of experience contracts into the awareness of “a happening in which the conditions of rationality change” depending on types of inquiry.⁸⁵ Seen from this angle, hermeneutical understanding no longer exhibits the “horizontal” quality claimed by Gadamer and must content itself with a more restricted scope. For Habermas, Gadamer’s approach is

80. *Id.* at 357.

81. *Id.*

82. *Id.* at 358.

83. *Id.*

84. *Id.* at 359.

85. *Id.*

“not objective enough” because it does not recognize the external forces impinging on understanding, that is, the “walls” or “boundaries” against which it comes up “from the inside.”⁸⁶ Despite its status as a social matrix, language is “evidently dependent” also on objectively analyzable social processes: most prominently the processes of labor and domination. By “social labor” Habermas means a broad spectrum of activities ranging from economic production to the instrumental designs of science and technology, activities ultimately rooted in the “anthropologically deep-seated vantage point of technical mastery.”⁸⁷ A similar impact is wielded by social power and domination, which distort language into ideological manipulation. As the *Review* concludes, the linguistic matrix of “society is part of a complex that . . . is also constituted by the constraint of reality”: more specifically “by the constraint of outer nature that enters into procedures for technical mastery” and “the constraint of inner nature reflected in the repressive character of social power relations.”⁸⁸ Operating “behind the back of language,” these forces reveal society as an “objective framework that is constituted conjointly by language, labor, and domination.”⁸⁹

Although startling in the context of the *Review*, Habermas’s concluding arguments could not come as a complete surprise to readers of his own evolving opus, which, precisely at that time, was revolving around the problem of types of knowledge and their “constitution” in pre-reflective experience. Already two years prior to the *Review*, Habermas had presented his inaugural lecture in Frankfurt on the topic “Knowledge and Human Interests”—an address that, in lapidary style, contained the main seminal ideals subsequently elaborated in book form (under the same title).⁹⁰ Although richly nuanced and replete with complex historical allusions, the address advanced mainly two points: first, the need to reconnect knowledge or reason with pre-reflective experience; and secondly, the importance of compartmentalizing modes of knowledge

86. *Id.* at 360.

87. *Id.*

88. *Id.* at 361.

89. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

90. JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective*, in KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN INTERESTS, 301, 308, 313-14 (Jeremy J. Shapiro trans., Beacon Press, 1971) (1968) [hereinafter HABERMAS, *Knowledge*]. For the German text of the lecture “Erkenntnis und Interesse,” see JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *TECHNIK UND WISSENSCHAFT ALS “IDEOLOGIE”* 146-68 (Suhrkamp 1968). The book *Erkenntnis und Interesse* was first published in 1968, also by Suhrkamp.

in three rubrics. Both points were basically meant as corrective antidotes to positivism. According to Habermas, one of positivism's misleading claims was the neutral detachment of science from life-contexts. Partly following in Husserl's footsteps, his address sought to uncover a deep-seated or "quasi-transcendental" framework of human reason: the framework of cognitive or "knowledge-constitutive interests."⁹¹ As he wrote, for three categories of inquiry one can demonstrate "a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests"—a demonstration that is the task of a "critical philosophy of science escaping the snares of positivism."⁹² The other corrective to positivist scientism was the compartmentalization of knowledge into three domains: the "empirical-analytical sciences," the "historical-hermeneutic sciences," and the critique of ideology (governed respectively by a "technical," a "practical," and an "emancipatory" interest).⁹³ Among the three types, the highest form of rational transparency was provided by self-reflection operative in ideology critique. In the words of the lecture:

The specific viewpoints from which, with transcendental necessity, we apprehend reality ground three categories of possible knowledge: information that expands our power of technical control; interpretations that make possible the orientation of action within common traditions; and analyses that free consciousness from its dependence on hypostatized powers. These viewpoints originate in the interest structure of a species that is linked in its roots to definite means of social organization: work, language, and power. . . .

. . . .

. . . The emancipatory cognitive interest aims at the pursuit of reflection as such. . . . [T]hus that *in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one*.⁹⁴

III. CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HABERMAS-GADAMER DEBATE

This is not the occasion to recapitulate in detail the debate that ensued from Habermas's theoretical intervention. Here it must suffice to highlight some salient points and broader implications. Basically, the texts reviewed above pinpointed a contrast of

91. HABERMAS, *Knowledge*, *supra* note 90, at 307-08, 313-14.

92. *Id.* at 308.

93. *Id.* (emphasis omitted).

94. *Id.* at 313-14.

philosophical positions, a kind of parting of ways that subsequent discussions and elaborations only managed to reinforce (despite occasional accommodations); in a sense, they laid the groundwork for sharply divergent trajectories only partially mitigated by a shared commitment to dialogue or communication. For his part, Gadamer immediately recognized the challenge and promptly responded in a series of essays. A major point taken up in his response was the issue of the “horizontal” (or universalizing) quality of hermeneutics, as opposed to its narrow, “methodical” compartmentalization.⁹⁵ As Gadamer reiterated, hermeneutical understanding is not a confined mode of inquiry, but rather a distinctive mark of human “being-in-the-world” in all its dimensions. His own “philosophical hermeneutics” hence was not meant to inaugurate a special methodology, but rather to thematize the pervasive significance of understanding in all types or modalities of human experience. It is in this sense that hermeneutics can properly lay claim to a universal (or horizontal) scope because it discloses “the universality of human linguisticity as a limitless medium that carries *everything* within it . . . because everything (in the world and out of it) is included in the realm of ‘understandings’ and understandability in which we move.”⁹⁶ The term “everything” here includes even modern science because it is the matrix of understandings (or pre-understandings) which generates the questions addressed to science.⁹⁷

Given the scope of this matrix, Gadamer could not possibly consent to Habermas’s compartmentalizing strategy. One important feature of this strategy was the separation of methodological inquiry from pre-reflective understanding or—more broadly stated—of reason from tradition (or life-world). As Gadamer noted, this separation or division involved “a prior decision of greatest significance”: by extricating itself entirely from tradition, methodology removed itself very far from the customary ambience of human understanding “with all its bridge building and recovery of the best in the past.”⁹⁸ As an antidote to this breach, his response advanced the thesis—crucial both philosophically and socially—“that the thing which hermeneutics teaches us is to see through the dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing, natural

95. HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection* (1967), in *PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS*, *supra* note 29, at 18, 25-26.

96. *Id.* at 25.

97. *See id.* at 25-26.

98. *Id.* at 26.

'tradition' and the reflective appropriation of it."⁹⁹ Gadamer at this point brought this assertion in contact with the sort of positivist objectivism that "critical theory" supposedly challenged. In his words: "[B]ehind this assertion [of separation] stands a dogmatic objectivism that distorts the very concept of hermeneutical reflection itself."¹⁰⁰ From the angle of this objectivism, understanding is construed no longer "in relationship to the hermeneutical situation and the constant operativeness of history [*Wirkungsgeschichte*] . . . , but in such a way as to imply that [the observer] . . . does not enter into the [hermeneutical] event" (preferring instead the role of spectator or the view from nowhere.¹⁰¹ Habermas's contention that this retreat or distanciation was the necessary consequence of modern science—or even the "priceless heritage of German idealism"—neglected the human and social costs of the process. For: "What kind of understanding does one achieve through 'controlled alienation'? Is it not likely to be an alienated understanding"—and possibly no understanding at all?¹⁰²

The latter comments were relevant particularly to the tripartition of types of inquiry (as outlined in "Knowledge and Human Interests"). For Gadamer, this partitioning rested on a basic misconception of hermeneutics: namely, its misconstrual as a narrowly cultural, mental, or "idealist" enterprise opposed to a "real" world outside.¹⁰³ As *Truth and Method* repeatedly insisted, however, self stands always in relation to non-self, the familiar in relation to the alien or foreign (*Fremdheit*), in a manner undercutting inside/outside binaries and also the bifurcation between understanding, on the one hand, and labor and power, on the other. "[D]oes hermeneutics," Gadamer asks, "really take its bearings from a limiting concept of perfect interaction between understood motives and consciously performed action," or does it not also pertain to meanings that are "not actually intended"?¹⁰⁴ In the latter case, why should the so-called "real factors" (of labor and power) lie "outside the realm of hermeneutics"?¹⁰⁵ From the hermeneutical vantage properly understood, he added, "it is absolutely absurd to regard the concrete

99. *Id.* at 28.

100. *Id.*

101. *Id.*

102. *Id.* at 27.

103. *See id.* at 31.

104. *Id.* at 30.

105. *Id.* at 31.

factors of work and politics as outside the scope of hermeneutics.”¹⁰⁶ Regarding the “critique of ideology” and especially the claimed “coincidence” of reason and emancipatory interest, Gadamer chided its triumphalist hyperbole, manifest in the absorption of interest into reason and the resulting radical ascendancy of “enlightenment” over traditional life-practices. In his pointed rejoinder:

I cannot accept the assertion that reason and authority[tradition] are abstract antitheses, as the emancipatory Enlightenment did. . . .

. . . [I]n my opinion this abstract antithesis . . . is a mistake fraught with ominous consequences. In it, reflection is granted a false power, and the true dependencies involved are misjudged on the basis of a fallacious idealism.¹⁰⁷

On Habermas’s part, the rejoinder triggered a rethinking of some disputed issues—but without jeopardizing the privilege accorded to method (and meta-theory). Among the points advanced by Gadamer, Habermas accepted mainly the critique of the merger or coincidence of reason and life-practice—a notion he jettisoned in favor of further compartmentalization. As he admitted, the relation between knowledge and interest had been too narrowly construed in terms of “knowledge-constitution,” a construal that needed to give way to a sharper distinction between the origin or “genesis” of knowledge claims and their general “validity.” To mark this division, the notion of rational “discourse” was now introduced to designate a formalized mode of communication in which pre-reflective life-practice is bracketed (or “virtualized”) in order to permit rigorous testing of arguments. Corresponding to the previous tripartition (labor, interactive language, and critique of power), three types of validity claims were specially highlighted: the claims to cognitive “truth,” moral “rightness,” and personal “truthfulness.” Still more importantly, the notion of critical “self-reflection” was further internalized or subjectified, thus making room for a more detached and “objective” meta-reflection termed “rational reconstruction,” which was designed to uncover anonymous rule mechanisms and competences governing human thought and practices in general.¹⁰⁸ In quick succession, the reconstructive model was applied both to the genetic or “diachronic” development of human societies and to the

106. *Id.*

107. *Id.* at 33.

108. For some of these arguments, see Jürgen Habermas, *A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests*, 3 PHIL. SOC. SCI. 157, 157-89 (1975); Jürgen Habermas, *The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality*, in JOSEF BLEICHER, CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICS: HERMENEUTICS AS METHOD, PHILOSOPHY AND CRITIQUE 181, 181-211 (1980).

“synchronic” analysis of rule systems underlying universal language performance. Habermas’s *Legitimation Crisis*¹⁰⁹ (1973) offered a broad reconstructive sketch of social evolution, relying chiefly on the twin engines of progressive social differentiation and rationalization. Differentiation in this context signaled the growing separation between formalized “system” and “life-world,” where “system” embraced the domains of the economy (labor) and the state (power), while life-world denoted interactive processes (undergoing the steady pull of rationalization).¹¹⁰ In turn, the reconstruction of speech performance led to the theory of a “universal pragmatics” (first presented in 1976), a theory according to which speakers necessarily relate to three different “worlds”: the “objective world” of external nature through “constative” speech acts, the “social (norm-regulated) world” through “regulative” speech acts, and the “subjective world” through “avowals” or “expressive” acts—while relying on language itself as means or medium of communication.¹¹¹

Habermas’s penchant for border-drawing and compartmentalization was continued and even intensified in subsequent writings—of which only brief glimpses can be offered here. His magnum opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action*¹¹² (1981), transferred the partitioning of “worlds” and speech acts to the domain of action theory, a transfer that yielded the stipulation of four main sociological concepts of action correlated with three basic types of formal “worlds” (plus the life-world). As before, the latter included the “objective world” defined as “the totality of states of affairs that either obtain or could arise or could be brought about by purposeful intervention”; the “social world” seen as “the totality of legitimate interpersonal relations”; and the “subjective world” as “the totality of subjective experiences to which the actor has, in relation to others, a privileged access.”¹¹³ The corresponding types of action were “teleological” (and/or “strategic”) action involving relations with external reality (and subject to the criteria of truth and/or efficacy); “norm-regulated” action involving relations mainly with society (criterion: rightness); and “dramaturgical” action pertaining

109. JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *LEGITIMATION CRISIS* (Thomas McCarthy trans., Beacon Press 1975) (1973).

110. *Id.* at 1-17.

111. JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *What Is Universal Pragmatics?*, in *COMMUNICATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY* 1-68 (Thomas McCarthy trans., Beacon Press 1979) (1976).

112. JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION* (Thomas McCarthy trans., Beacon Press 1984 & 1987) (1981) (two volumes).

113. 1 HABERMAS, *supra* note 112, at 87-91.

mainly to the expression of inner dispositions (criterion: truthfulness).¹¹⁴ As a fourth type, “communicative” action was said to bring into play the “linguistic medium” reflecting an “actor’s relations to the world as such.”¹¹⁵ More recently, similar forms of partitioning have emerged in Habermas’s moral, political, and legal theories. In the field of political theory, in particular, his notion of “deliberative” or “procedural” democracy maintains the early triad of labor, interaction, and power—now under the system- (or meta-) theoretical rubrics of economy, civil society, and public administration (or “state”). As we read in *Between Facts and Norms*: The procedural model of democracy “respects the boundaries between ‘state’ and ‘society,’ but it distinguishes civil society, as the social basis of autonomous public spheres, from both the economic system and public administration.”¹¹⁶ Accordingly, this model “requires a realignment in the relative importance of the three resources from which modern societies satisfy their needs for integration and steering: money, administration, and [social] solidarity.”¹¹⁷

As can readily be seen in these and related writings, the contrast marking the initial encounter was steadily deepened—with both theoretical and practical consequences. Philosophically, Habermas’s evolving trajectory involved a progressive sidelining or marginalization of hermeneutics, its reduction to at best a subsidiary role in the midst of complex, mutually delimited compartments. What was lost in this reduction was basically the “horizontal” or border-crossing quality of hermeneutics: the readiness of understanding to be “addressed” and possibly be transformed by multiple domains of experience, including the domain of the other or alien (*Fremdheit*). This loss was particularly evident in the compartmentalization of “worlds”—the segregation of three formal worlds juxtaposed to the life-world—a segregation which undercut the key notion of human “being-in-the-world,” thereby jeopardizing the possibility of coherent self-understanding (and perhaps the very meaning of *Dasein* itself). In addition to its problematic effects on human “being,” the same partitioning carries significant implications for the “worldliness” of human life: namely, by distancing “nature” into a radically external

114. *Id.*

115. *Id.* at 94.

116. JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *BETWEEN FACTS AND NORMS: CONTRIBUTIONS TO A DISCOURSE THEORY OF LAW AND DEMOCRACY* 299 (William Rehg trans., MIT Press 1996) (1992).

117. *Id.*; see also 1 HABERMAS, *supra* note 112, at 84-94.

reality amenable to technical mastery and control, or else to the productive forces of modern industry (labor). Despite repeated complaints about the modern ascendancy of “instrumental rationality,” Habermas’s segregating strategy bars any hermeneutical transition or border-crossing between human endeavors and nature (especially when the latter is seen in the Greek sense of *physis*). To this extent, his work is scarcely sensitive to contemporary ecological concerns, especially to the urgent need to curb technological mastery and industrial production for the sake of a more sustainable ecospace for humanity. A similar reduction is manifest in the stylizing of psychic life into a “subjective world” of self-expression, a move curtailing pre-reflective moorings in favor of a progressively rational self-transparency.¹¹⁸

In sidelining hermeneutics, Habermas’s trajectory also steadily weakened or eroded its linkage with *praxis* or practical philosophy in Aristotle’s sense—whose legacy, in modified form, was preserved and continued in Gadamer’s work. In this respect, Habermas’s bracketing of ordinary life-practices in favor of formalized discourses and rational reconstructions was bound to exact a price. Compared with formal validity claims and anonymous rule structures, concrete life-practices were liable to slide into the backwaters of unexamined traditions or, worse yet, into the cauldron of irrational impulses and atavistic desires. The same peril inhered in Habermas’s extensive borrowing from sociological “system theory” with its spectatorial (or meta-theoretical) biases. By acknowledging the need for “system integration” and maintenance, this borrowing jeopardized the very notion of a “legitimation crisis”—whose chances were liable to be thwarted by superior system imperatives (geared to efficacy and administrative control). In a particularly patent manner, the peril persists in Habermas’s recent legal and political theorizing, especially in his model of deliberative democracy. Wedged between the subsystems of “money” and “administration,” practical “solidarity” in

118. Following *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas turned increasingly away from Freudian psychoanalysis in the direction of developmental psychology, especially the model of cognitive and moral development as articulated by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. See, e.g., JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Moral Development and Ego Identity*, in COMMUNICATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY, *supra* note 111, at 69-94; JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Lawrence Kohlberg and Neo-Aristotelianism*, in JUSTIFICATION AND APPLICATION: REMARKS ON DISCOURSE ETHICS 113-132 (Ciaran P. Cronin trans., MIT Press 1994) (1991). In Habermas’s normative theory, hermeneutical ethics is precariously wedged between a “pragmatic” and a properly “moral” use of practical reason; in the specific domain of “moral discourse,” hermeneutical judgment (*phronesis*) is allotted a subsidiary role in the field of “application.” *Id.* at 5-6, 13-14, 37-38.

the social life-world seems to have little room to unfold and thrive. In fact, the extensive homage paid to economic, technical, and bureaucratic expertise tends to undercut the significance of political participation and practical engagement—thus corroborating the long-standing retreat or atrophy of the “public sphere” in modern politics. At the very least, greater attention would have to be given in the model to hermeneutical-political bridge building, especially to the need to reintegrate expert knowledge into the ordinary language of practical political life.¹¹⁹

Closely linked with the retreat of *praxis* is the danger posed to dialogue and communication—especially in our rapidly globalizing age. What is urgently needed in this context is an open-ended, “horizontal” dialogue supportive of inter-civilizational learning and practical engagement. This prospect is thwarted both by a retreat into narrow particularism and a leap into spectatorial meta-theory. Although the dangers of the former are manifest, the drawbacks of the latter are often ignored. As Gadamer insists, however, both particularism and meta-theory are equally non-conducive to hermeneutical learning. From the vantage of meta-theory—including formal meta-communication—ordinary languages and life-practices are prone to be distanced and objectified, only to be subsumed as instances under universal categories. (Alternatively, life-practices are stylized as separate “worlds” without mediating connections.) In Gadamer’s view, the leap into meta-theory has always been a particularly Western or “Occidental” temptation, encouraging the pretense of a “superior” standpoint. As opposed to concrete or “effective reflection”, he notes, objectifying meta-reflection has been the hallmark of the “Occidental linguistic history”—a paradigm that is now being globalized, thus establishing “the grounds for the

119. The importance of such reintegration was still stressed in some of Habermas’s early writings, especially JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *TOWARD A RATIONAL SOCIETY: STUDENT PROTEST, SCIENCE, AND POLITICS* (Jeremy J. Shapiro trans., Beacon Press 1970) (1968); JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *THE STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE: AN INQUIRY INTO A CATEGORY OF BOURGEOIS SOCIETY* (Thomas Burger & Frederick G. Lawrence trans., MIT Press 1989). More recently, however, the integrative capacity of both language and philosophy has been greatly curtailed, with language shrinking into a means or “medium” of communication, and philosophy mainly into a “stand-in” for scientific-theoretical knowledge. See in this respect JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?* (1971), in *PHILOSOPHICAL-POLITICAL PROFILES* 1, 1-19 (Frederick G. Lawrence trans., MIT Press 1983) (1981); JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Philosophy As Stand-In and Interpreter*, in *MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND COMMUNICATIVE ACTION* 1, 1-20 (Christian Lenhardt & Shierry Weber Nicholens trans., MIT Press 1990) (1983); see also FRED R. DALLMAYR, *Habermas and Rationality*, in *BETWEEN FREIBURG AND FRANKFURT: TOWARD A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY*, *supra* note 3, at 132, 132-59.

planetary civilization of tomorrow.”¹²⁰ To counter the defects of this paradigm, Gadamer persistently counsels the return to lived practices, and especially the cultivation of engaged dialogue across borders or boundaries. Only such cultivation can engender a genuine social “solidarity”—the term understood, not in the sense of a constraining or exclusivist communitarianism, but in that of a nurturing and mutually liberating democratic engagement. To conclude with a “vintage” Gadamerian passage:

And so, as a kind of answer to the question, What is practice? I would like to summarize: Practice is conducting oneself and acting in solidarity. Solidarity, however, is the decisive condition and basis of all social reason. There is a saying of Heraclitus, the “weeping” philosopher: The *logos* is common to all, but people behave as if each had a private reason. Does this have to remain this way?¹²¹

120. See GADAMER, *supra* note 95, at 35.

121. HANS-GEORG GADAMER, *What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason*, in REASON IN THE AGE OF SCIENCE 69, 87 (Frederick G. Lawrence trans., 1981).

