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Reason, Tradition, and Authority:
A Comparative Study of Habermas and Gadamer

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Abstract

This thesis explores the possibilities for normative grounding of authority through a focus on the relationship between Habermas's 'critical theory' and Gadamer's 'philosophical hermeneutics', with particular reference to the bases of authority in East Asian culture. More specifically, it examines the role of reason and tradition in justifying political authority. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics locates the conditions of authority in tradition, constituted in part by prejudice, while Habermas offers a theory of communicative action that transcends the limited horizons of tradition. The distinction between reason and tradition is applied in East Asian culture through an analysis of the practice of filial piety.

The thesis endorses Habermas's charge that Gadamer hypostatizes tradition. Habermas correctly identifies the political implication of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, namely, that it obscures power relations. It is argued that Habermas's 'communicative action theory' and 'discourse ethics' are better able to do justice to the basis for the normative grounding of authority. The relevance of discourse ethics for the justification of political authority in East Asian culture is explored.

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Preface

Nietzsche argued that every philosophy is, essentially, the confession of a philosopher and following Nietzsche the staring point of this thesis lies in a confession of my philosophy. Another way of expressing this idea is that any piece of writing should carry a 'declaration of interest': there is a personal motivation for studying the Habermas-Gadamer debate and this has shaped the approach that I have adopted. While there is considerable interest in German philosophy in Korea, its reception is refracted through a specific East Asian culture. And for this reason I focus on filial piety, because it is a significant cultural practice, the study of which allows me to explore the normative underpinning of tradition. The absence of filial piety in Western culture is a reflection of an individualism absent in East Asian culture. My defence of Habermas against Gadamer can be taken to be an endorsement of Western individualism and a (qualified) rejection of some aspects of East Asian culture. This should not be interpreted as a rejection of respect for parents, but rather as a demand for a reorientation of that relationship – and by extension and more importantly of political authority – away from tradition to reason.

This criticism of East Asian culture should not be taken as a simple characterization of that culture as homogeneous, and this can be illustrated by my family background. My parents' values influenced the development of my own worldview and while it is difficult to free myself from the restrictions that these inherited values set upon me that influence was expressed in different ways. My mother's ontological outlook on life – taking life as granted and therefore accepting life unquestioningly – often ended up falling into a radical fatalism that greatly affected my own view of life. At the other extreme was my father's critical viewpoint on reality, which simultaneously had an effect on the process of me forming my worldview and thus stirred an internal conflict.

So what I am 'confessing' in the Nietzschean sense of 'confession' is that my cultural background has been heavily influenced by Non-Western culture. My worldview has its starting point in the East, especially in Confucian East Asian culture. The fundamental

characteristic of Confucian East Asian societies is characterized by explicit social hierarchy. In other words, the hierarchy that structures the relationship between parents and children, male and the female, and the ruler and the ruled are the conditions of conventional morality in Confucian tradition. The hierarchical foundation of the family and society, expressed in terms of three bonds (*Sangang*, 三綱; father-son, husband-wife, and ruler-ruled) [1], is the aspect of the Confucian tradition most criticized. However, these relationships are described in the Confucian literature as the basis of mutual social obligations that guide correct, humane, harmonious relations; they are based on age differentiation, division of labour, or other kinds of status and have been viewed as defining characteristics of any complex society.

Social hierarchy is also reinforced by the continuity of relations with one's parents long into one's adulthood. Even today, Asian adults have close, dependent ties to their parents. This is intended as an expression of compassion and respect for those who gave life to, nurtured, and taught one to behave in a civilized fashion, but often it infantilizes an otherwise grown person by subordinating one to parental demands. It is a discourse which Confucian cultural issues lie in an understanding of how those values are manifested in the lives of those who inherit the tradition and authority.

The fact that Gadamer, a Western philosopher, discusses elements relevant to understanding the values that circulate within the Confucian culture in his research scheme, 'philosophical hermeneutics,' gave me enough interest to enter into the study of the subject. Gadamer makes it clear that his philosophical background lies in the existential-ontological tradition. According to Gadamer, it is almost impossible for human beings to triumph over tradition due to the finitude of human existence. The task of hermeneutics ultimately lies at best in understanding the ontological conditions. Thus, the overcoming of prejudice that is grounded in tradition is no easy task unless there has been a special critical encounter in one's life.

The unconditional instilling of hierarchical relationships, of tradition, and of authority, which serve as the standards of East Asian Confucian culture, provide the basis of judgment for each member of the society. The emphasis on filial piety and the sustenance of traditional ancestral worship as means of upholding the Confucian values of tradition and authority naturally led me, after growing up in a non-Western –specifically, Confucian – culture, to raise doubts concerning these problems.

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[1] I use Chinese characters, which correspond to English in order to minimize the confusion of original meaning of Chinese characters.

In this context, Gadamer's claim that one cannot escape from tradition, and Habermas's counter-position that absolute acceptance of tradition and authority can be fixed through the use of reason, constituted an existential as well as an intellectual challenge for me. For Habermas, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics which mainly relies on the appropriation of tradition underestimates human beings' capacity to adopt a critical attitude towards their inherited culture. Although, as I shall argue, there are critical elements in Gadamer's research scheme there is lacking in his work a coherent standpoint from which can adopt a critical stance towards society.

The debate between Habermas and Gadamer might not be new in the Western world, but for me, the debate constitutes a collision of different worldviews. The debate between the two philosophers may be an outdated academic debate for the Western humanity, but it is this conversation between two philosophers that gave me a valuable motivation for an intellectual inquiry into my internal conflict.

Last but not the least, I dedicate this small piece of work to my late father, Yeojung Kim, who has introduced me to the worldview based on impartiality and thus gave me the motivation for writing this thesis.

Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Printed name   DONGHYUN   KIM

Chapter 1: Introduction

In *Beyond and Good and Evil* Nietzsche argues that claims to truth depend on their expression in language. Truth-claims merely express a point of view and no point of view can be comprehended as the absolute truth. There are only different perspectives. We interpret experience from a particular perspective, and that perspective is coloured by prejudice. Philosophers attempt to articulate experience through theory, but ultimately they depend on prejudice, and what they are really defending is their point of view.

Every human being has his own fundamentally 'pre-structured' understanding, which provides a 'taken-for-granted' background against which the actions of others are judged. Prejudice shapes self-consciousness. The formation of prejudice can be traced to two sources: nature and nurture, i.e., genetic dispositions and environmental factors.

I will add as an aside, that the role of genetic disposition as against environmental factors is a controversial one. In this dissertation I focus on the latter, but leave open the role of genetic conditioning. It may be controversial to argue that genetic factors play a role in shaping culture, but that possibility cannot be rejected. The individualism characteristic of Western cultures as against the relatively more collectivist nature of East Asian cultures may in part be the product of thousands of years of evolutionary pressures, which themselves are adaptations to an ecological environment. Culture could play a role by emphasizing desirable characteristics in marriage partners and thus affecting the course of evolution. If behaviour – for example, relative levels of ethnocentrism as measured by fear of strangers – has a genetic as well as an environmental cause, then tradition will require a sociobiological analysis. Indeed, filial piety, the study of which I use as an important illustration of a cultural practice that marks a major cultural difference between East and West, might then be explained by an underlying drive to maintain gene lines. I sidestep the *genetic* explanation for the difference between East and West, but stress the important role that *culture* plays as a challenge for Western thought, and in particular for Gadamer's hermeneutics and Habermas's discourse ethics.

Gadamer calls the consequence for individuals of the process of prejudice- and tradition-formation 'historically effected consciousness', which in turn takes as a fundamental fact human finitude. Since humans are finite beings, individuals form their prejudices within the bounds of a particular tradition. The accumulation of individual experience based on such prejudices forms the foundation of tradition, and this process eventually gives birth to a

mechanism that forces individuals to follow tradition-grounded authority. On Gadamer's account, we can philosophize only if we acknowledge that, by reason of our finitude, all of our thoughts presuppose a pre-understanding or prejudice that we can never get beyond.

Of course, the use of benign authoritative practices is of great significance in providing a foundation for society as well as sustaining its institutional structure. But, malignant or distorted practices of prejudice, tradition, and authority are a problem. If we accept Gadamer's idea of finitude then it is indeed difficult to overcome personal prejudice within the compass of one's lifetime, and it is even more difficult to challenge social prejudices. This is not, however, an argument against trying. If we focus only on either the isolated individual or society then the task of challenging prejudice is difficult. However, if we set in motion a dialectic of individual and society then social change is possible. Individuals are sources of 'difference' and so can challenge social prejudices, but the limitations of a lifetime mean that progress depends on mechanisms of social inheritance. This does indeed give scope to tradition, but a tradition that can be reflexively challenged. Against Nietzsche's relativism and Gadamer's conservatism I will defend an Enlightenment perspective on tradition and authority.

The chief concern, therefore, of this thesis is to explore the possibilities of grounding authority on human autonomy. Habermas offers this with his idea of a 'universal and unconstrained consensus' made possible by the maturity (*Mündigkeit*) of the individual (Habermas, 1984:147), where the idea of maturity is taken from Kant, but given new life through the idea of language, or more specifically linguistic competence. This maturity provides the basis for human freedom.

The pursuit of individual freedom is a long-cherished objective of modern democratic societies. The autonomy of the individual is not the only ground for rights recognized in the modern Western democratic tradition, but it is probably now – in the era of universal human rights – the most recognized ground in every culture. If we follow Gadamer's account of the importance of prejudice then tradition becomes an 'iron cage' out of which we cannot break: we are wrapped in tradition and it is impossible to break out of it. But if we reject Gadamer and instead trace a line from communicative competence to political authority then we will be able to challenge the power relations that underpin politics and achieve a degree of freedom. From the perspective of communicative competence we can recognise some social and political practices as 'distorted' and sources of unfreedom.

To develop an account of distorted practices depends, first, on distinguishing descriptive and normative interpretation, or 'is' and 'ought'. The distinction between 'is' and

'ought' has had a long tradition in philosophy. Whilst descriptive interpretation is concerned mainly with the subject-matter, normative interpretation is concerned with values or norms. As I will argue Gadamerian hermeneutics is unable to offer a normative grounding of authority, because his philosophical hermeneutics is solely an ontological theory of understanding. His main concern lies in the descriptive understanding of the world rather than in providing a normative grounding of the world.

Second – and crucial to this thesis – is the normative underpinning of political legitimacy. One of the reasons for using filial piety as an example is that we can see how the ontological and normative issues play out: viewed ontologically, filial piety is a given. It is part of the social ontology of East Asian societies. But we need to get 'inside' the practice and view it from the standpoint of each participant. Of course, Gadamer will argue that an ontological hermeneutics is concerned with consciousness – with horizons – but the problem is that it is not concerned with the individual as an autonomous agent.

The debate between Habermas and Gadamer concerns the status and authority of tradition and the legitimatization of political authority. This political debate mirrors the one found in moral philosophy concerning the status of values. We are accustomed to saying that values express freedom's creative spontaneity, that is, its capacity to both assess and develop projects. On the other hand, there appears to be a hierarchy of values that we receive and ought to acknowledge more so than something we create or establish by choice. Values appear to be able to orient our action only because, in the final analysis, they do not depend on us for their validity.

The problem posed by traditions is that they do not simply transmit a set of practices and institutions from one generation to another. What is transmitted claims to have distinctive authority. The Habermas-Gadamer debate is about the validity and justification of this putative authority. The normative grounding that distinguishes benign and malign meanings of prejudice, authority, and tradition is essentially a question of 'ought' and not 'is'. Using philosophical hermeneutics as a framework, Gadamer inquires into the problem of 'is', and overlooks the meaningful, normative use of human reason, i.e., the problem of 'ought'. While we cannot deny that explanatory features of the ontological-existential arguments – i.e., the finitude of human existence and the necessarily historical mode of being-in-the-world – are part of the human condition, when the aspect of normativity is eliminated and historicity becomes a brute fact, ontology runs into relativism and nihilistic defeatism. Habermas's theory shifts hermeneutics from an ontology to a methodology.

All critical thinking, Habermas argues, is subject to the existential-ontological conditions of interpretation. Critique is necessarily an imperfect intellectual operation; it is always vulnerable to further critique. Critical hermeneutics is not transcendental philosophy in the sense of explicating the necessary conditions of the possibility of interpretation and understanding, but has a more practical task. A critical undertaking can never be completed; it creates an object, which must in its turn be criticised. Critique must be constantly started again, precisely because the dimension of conflict giving the critique the space to operate affects also the critical undertaking itself. Thus, Habermas tries to solve the problems surrounding prejudice, tradition, and authority from an ethical and normative standpoint, and he explains these problems through his discourse ethics as normative validity, which allows for a judgment of right or wrong.

As I have explored the different positions between Habermas and Gadamer above, while Habermas sees that uncritical prejudice, authority, and tradition can be improved by means of critical reflection, Gadamer emphasizes the significance of prejudice, authority, and tradition and contends that these concepts should be maintained. This thesis investigates the possibility of studying the debate between Habermas and Gadamer by focusing on filial piety, which is one of the most important characteristics of the Confucian East Asian culture. In other words, using filial piety as a focus, I will try to explain the difference in the positions of Habermas and Gadamer in their abstract philosophical debate in a more concrete manner.

The concept of filial piety is a phenomenon specific to Confucian East Asian culture. However, it can be used as a tool in exploring whose argument, Gadamer's or Habermas's, has more relevance. The essential problem with filial piety is that it appears incompatible with the values of freedom and equality. This is due to the most important principle of filial piety being that the children must unconditionally yield to their parents' authority. I believe that Habermas's discourse ethics can break open the power relations at the heart of filial piety. But this is not a work on filial piety, so the use of the example should be understood as a means of exploring the broader question of the role of tradition in underpinning political authority.

Chapter 2 begins with the examination of the concept of filial piety against the background of Confucian culture. Confucianism is a distinctive mode of culture which is deeply embedded in the oriental world. The concept of filial piety (*xiao*, 孝) has defined East Asian Confucian culture for centuries. It has served as a mode of thinking and way of life. It is evident that the concept of filial piety persists in different forms, having been inculcated through many generations but also eroded by various social and political forces. However, it

still serves as the primary value of East Asian Confucian culture in buttressing the unique East Asian culture. In this chapter, I will look into how the concept of filial piety has been widely accepted as a significant tool for bolstering authority in East Asian Confucian societies.

Chapter 3 begins by looking at the ways in which Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is affected by the Heideggerian outlook of ontological-phenomenology. It is an extension of Heidegger's ontology into philosophical hermeneutics, and is an attack on the idea that the scientific method is the only route to truth. Philosophical hermeneutics, thus, can be understood as the philosophy of understanding and interpretation. Gadamer considers hermeneutics to be concerned mainly with the ontological understanding of human existence. He emphasises the finitude and historical nature of subjectivity. By examining his key concepts such as 'prejudice', 'tradition', 'authority' and the 'fusion of horizons', I explicate the problems of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

In chapter 4, I will present Habermas's defence of the Enlightenment project. Treating authority as a source of prejudices accords with the well-known principle of the enlightenment that Kant formulated: 'have the courage to make use of your own understanding' (Kant, 1991:54). In his own version of the Kantian enlightenment scheme, Habermas provides for the possibility of a 'universal and unconstrained consensus', and with it, the ideas of autonomy and maturity (*Mündigkeit*) (Habermas, 1986a:314). Habermas's defence of rationalism is based on a thesis about the universal conditions which must be presupposed if we are to account for the possibility of communicative speech. To realize this goal, Habermas presents the 'ideal speech situation' based on a rationally motivated mutual understanding between interlocutors. Habermas argues that such an ideal speech situation requires the recognition of a regulative ideal between dialogical partners.

I will review the essentials of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in chapter 3 and Habermas's communicative action theory in chapter 4. With an emphasis on the concept of tradition, Gadamer contends that tradition not only instils a historically effected consciousness of temporality, but also provides the foundation of prejudice. In particular, in chapter 5, I will discuss the concept of 'tradition' and consider its application to our understanding of filial piety. Gadamer maintains that since all human beings are conditioned by the effects of cultural heritage, our attitude to historical texts and events can never be disinterested. All previous contexts of human language and culture enter into the greater 'tradition' that is transmitted to us through the generations as an inexhaustible stock of moral instruction. Tradition, then, pre-structures the self-understandings of each present age, thereby binding us into a dialogue with

our collective past, i.e., 'the fusion of horizons'. In his critique of Gadamer's appropriation of tradition, Habermas argues that human beings can overcome the dogmatic force of tradition. On Habermas' account, it is of significant importance to use reason – critical reflection – in order to overcome such dogmatic force.

In chapter 6, I deal with the Habermasian universalist perspective. Unlike Gadamer's rejection of the Enlightenment project, Habermas upholds the Enlightenment programme. The distinction between Habermas's universalist programme and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics lies in the former's conviction that a universalisation principle can be developed from human beings' communicative competence. In this chapter, I apply this perspective to filial piety on the grounds that communicative competence gives us a viable way of modelling the equal and autonomous relationship between two actors (or sets of actors) – parents and the children. Of particular interest is how Habermas reinterprets Max Weber's rationalisation process, given Weber's interest in comparative religion and culture. Weber's writings on Chinese religion will be discussed.

In Chapter 7, I explore how Habermas overcomes the standard charge that a universalist ethic is merely formal and cannot affect substantive ways of life. He has to bridge the gap between what Hegel termed *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*, or ethics as a concrete cultural practice and morality as a transcendent set of principles. Habermas employs Lawrence Kohlberg's stages theory of moral development to underpin his theory. He argues that the universalistic claims of discourse ethics are closely related to Kohlberg's stages of moral development, and therefore Kohlberg provides the bridge between *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. I will offer a partial endorsement of Habermas's use of Kohlberg, arguing that the teleological aspects of Kohlberg should be abandoned and the 'stages' be seen as a set of moral competences. The theory can then be applied to East Asian culture and we can see that rather than assuming that the West is superior to the East all human beings face a range of moral choices and the task should be to expand the scope of universalisation in order to challenge power relations. Such an approach amounts to a rejection of the 'iron cage' of tradition.

Chapter 2: The Problem of Filial Piety in East Asian Culture

In this chapter, I will examine the concept of filial piety, as it exists in East Asian Confucian societies as a means of drawing out the political implications of the debate between Gadamer and Habermas. The debate primarily originates from two different – although both 'Western' – philosophical traditions: 'philosophical hermeneutics' and 'critical theory'. Whilst Gadamer endorses tradition and illuminates the role of 'prejudices', Habermas considers tradition incompatible with the notion of 'critical theory'. In other words, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics embeds understanding in tradition, because all understanding is, he argues, necessarily prejudiced. Although Habermas recognises the cultural manifestations of what he terms the 'lifeworld'[2] as a source of prejudice, he rejects Gadamer's idea of tradition on the grounds that it is 'absolutising'.

2.1 Filial Piety – Ideology and Lived Practice

Filial piety can be viewed from two perspectives: empirically, as a 'lived practice', and ideologically as a body of thought which reflects upon that lived practice and seeks to justify it. That justification focuses both on the immediate relationship between parent (meaning primarily, father) and child, and on the wider social and political role of filial piety; specifically, its role in justifying political authority. My focus is mainly on filial piety as ideology, because I am concerned with the reasons we give one another – this is central to the debate between Gadamer and Habermas – but it is important to recognise that filial piety is a real, lived experience in East Asian culture, albeit one that is subject to change and reinterpretation over time. There is no simple or straightforward relationship between practice and ideology, because ideology is a form of practice, and this is illustrated by the development of the 'Filial Piety Prize' in (South) Korea. This prize was established by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in 1973 and is awarded annually to about 250 people who are nominated by their local community or a private organisation (Sung & Song, 2001:37).

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[2] Edmund Husserl, a pioneer of phenomenological philosophy, coined the concept of 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*). Husserl understood it is an epistemological concept. Alfred Schütz merges Husserl's phenomenological understanding of consciousness and Max Weber's sociology. Unlike Husserl and Schütz, for Habermas, the 'lifeworld' is 'a reservoir of taken-for-granted, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation'. Habermas understands it as 'a culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretive patterns', rather than one's cognitive self-consciousness. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. II: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason,* translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p. 124.

According to Sung and Song the purpose of the prize is twofold: '…to preserve the value of filial piety as a cultural heritage of the nation, and…to stress the importance of the practice of filial piety, the idea of parental care, in order to impede the decline of elderly care' (Sung & Song, 2001:37). The latter rationale would not be unfamiliar to Western observers, for the more support members of a family provide for one another the less reliant they are on state spending. However, the effectiveness of the prize depends on a background set of values which are non-Western.

It should, however, be acknowledged that some of the reasons why a prize was awarded to a particular person are strikingly Western. Sung and Song undertook a content analysis of the 'stories' that accompany each prize – in effect, the stories are the explanation for why a prize was awarded. They grouped the reasons together and found that in 85% of the stories 'showing respect for parents' was indicated, followed by 'fulfilling filial responsibility' (84%), 'repaying debts to parents' (71%), 'harmonising the family' (46%), 'making filial sacrifice' (43%), 'showing filial sympathy' (26%), 'maintaining family continuity' (20%), 'compensating for undone services' (10%), 'providing services to other elders' (6%), 'complying with religious teachings' (5%), and 'maintaining family honour' (5%) (Sung & Song, 2001:43). Some of these are question-begging: 'filial responsibility' and 'filial sacrifice' presupposes we know what is meant by the term 'filial'. But some of the low-ranked reasons – for example, the last two – are 'Eastern'. The overall point is two-fold: on the one hand, the need to institute a prize would suggest that filial piety is in decline, but the possibility that the prize could be effective suggests that the Korean state thinks that the practice still has sufficient force for it to motivate people. Clearly, this is an ideological manipulation of an ancient practice.

A parallel example can be taken from Singapore, which is an ethnically segmented society, approximately three-quarters of whom are Chinese (Thomas, 1990:196). From the 1950s Singapore underwent rapid industrialisation and is now – unsurprisingly, given its population density – a highly urbanised society. In addition, the requirement to learn English has made the city-state outward-looking. All these are conditions likely to weaken filial piety. The Singapore government were concerned that industrialisation and urbanisation would undermine social cohesion, and so alongside 'modernisation' policies they also introduced a new moral education programme. And this programme stressed filial piety (Thomas, 1990:196). Elway Thomas undertook a study of the impact of this programme on Singaporean Chinese adolescents. He wanted to assess the extent to which the adolescents rated filial piety

as important and – a somewhat separate point – whether they integrated it into their own lives (Thomas, 1990:197). This distinction corresponds to a familiar one in moral psychology: knowing what one ought to do and actually being motivated to do what one ought to do. Thomas concluded that filial piety was indeed central to their lives. More specifically, their perception of filial piety could be broken down into three dimensions: ancestral remembrance, familial harmony, and 'caring for parents as they got older' (Thomas, 1990:202). The third item would be familiar to a Western audience, but the first two – and especially the first – indicates a specifically Eastern conception of the parent-child relationship. What Thomas did discover is that there is an increasing Westernisation of the concept, with a shift from ancestral worship to a relationship based on affection between living people (Thomas, 1990:204).

Thomas's conclusion was mirrored in a more recent Korean study. In their research on the Korean family, Clark Sorensen and Sung-Chul Kim argue that the performance of filial piety in Korean society has changed from direct care for parents to the purchasing of commodities for them. This is a reflection of the rapid economic growth (South) Korea has experienced in the past forty years. But despite the rise of a capitalist commodity society filial piety has been preserved: 'everybody continues to maintain life-cycle rituals that express honour and respect for the aged' (Sorensen & Kim, 2004:180-181). And Kwang Kyu Lee also emphasises how filial piety has persisted even in the face of rapid economic change. He argues that despite the population mobility one would expect with the development of a capitalist market economy the Korean family unit still takes the extended form, with married offspring living with in-laws in a hierarchical set up (although there is some separation of living arrangements). Furthermore, a first-born son, living in the same city as his parents, will carry warm soup to them, and when the father or mother die, the surviving parent almost always comes to live with the son (Lee, 1998:259). Of course, such an arrangement is not unknown in the West. Lee comments that children who live apart from their parents will send them money or gifts and visit them a number of times a year, especially during birthdays and holidays and there is an emotional dependency. Once again, this would not be seen as an exotic practice in the West.

While my thesis focuses on the ideological use of the concept of filial piety it is important to recognise that the ideology of filial piety would have no force if there were no practice on which to build. To understand the broader point about the ideological uses of the family as an institution a parallel can be drawn between Soviet Russia, National Socialist

Germany, and Maoist China. Frank Salter compares Russia and Germany, arguing that both were intensely concerned with competing affiliations:

> At the height of their revolutionary fervour in the 1920s and early 1930s, the Bolsheviks demanded that citizens subordinate all other loyalties to the party, including ethnic and familial ones, While fascist ideology asserted the precedent of the state over family ties, it incorporated the ideal and symbolism of the family, while communism, especially, the Lenin-Trotsky model, competed directly with familial piety.

> In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Bolsheviks attempted to replace family loyalty with allegiance to the overall Soviet society. The methods were indoctrination by schools and press, as well as by radical family policies that allowed sexual freedom and easy divorce and abortion, resulting in a decline in the Soviet family as an economic and socializing unit. The cost, however, was perceived to be too high and Stalin, in an attempt to revive the Russian family, adopted pro-natalist policies by 1936. (Salter, 2002:266)

Thomas comments that Mao Zedong rebelled against his own father and provided a model that challenged filial piety (Thomas, 1990:195). This fits with the revolutionary Russian experience, which saw the family as in competition with the proletariat. However, Thomas also argues that filial piety never really disappeared in post-revolutionary China, but has become 'politicised', ending its family monopoly (Thomas, 1990:196). It that politicisation that concerns me in this thesis.

2.2 Confucianism and Filial Piety

Confucianism is one of the most significant Eastern philosophies, and has influenced East Asian society for more than two millennia. It has entirely permeated the way of life of the people in East Asian societies. In other words, it has played an important role as both a conscious political ideology and a 'taken-for-granted' everyday social ethic. Although Confucianism is commonly combined with various other religions – i.e. Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism to form a historical religion, it is ultimately considered to be an unstructured – or immanent – religion, which is a point to which I will return when I discuss Max Weber's view of Chinese culture. Indeed, this fact also explains its capacity to permeate everyday life. Education, family structure, government and the general

values of East Asia have been affected, to varying degrees, by Confucianism (Roetz, 2008a:41), to the point where there is a significant divergence of Eastern and Western culture. Although it would be an exaggeration to state that all conventional life and culture of East Asia are Confucian in a narrow sense, to a significant degree Confucianism can in a broad sense be used as a label for East Asian culture. As Wei-Ming Tu argues:

> Confucianism is a historical phenomenon. The emergence of the Confucian tradition as a way of life, its elevation to the status of a state cult, its decline as moral persuasion, its continuous influence in society, its revival as a living faith, its metamorphosis into a political ideology, its response to the impact of the West, and its modern transformation, can all be analyzed as integral parts of East Asian culture. The Confucians do not have an internalist hagiographic interpretation of their past narrative. Indeed, a distinctive feature of Confucianism is its expressed intention to the everyday human world as profoundly spiritual. By regarding the secular as sacred, the Confucians try to refashion the world from within according to their cultural ideal of the unity between human community and Heaven. (Tu, 1998:4)

As Ronald indicates, Confucianism is 'a code of ethics for family and social life based on filial piety, [which] is strongly integrated into household and family practices' (Ronald, 2004:56). Confucius believed that filial piety should be regarded as a primary form for arriving at the moral excellence of humanity (Huang, 2007a:6), and argued 'that the way to enhance personal dignity and identity is not to alienate oneself from one's family, but cultivate genuine feelings for one's parents' (Tu, 1998:13). Confucius thought that family was of the greatest significance because human beings can learn fundamental virtues through it. In other words, by being family members human beings can transform their self-centred proclivities and redirect their energies to the collective good (Roetz, 2008b:369). The fundamental Confucian virtue of humanity (*ren,* 仁)[3], is the ultimate product of self-cultivation. For Confucianism, 'the first test for our self-cultivation is our ability to cultivate meaningful relationships with our family members' (Tu, 1998:13).

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[3] In the first chapter of *The Classic of Filial Piety*, Confucius argues that 'filial piety is the root of all virtue' (XiaoJing:1) and 'All virtue means the five virtuous principles, the constituents of humanity (*ren,* 仁): benevolence, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and fidelity'. See *XiaoJing*. http://www.chinapage.com/confucius/xiaojing-be.html, accessed on 17th of February 2008.

The ultimate objective of filial piety is, as suggested by Aristotle, human flourishing for parent and child[4]. Filial piety demands the acknowledgment of, and respect for, the fundamental basis of human life:

> Confucians see it as an essential way of learning to be human. [Confucians] are fond of applying the family metaphor to the community, the country, and the universe. They prefer to address the emperor as the son of Heaven, the king as ruler-father, and the magistrate as the 'father-mother official' because they assume that implicit in the family-centred nomenclature is a political vision. When Confucius responded that taking care of family affairs is itself active participation in politics, he made it clear that family ethics is not merely a private and personal concern because the public good is realized by and through it. (Tu, 1998:13)

In Confucius' writings, the most significant and distinctive elements in the father-son relationship are those concerned with the absolute obedience and respect of the son for his father. Whilst it is argued by Tu that the son should encourage and nurture himself, he must also learn self-control, and subsequently be able to overcome feelings of desire, recognise the requirements of his father, and regard with reverence his father's requests (Tu, 1985:115).

So we can summarise the concern with filial piety through a series of questions: What is filial piety? Why is the concept of filial piety peculiarly important in East Asian culture? What are the political implications of filial piety? And – crucial to this thesis – is it possible to criticise filial piety from a standpoint that transcends East Asian culture and in so doing reconstruct the basis of political authority in that culture? In order to address these questions, I intend to consider the notion of filial piety based upon the following Chinese canonical texts: Confucius' *Analects* (論語); *Three Bonds* (三綱); and *The Classic of Filial Piety* (孝經)[5], all of which place great emphasis on the role of filial piety.

2.3 Explanation: The Concept of Filial Piety

Whatever its form, the family constitutes the 'core unit', meaning the first place which could be affected by the improvement of social relations. It also constitutes the most basic (or smallest) unit of human association, for the family is the ultimate foundation of social order,

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[4] Aristotle considers the family to be a fundamental element in the facilitation of genuine human flourishing as opposed to a component of such flourishing. He considers the bond and ultimately relationship between parents and children to be a filial love: 'parents love their children as being a part of themselves, and children their parents as being something originating from them' (1161b17), Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), p. 230.
[5] The English title *The Classic of Filial Piety* is rendered in Chinese as *XiaoJing* (孝經) and *The HsiaoChing*.

that is, of humankind's social and institutional structure. However, it does not follow that political authority – as distinct from private morality – is grounded in the familial relationship: in certain traditions of Western thought that political is radically discontinuous from the private. We see this in the contractarian thought of, for example, John Locke, who attacks Robert Filmer's patriarchal conception of power. But it is also present in the teleological work of Hegel, and the distinction between family, society, and state [6], as posited by Hegel, is useful here because there is a dialectical sophistication in his work that appears absent in filial piety: although the family is central to Hegel's conception of the state there is no linear justification from patriarchy to political thought, but rather the family is an essential 'moment' in the realisation of *Geist* (Absolute Spirit). According to Hegel, the modern family is the most fundamental unit of all, and it is the 'ethical root of the state' (Hegel, 1952:par. 255)[7]. While the family is a fundamental part of the political world it cannot be reduced to the underlying logic of economic or political relationships. It is the most primary and basic unit in which individuals can learn about their orientation towards the whole. Family members in modern society are, at once, members of the state as well as civil society[8]. According to Hegel, family, civil society, and state – referred to as the three individual 'moments' shaping ethical life – exist in contention with each other whilst simultaneously are inextricably linked to the 'constitution of the state' as its ultimate articulation (Hegel, 1952:x, par. 157).

The theory stated by Hegel concerning family life is to establish a new unity between ethical and political life so as to provide a solution to the social fragmentation which has occurred as a consequence of the development of modern economic relationships (Ware, 1999:164). He considers the Athenian polis to be the most desirable arrangement of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), the fundamental basis of which constitutes a type of collaboration between private and public existence (Ware, 1999:150). However, he also maintains that the family must be compatible with the social consequences of class and property divisions (Ware,

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[6] Hegel's way of distinguishing between family, society, and state is a useful tool for demarcating the social structure. The objective of Hegel's categorization of the social structure lies in the emphasis on his own ideal manifestation of 'Absolute Spirit' of historical development in the history of civilisation.

[7] In citations of G.W.F. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, material from the main text of the paragraph will be referred to by the paragraph number. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

[8] Hegel was the first philosopher to provide any form of differentiation between the state and overall civil society. Hegel assigned civil society as the intermediate realm between state and family, where the individual person subsequently evolved to become a public person. Moreover, through the adoption of membership across various establishments, is able to reunite the universal and the individual. Hegel determines civil society as having a unique definition in that a civil or bourgeois society is directly linked to individuals who strive to achieve their own aims in contradiction to the state, whilst involving political society. Sayta Brata Datta, *Women and Men in Early Modern Venice: Reassessing History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 51.

1999:174), such that there can be on straightforward or unmediated return to the conditions of the Athenian polis. Modern family life remains in stark contrast to the lives lived in the ancient polis, and must adapt to the ways of the modern individual (Redner, 2002:258). Furthermore, in Hegel's view, the individual is simultaneously a member of civil society, a citizen, and a family member (Pinkard, 1994:303). Ultimately, the individual's consciousness acts as a moral mediator – as modern subjectivity – and is a result of the daily interactions between individuals, both inside and outside the family (Singer, 2001:77). In Hegel's view, the family creates the foundation for individuality in terms of both ethical and material life; simultaneously, however, Hegel condemns the current shape of individuality and subjectivity in the modern world, and seeks to reconstitute the relationship between individuals – subjects – in such a way that genuine community is created (Singer, 2001:53-54). The creation of a more powerful form of collective life results in the ethical state – a state very different from the 'egoism' of the English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke (Ware, 1999:133,137). In Hegel's view, the ethical state is rooted in various social institutions of civil society, in addition to family, and is therefore not an isolated institution (Pinkard, 1994:303). But crucially, the ethical state is not reducible to the family.

Blustein argues that family relationships are constituted by love, caring, and sympathetic identification as opposed to duties – much like all close, intertwined relations (Blustein, 1982:103). Undoubtedly, emotional empathy and compassion thrive between parents and their children, and the relationship between such individuals is ultimately a truth acknowledged universally and largely remains undisputed. Such emotional empathy present within this relationship is stated as being 'natural', and applies within the majority of – if not all – ways of life and cultures (Liu, 2007b:18). With this in mind, as an East-Asian phenomenon, filial piety must also be established as being distinct. Filial piety, however, provides a basis for political life quite different to that of Hegel. For Hegel the family is a dialectical 'moment' in the development of human consciousness (Geist), whereas for Confucianism it is fundamental. As Fan argues 'modern Western philosophers fail to recognise the true nature of the family as an eternal social reality' (Fan, 2007:516). In this sense, Hegel's logical basis of the family is entirely dependent on the fact that the family is one of the unities among the three ethical systems – family, civil society, and state. According to Hegel, the family is reliant on children, owing to the fact that 'it is only in the children that the unity itself exists externally, objectively, and explicitly as a unity, because the parents love the children as their love, as the embodiment of their own substance' (Hegel, 1952:par. 173).

And in another important difference between Eastern and Western – or at least Hegelian and Confucian – conceptions of the family, for Hegel the familial relationship between parents and children is transformed when the latter reach the age of reason:

> Once the children have been educated to freedom of personality, and have come of age, they become recognised as persons in the eyes of the law and as capable of holding free property of their own and founding families of their own, the sons as heads of new families, the daughters as wives. They now have their substantive destiny in the new family; the old family on the other hand falls into background as merely their ultimate basis and origin, while *a fortiori* the clan is an abstraction, devoid of rights. (Hegel, 1952:par. 177)

However, the Confucian idea of familial relationship between parents and children does still exist even though children become adults and have their own families through marriage. In contrast to the Eastern Confucian family, whilst Hegel is concerned to formulate a moral theory of parenthood he says little about obligations of children to their parents. The education of children is part of a process by which the family is preserved but transcended. And whilst Hegel stresses the emotional bonds that exist in the family these are relatively egalitarian – it is the affection between husband and wife, and brother and sister that matters (Blustein, 1982: 95).

In the case of Western culture, the performance of filial piety – insofar as we can say that the phenomenon exists in the West – is built on personal choice, which is applicable to both children and parents, as opposed to obligations and duties. On the other hand, there is much emphasis placed on obligations and duties in an Eastern context (Miller, 1992:20; Pecchioni, 2004:180). In the West, filial piety is potentially a threat to personal autonomy. From a Western perspective, the practice of filial piety in Confucian culture is viewed as detrimental to the pursuit of individuality and personal autonomy and it cannot fully guarantee equal rights (Huang, 2007b:40; Fan, 2007:516).

The vast majority of people in East Asia implicitly endorse the ideas surrounding filial piety. The word 'piety' is the most commonly acknowledged between the two. Although dictionary definitions should be treated with caution, as they catalogue often disparate uses of terms rather than provide coherent conceptualisation it is worth reflecting on the Oxford English Dictionary definition, as: 'habitual reverence and obedience to God (or the gods); devotion to religious duties and observances; godliness, devoutness, religiousness' (Dictionary, 2008:s.v. 'piety'). However, the OED also states that the term 'piety' may be considered as:

'faithfulness to the duties naturally owed to parents and relatives, superiors, etc.; dutifulness; affectionate loyalty and respect, esp. to parents' (Dictionary, 2008:s.v. 'piety'). Owing to the fact that this secondary definition is less commonly adopted, the term 'piety' is instead usually modified with the word 'filial'. The OED, in this instance, defines the term as 'of or pertaining to a son or daughter' and 'of sentiments, duty, etc.: due from a child to a parent' (Dictionary, 2008:s.v. 'piety').

In East Asian culture, the concept of filial piety (*xiao*, 孝) has a deep, long, and complex history. The interest in ancestor worship is deeply rooted, and is a significant factor in distinguishing Eastern and Western concepts of piety: from a progressive, Enlightenment, teleological perspective there is no obvious value in ancestor worship because the value of the family is forward-looking, meaning that it is a stage in self-realisation and in the realisation of an ethical community. In contrast worshipping one's ancestors implies a backward-looking individualism; since the past cannot be changed it has no formative value and it is focused on individual and not on society. Against this background, the family is considered to be society's individual organising element, and the ethics associated with filial piety – particularly in relation to Confucianism – has ultimately developed into a distinguishing element of the moral identity of Eastern culture. As a result, the ethical standpoints concerning Confucianism penetrate every level of life within the societies of East Asia (Kunio, 2004:110). From the perspective of Confucius, the notion of filial piety formed the initial element in the process of achieving an ideal moral character. In Book II of the *Analects*, there are four passages in which Confucius explains to his disciples the definition of filial piety:

> When your parents are alive, serve them according to the rule of propriety. When they die, bury them according to the rules of propriety and sacrifice to them according to the rules of propriety. (Analects 2.5) (Lau, 1979:63)

> Give your father and mother no other cause for anxiety than illness. (Analects 2.6) (Lau, 1979:64)

> Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even dogs and horses are, in some ways, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference? (Analects 2.7) (Lau, 1979:64)

What is difficult to manage is the expression on one's face. As for the young taking on the burden when there is work to be done or letting the old enjoy the wine and food when these are available, that hardly deserves to be called filial. (Analects 2.8) (Lau, 1979:64)

We can take from these injunctions that Confucius regards filial piety as not just ensuring the provision of ritual burial and materialistic requirements. In other words, filial piety and its overall practice should not be considered as merely ritualistic, but rather as guiding action in everyday life. And those who practice filial piety should be sincere in the performance of their filial duties.

Certainly, something that looks like filial piety is not unique to the East. Many cultures, including Western ones, value filial duties. Such practices are, however, part of a broader religious world-view, in which the parent-child relationship reflects the relationship of God, the Father, to his Son, Christ. For example, Saint Thomas Aquinas combines an Aristotelian interpretation of human nature, which is built on the family as the first step towards the polis, with a Christian emphasis on obedience to the commands of God (Blustein, 1982: 56-62). This presupposes a revealed and doctrinal religion, which is alien to East Asian culture.

Nevertheless, in the context of East Asian culture, Confucianism is distinctive in that great emphasis has been placed on the role of the family. The family is never a subordinate element of political life, nor can it be transcended. As Jordan contends, the concept of filial piety in Confucian culture is a central concern in all thinking about moral human behaviour:

Filial piety is simultaneously (and ambiguously) both a mental state and a behavioural code, and the behavioural code is (also simultaneously and also ambiguously) both a set of actions and a system of values underlying those actions. Thus we find that filial piety in Confucian culture may be defined in three quite separate ways: (1) filiality as action directed toward a parent and exhibiting submission and nurturance; (2) filiality as an emotion of love toward a parent that is understood to differ from other sorts of attachment (filial piety as emotion is particularly vivid in the context of funerals, which provide strong cultural support for this interpretation of a mourning child's affect); (3) filiality in children as part of a system of values, which must be self-consciously cultivated. (Jordan, 1998b:271-272)

Filial piety in Confucian culture provides the foundation of emotional love and faithfulness of children to parents, but it also generates an authoritarian social structure in which social relations are fundamentally hierarchical. With filial piety hierarchical

relationships exist across generations and there are *permanent* obligations of respect, reverence, and obedience, and even ancestor worship. The latter means that even the death of one's parents does not release the child from his or her duties. It bestows a privileged position not only on the older generation over the younger generation and the parents over the children, but also the male over the female, since the obligations are directed towards the father. So filial piety is also patriarchal. As Liem argues filial piety maintains the 'emotional link between recollection and trans-generational inner reality' (Liem, 1998:75).

Filial piety has played a fundamental role in the society of East Asia as a way of guaranteeing both 'ontological' security – meaning that it provides a sense of self or personhood – and general social hierarchy (Hashimoto, 2004:196). The importance and influence of filial piety in East Asian societies are undisputed characteristics and its consequences are also unmistakable. Therefore, it can be stated that the notion of filial piety has been utilised as a means of achieving progress in terms of Confucian culture, spanning numerous generations. In addition, filial piety and its practices have formed a way of life in Confucian culture, and ultimately stipulate the rules and expectations in terms of power and duty between children and parents in an attempt to further support and reinforce the societal hierarchy present in the Confucian societies of Eastern Asia.

2.4 Political Authority based on Filial Piety

Certainly, it is possible that two different forms of relationship exist: that which is harmonious and equal, and that which is hierarchical and inegalitarian. Whilst the former assumes that a non-conflictual relationship can exist between individuals, the latter inevitably entails conflict. As Buchanan argues:

> In any ordered society, two contrasting attitudes may describe the positions that persons take, one toward another, in evaluating and organising one's relationship, whether these be personal, social, or political. A person may consider and treat others as 'natural equals', as potential players in the cooperative-competitive game who are capable of reciprocating behaviour and hence deserving of respect. Or, by contrast, a person may consider and treat others as determined by classification of their positions in a 'natural hierarchy', as superiors or inferiors and hence deserving of either deference or domination – a stance that may or may not be informed by ethical standards. (Buchanan, 2006:255)

Undoubtedly, to a certain degree, human relationships necessarily involve some idea of equality – or at least of mutual dependence. All political relationships entail to some extent cooperation, even if that cooperation is – to use Habermas's term – strategic. The fundamental issue is whether there is a deeper moral equality, and how that moral equality fits with the hierarchy of Eastern culture, underpinned by filial piety.

If we return to Hegel, in understanding the link between family life and political life we have to show that there is an implicit conception of equality: whatever hierarchy exists in the family must somehow be transcended in a notion of civic equality. Accordingly, Hegel dismisses the notion of homogeneous authoritarian relationships throughout society, which fundamentally underpin the patriarchal argument whereby the husband has authority over the wife and the father over the children – where, indeed, the husband/father is a small-scale monarch.[9] Furthermore, Hegel similarly rejects the notion of a simple political-socialisation model, which sees both the authority and discipline learned within a family situation as directly applicable to citizenship roles (Landes, 1981:8). Whilst Hegel does not place any degree of importance on the educative role within the family context, he nevertheless establishes that different relationships are applicable within the different instances of family, state and society. Not dissimilar to the patriarchal model, the theory surrounding political socialisation makes the error of neglecting to distinguish between the components of life in a social context (Landes, 1981:8). Furthermore, Hegel also dismisses the notion that family is a completely separate element, which is segregated from social reality (Landes, 1981:10).

In contrast to the Hegelian model of the family the ultimate core of filial piety is apparent in those children who illustrate 'absolute obligation with regard to their parents, an obligation that trumps all other demands and moral concerns' (Ivanhoe, 2004:197). The formation of the traditional family in Confucian culture stems from a 'hierarchical social structure' (Slote, 1998:39) in which ultimate authority rests with the father and husband. In this sense, parents (especially the father) have an all-powerful and all-fulfilling authoritarian potency, and their authority finally leads to 'fear, dependency, and hostility' in the Confucian family system (Slote, 1998:46).

Filial piety is not only concerned with gratitude and kindness, and subsequent debt and obligation, but also encompasses acknowledgement of the fact that kindness was awarded by

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[9] For a discussion of the theme of family and society, see Richard Chapman, 'Leviathan Writ Small: Thomas Hobbes on the Family', *American Political Science Review* 69, no.1 (1975): 76-90 and Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought: The Authoritarian Family and Political Speculation and Attitudes especially in Seventeenth-century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975).

someone in a much more powerful position. Such a notion can help to achieve a deeper level of understanding concerning why those following the tradition of Confucianism regularly state that filial piety is the most natural model when seeking to determine the best relationship between subject and ruler or child and parent (Ivanhoe, 2004:196-197).

The level of consciousness surrounding the notion of filial piety in East Asian Confucian societies to a degree complements the hierarchical relationship and social structure within society. *The Classic of Filial Piety*[10] (*XiaoJing*, 孝經) is one of the key documents in the advancement of filial piety as a broader means of achieving social hierarchy. The book comprises a compilation of key accounts of the practice of filial piety with the aim of emphasising and reiterating the Confucian ethics associated with filial piety. This is done with the overall objective of contributing to and developing the level of education within those East Asian countries adopting the Confucian tradition.

It is noteworthy that for Confucius the application of filial piety is not restricted to private or individual virtues which can only be practised within family institutions (Rosenlee, 2006:124). For example, in the *Analects* the concept of filial piety is considered to be the source of the moral character exemplified by persons within the political sphere:

> It is rare for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on initiating rebellion. Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of humanity (*ren*, 仁). (Analects, 1.2) (Lau, 1979:59)

Therefore, in the familial sphere, filial piety is considered to be the ultimate foundation for one's own moral capacities in the political sphere. Of course, filial piety is predominantly directed to an individual's own parents. However, the general arena of filial piety ultimately reaches far beyond the family sphere and advances into that of the state. Filial piety as outlined in *The Classic of Filial Piety* (*XiaoJing*, 孝經) is implemented by aiding one's own parents in the familial sphere, but in so doing one emphasizes one's ancestry and this results in dedication and service to the state. In sum, it should be acknowledged that filial piety may be considered an initial education for what is to follow when serving the state in the East Asian Confucian societies.

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[10] The name of the author of *The Classic of Filial Piety* is unknown. It is attributed to a conversation between Confucius (孔子) and one of his disciples named Zeng Zi (曾子).

As highlighted by Ch'u Chai & Winberg Chai, both political and social duties and the tradition of ancestral adoration in East Asian tradition are combined to form a key doctrine (Chai & Chai, 1965:326-327). The introduction of *The Classic of Filial Piety* shows how the Confucian ethic undergoes politicisation in Han China[11] (Holzman, 1998:193, 199). During the initial passages of the book – the 'Starting Point and Basic Principles' chapter – the following is stated:

> Filial piety is the root of all virtues, and from which all teaching comes….The body, the hair and skin are received from our parents, and we do not injure them. This is the beginning of filial piety. When we have established ourselves in the practice of the Way (*Dao,*道), so as to make our name famous in future generations and glorify our parents, this is the end of filial piety. Filial piety begins with the serving of our parents, continues with the serving of our ruler, and is completed with the establishment of our own character….Yet, filial piety is the way of Heaven, the principle of Earth, and the practical duty of man. Heaven and Earth invariably pursue this course, and the people take it as their pattern. (XiaoJing:1, Fung, 1952:361)

The Classic of Filial Piety introduces the key idea that filial piety is the ultimate root of all that is great; therefore, any person who embodies the qualities associated with filial piety would ultimately also encompass all other beneficial qualities and virtues (Liu, 2007:77). Thus filial piety extends to the political arena, so that serving one's royal monarch is also included when striving to fulfil filial obligations. Filially pious behaviours must, therefore, be divided into stages. The notion of serving one's own parents is only the first stage of several: it is required that an individual ultimately provides his or her parents with pride and joy through serving one's own monarch, which is the only way in which filial obligations can be satisfied (Bellah, 1957:93-94).

The Classic of Filial Piety may have extended the concept of filial piety to serving one's monarch in order to resolve the conflict between loyalty to one's parents and loyalty to the state (Bi & D'agostino, 2004:455). In so doing, its main objective was to consolidate monarchical rule. Accordingly, in the chapter on the filial piety of the 'inferior officers'[12], it says:

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[11] The Han dynasty of China lasted from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D.

[12] *The Classic of Filial Piety* consists of 18 chapters in total. Chapter 4 explains filial piety between 'monarch' and 'high ministers and great officers'. Chapter 5 illustrates filial piety between the 'monarch' and 'the inferior officers'. Those two chapters discuss the role of filial piety between the servants and the monarch. In chapter 5 of *The Classic of Filial Piety,* the concept of 士 (*shi*) has usually been translated as 'scholars', but 'inferior officers' would be a more modern translation. In *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing), the concept of士 (shi) is described

One serves one's mother in the same manner in which one serves one's father, and the love toward them is the same. One serves one's monarch in the same manner in which one serves one's father, and the reverence toward them is the same. Thus, to the mother one shows love and to the monarch one shows reverence, but to the father one shows both love and reverence. Therefore, to serve the monarch with filial piety is to show loyalty; to serve the senior with reverence is to show obedience. Not failing in loyalty and obedience in the service of one's superiors, one will be able to preserve one's emolument and position and to carry on one's family sacrifices. This is the filial piety of inferior officers. (Peebles, 1991:94, XiaoJing:4b-5a)

It is noteworthy to state that, when acting in the role of government official, an individual is ultimately required to adopt two different identities, that of a son and that of a subject. As I explained earlier, the father holds the position of highest authority within the family structure, so that the son is therefore required to obey him; however, the monarch supersedes all in the hierarchy.

The amalgamation of the political ethic of loyalty in combination with filial piety as a familial ethic has a significant impact on the monarch-minister[13] relationship in terms of its development, which is now seen as being unequal and one-sided. As previously described, the method and subsequent progression of filial piety has been described in *The Classic of Filial Piety* in chapters 15 and 16:

The Master [Confucius] said: 'The gentleman serves his parents with filial piety; thus his loyalty can be transferred to his sovereign. He serves his elder brother with brotherly deference; thus his respect can be transferred to his superior. He orders his family well; thus his good order can be transferred to his public administration. Therefore, when one cultivates one's conduct within oneself, one's name will be perpetuated for future generations'. (XiaoJing:15b-16a, Peebles, 1991:98)

The important concept is 'transference' (Bi & D'agostino, 2004:463-464). Filial piety must be made compatible with loyalty to the state and that means not simply extending the concept to the ruler-subject relationship but actually redefining it (Chow, 1960:304). From the perspective of a minister, filial piety could act as a substitute for loyalty, and vice versa (Jung,

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as follows: 'The 士 (shi) of feudal China were the younger sons of the higher classes, and men that by their ability were rising out of the lower, and who were all in inferior situations and looking forward to offices of trust in the service of the royal court or of their several states. When the feudal system had passed away, the class of "scholars" gradually took their place'. *The Classic of Filial Piety (XiaoJing)*. http://www.chinapage.com/confucius/xiaojing-be.html, accessed on 17th of February 2008.

[13] In *The Classic of Filial Piety*, the notion of 'minister' denotes a person who works as a government minister.

2008:134). However, when there is any form of discrepancy between the two elements – that of loyalty and filial piety – a minister would ultimately seek to achieve loyalty, which would subsequently be considered as fulfilling his obligations in a filial context (Hamilton, 1990:98).

In the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the basis for imperial rule in relation to Confucian societies in East Asia was laid down by the interpretation of the link between filial piety and loyalty. Moreover, in the *Classic of Filial Piety* the overall idea underlying filial piety was amended and shaped so as to conform with changes in the monarchical systems. In other words, Confucian societies' rulers utilised the ethic of filial piety in order to encourage and foster the overall objective of supplementing common people's education. For instance, as can be seen in the *Guidelines for Ministers* by Wu Zetian of Tang (武則天), two moral principles were measured by the Empress as follows:

> There is an old saying, 'A loyal minister could only be found in the family of filial sons'. If he is not a filial son, he could establish great loyalty….However, in order to honour one's own parents, one should first honour one's monarch; in order to bring peace to one's family, one should first bring peace to the state. Therefore, loyal ministers of the past, without exception, would first consider their monarchy and then their parents, their country and then their families. Why? The monarch is the root of the parents, without the monarch the parents would not survive; the state is the foundation of the families, without the state the families would not exist. (Wu Zetian in Yin, 2004: 148)

As can be seen from the above, there is the idea that filial piety to one's parents is fundamentally reliant on loyalty to the monarch, and that the survival of families rests on the state (Bi & D'agostino, 2004:464). As a result, there are two recognised politicisation progressions associated with filial piety, which are considered in the *Classic of Filial Piety,* in addition to the introduction of personal loyalty as exhibited by the familial state. It is held that the monarch is more important than parents, whilst the state is also considered to be more important than family. Therefore, filial piety appears less important than loyalty.

The ultimate principle of Confucian filial piety has critically encouraged and emphasised the doctrine of the transference of filial piety to loyalty, that is, those who strive to follow filial piety in the case of their parents will similarly show loyalty to their ruler (Bi & D'agostino 2004:463). Furthermore, if an individual adopts filial piety and serves his parents, it is then required that such loyalty be replicated in the case of the monarch. The monarchs of

Confucian societies attempted to affirm their persona as a Confucian sage kings [14] and accordingly to encourage loyalty and corresponding duty (Cheng, 1988:55-56). It was claimed that they were a communicator of the sages, and subsequently determined their own standing as sage rulers whilst simultaneously solidifying the overall political interpretation of ensuring loyalty above filial piety. With this in mind, it can be stated that the transference to loyalty from filial piety has been adopted in order to further encourage and strengthen the idea of loyalty to the monarch at the expense of filial piety (Cheng, 1988:63). Accordingly, filial piety has undergone promotion and encouragement within an imperial context, with the effect that filial piety has been politicised (Hwang, 1999:175-176). This raises a problem: is loyalty to the ruler more important that filial piety of child to father? But if we say that filial piety is the most fundamental form of obligation, does that undermine loyalty to the ruler? One answer is to treat filial piety as 'ideological', in the sense that rulers – or their theorists – have taken a deeply-rooted cultural practice and sought to draw on it to justify political power. The other might be to argue that what is 'fundamental' and what is the 'highest duty' are two different things. Filial piety is fundamental in that it is the most basic relationship, but political loyalty entails a higher level relationship; in any conflict between the two, loyalty to the ruler is ultimate. The problem of how we define the status of filial piety will be of importance in understanding filial piety – and more broadly Confucianism – as a 'tradition' in the debate between Habermas and Gadamer.

In this context, attention should be drawn to the doctrine of filial piety in the *Three Bonds* (*Sangkang*, 三綱) [15], which demonstrates that the hierarchical relationship is an inviolable ethical norm by means of which the Confucian social order is preserved. The essence of the *Three Bonds* is 'the minister serves the king, the son serves the father, and the wife serves the husband. If the three are followed, the world will be in peace; if the three are violated, the world will be in chaos' (Tzu, 1963, 75). The logic of the *Three Bonds*, is therefore concerned with ensuring ruler authority over minister authority, father over son, and husband over wife: paternal authority is fundamental, but ruler authority is higher. In consideration of the *Three Bonds*' doctrine, ensuring the authority of the father over the son is considered to be the most fundamental of all elements with regard to the concept of filial piety. As we have seen in the above passage, filial piety is the ultimate basis for all qualities and virtues. As the *Analects* state:

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[14] The Confucian 'sage king' is very similar to Plato's 'philosopher king'.
[15] This idea is first seen in the *Hanfeitzu*, in the section on '*Zhongxiao*' ('Loyalty and Filial Piety').

When a man's father is alive, look at the bent of his will. When his father is dead, look at his conduct. If for three years of mourning he does not change from the way of his father, he may be called filial. (Analects 1.11) (Lau, 1979:60-61)

Mang I asked what filial piety was. The Master said, 'It is not being disobedient'. (Analects 2.5) (Lau, 1979:63)

Nowadays for a man to be filial means no more than that he is able to provide his parents with food. Even dogs and horses are, in some ways, provided with food. If a man shows no reverence, where is the difference? (Analects 2.7) (Lau, 1979:64)

As shown both in the *Analects* and the *Three Bonds*, it is evident that there is a hierarchical social structure based on the dominant and subservient relationship between parents and children in Confucian societies: 'the most salient feature of filial piety is the subordination of the will and welfare of each individual to the will and welfare of his or her real classificatory parents….Filial Piety is quintessentially described as the subordination of a son to his father' (Jordan, 1998a:268-269).

The concept of filial piety as embedded in Confucian tradition has entirely infused modes of thought amongst the people of Confucian East Asian societies. The social and political structure of Confucian East Asian societies is principally derived from the obedience of the son to the father as stipulated by filial piety, which leads to the obedience of the minister to the king as articulated in the *Three Bonds*. Both *The Classic of Filial Piety* (*XiaoJing*) and *Analects* emphasise the practice of filial piety in underpinning the demand of loyalty to the king: 'Because a gentlemen is filial when serving his parents, he can be loyal to his ruler'. (*TheHsiaoChing,* 1961:3, *XiaoJing*, 2008:5)'; 'Few of those who are filial sons and respectful brothers will show disrespect to superiors' (Analects 1.2) (Lau, 1979:59). Roetz argues that one of the tasks of filial piety is to provide a conduit of loyalty to the sovereign[16]: 'the entrance door to *zhong*, loyalty to the ruler' (Roetz, 1993:54-55). Hahm suggests that the ethic of filial piety within the context of the family system and its values in Confucianism shape the structural foundation in Confucian societies:

It is well known that Confucianism places a great deal of importance on the institution of family. Confucian classics [such as Confucius' *Analects*, *Three Bonds* and *The*

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[16] The basic meaning of Zhong (忠) is loyalty to the sovereign. The ideas of zhong (忠) and filial piety (孝) have served as dominant ideology in Confucian East Asian tradition.

Classic of Filial Piety] are replete with pronouncements and aphorisms concerning the importance of family and values particular to it. What is perhaps less well known, or clearly understood, is the extent to which Confucians tried to define and construct familial institutions as an integral part of the political order. It was not just that they thought the family should be protected as an independent realm but they [also] viewed the institution of the family as the bedrock upon which sound political institutions and a well-ordered society could be built. (Hahm, 2006:480)

The exercise of filial piety at home is a necessary condition for the establishment of the sovereign's authority, because without the route – or conduit – from filial piety to political duty East Asian cultures would be forced to offer an alternative grounding. It is significant that in the West there was a turn away from patriarchal authority as defended by Sir Robert Filmer to a contractual model of state authority, expressed in its most liberal form in John Locke's *Two Treatises* (Locke, 1980:34). The debate between Habermas and Gadamer is not between a defence of patriarchy versus egalitarianism, but over the role that traditions of patriarchy play in justifying political authority. Gadamer is not defending patriarchy, but tradition, which in the case of East Asia draws on filial piety.

In addition, it is the concept of propriety (*li*, 禮) which demands that the hierarchical social structure is based on obedience, respect, and loyalty. Within the practice of propriety in Confucian tradition, people should show respect for their parents and loyalty to their monarch. The meaning of propriety is well explained in the *Analects*: 'when your parents are alive, serve them according to the rule of propriety. When they die, bury them according to the rules of propriety and sacrifice to them according to the rules of propriety' (Analects 2.5) (Lau, 1979:63). As Young argues, propriety (*li*) is an essential concept in Confucian tradition: 'a core concept for Confucius, [which] was demanded of all. It defined the correct, stylized behavior which was attached to social roles and forestalled the idiosyncrasies of individual expression' (Young, 1998:139). The demanding force of propriety in Confucian tradition established the familial structure by bestowing the dominance of parents over children and husbands over wives. This form of dominant-subordinate relationship has ultimately shaped the social and political structure of authoritarianism in East Asian Confucian societies. And again, we see a contrast with the West: it is often argued – rather simplistically – that the West is a characterised by a 'guilt culture' and the East by a 'shame culture', meaning that 'face' – maintaining it and the fear of losing it – plays a significant role in Eastern culture. If we accept that there is some validity in this distinction then interfamilial relationships in the West are

likely to be governed by an individualistic notion of guilt, whereas in the East by a more public sense of propriety; that is, of what is appropriate in a particular context.[17]

Of course, there is nothing wrong in either culture in ensuring the loyalty, compliance, and respect of young children towards adults. But in fact, it is evident that an authoritarian family structure determines the obedience of the children to the parents as elaborated by the practices of filial piety. As a result, the notion of filial piety is also applicable to those who have reached the 'age of reason', i.e. adolescents. Indeed, it could be argued that a child has to reach a state of maturity in order to grasp his or her duties. In this context, an issue might arise if children are to obey their parents absolutely even if parents should wrongfully exercise their authority over their children, or indeed if the parents should violate moral, social or legal rules. Put concretely: should a child cover up the crime of a parent? According to Rosemont and Ames, Confucian 'role ethics' is dependent on the pursuit of cosmic harmony in order to sustain the existing familial and communal order. This means that the father-son relationship should be maintained by emphasizing filial piety rather than drawing attention to the actual human conduct, even if this means that a son ignores his father's crimes (Rosemont & Ames, 2008:17). It is clear that, as Roetz maintains, the main aspect of filial piety is blind obedience of children to parents as claimed by Zhu Xi:

> Li Tong said: 'The fact that Shun could help Gusou (his criminal father) to achieve delight was simply because he fulfilled the way of serving the parents to the utmost, discharged the duties of a son, and shut his eyes to the wrongdoings of the parents'.
>
> Luo Zhongsu (Luo Congyan) once remarked to this, 'It was simply because *there are no parents in the world who are not right'*.
>
> When Liaowen (Chen Guan) heard this, he found it excellent and said, 'Only then the roles of father and son in the world were fixed. Whenever subordinates have murdered their rulers and sons have murdered their fathers, this has always started with their finding fault with them'.[18] (Zhu Xi in Roetz, 1993:57)

The underlying ethic of filial piety is deeply rooted in the ability of children to repress antagonistic attitudes toward their parents (Yim, 1998:165). As Slote claims, the core of

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[17] The classic treatment of the distinction between a shame culture and a guilt culture can be found in Ruth Benedict's discussion of Japanese culture, which was originally published in 1947 and was written during the Second World War to provide the American government with advice on a country that the Americans were likely to have to occupy. Although the study has been heavily criticised the distinction between shame and guilty has useful heuristic value, by which I mean that it provides a starting point, however inadequate, for understanding Eastern culture. See Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1947).

[18] It is cited in Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 57.

'Confucianism was based upon authoritarianism, and filial piety was the principal instrument through which it was established and maintained….it has been, in fact, the modus through which the Confucian hierarchical relationship was maintained' (Slote, 1998:46). As discussed above, Confucian societies primarily appear to be shown as having a hierarchical structure – socially and politically – that is underpinned by the yielding of authority to the parents (particularly the father).

The Confucian ethic of filial piety has created a 'model person', or an 'ideal type', in seeking filial obligation to one's parents as well as to the monarchy. As I have explored earlier in this chapter, the relationship between parents and children, as based on the Confucian ethic of filial piety, has required the blind obedience of children toward parents. As far as filial piety is concerned, it has served as the socio-political basis of Confucian culture. Considering claims about the moral status of filial piety, the primary aspect of filial piety is the absolute obedience of children to parents; and following on from this traditional idea, the ethic of filial piety has served the political requirements of societal order in Confucian East Asian culture. Accordingly, political control of the parent-child relationship, based on the prominence of filial piety, reinforces the consolidation of authoritarian values. In this sense, as will be discussed later in this chapter (section 2.5), the relationship between parents and children, as identified by the ethic of filial piety in Confucian culture, should be reconsidered. Filial piety is ultimately a discourse that diminishes the power of the children in the interest of safeguarding the hierarchy of social difference. It effectively regulates the interests of the children by assigning obligations and debt to them. Subsequently, democratic and individualist rules of engagement are seemingly necessary to buttress the autonomy of individuals. In other words, instead of acknowledging the inequality of individuals based on the authoritarian relationship between parents and children, we need to guarantee free and autonomous individuals who could have equal rights.

2.5 Gadamer's Appreciation of Tradition and Prejudice with respect to the Concept of Filial Piety

Richard Palmer argues that there are some affinities[19] between Gadamer and Confucius or Confucianism (Palmer, 2006:81-93). He argues that – allowing for differences in language and

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[19] Ng also argues that there are affinities between Gadamer and Confucius. He asserts that Gadamer's philosophy 'is seemingly consonant with the Confucian conception of knowledge: the veneration of tradition and the ascription of authority to the classical; the ontological sense of continuity and mutuality with history and culture; the resistance to the atomistic objectification of nature; the immersion of the self in the world through moral self-cultivation as fiduciary commitment; and the sober acceptance of the integrity of language as the embodiment of reality'. On-Cho Ng, 'Chinese Philosophy, Hermeneutics, and Onto-Hermeneutics', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30, no. 3 & 4, (2003): 373-385, p. 377.

tradition – there are parallel concepts in the work of the two thinkers: 'Truth, textual contemporaneity (*Zeitlichkeit*), phronesis, application, tradition and the historically-effected consciousness, conversation/dialogue, and solidarity' (Palmer, 2006:83). The guiding concept is tradition (Palmer, 2006:91). Just as Gadamer stresses the importance of tradition as a precondition for human existence in a particular culture, Confucius also considers the concept of tradition of significant importance in Confucian societies.

For Gadamer tradition is important both for epistemology and morality. He rejects the scientific methodology of the natural sciences, which seek to apply positivist notions of truth to human society. The intention of his research scheme, 'philosophical hermeneutics', is not to scrutinise how understanding occurs in the human sciences, but to consider understanding relative to the entire human experience of the world. The human sciences, in other words, are to be connected with the modes of experience that lie outside 'methodological self-consciousness'– the experience of art, philosophy, and history itself – and in doing so connect the human sciences 'with the totality of our experience of the world' (Gadamer, 1989:xxiii).

According to Gadamer, the notions of understanding and interpretation are intertwined. A. T. Nuyen argues that for Gadamer understanding depends on interpretation, and interpretation requires standing in a tradition, where an understanding of new situations always depends on prior knowledge. A tradition is a 'horizon of understanding'. Tradition equips the subject with the necessary conditions of understanding – they are what Gadamer terms 'prejudices':

> Understanding is the 'fusion' of the two horizons…Without tradition, understanding is not possible, not just because one lacks certain necessary cognitive preconditions, but also because one lacks self-understanding. Tradition nourishes and maintains the subject and guides the subject in its task of understanding, as well as serving as the subject's source of cognitive authority. (Nuyen, 2004:436)

We can see parallels in Confucius. Gadamer argues that tradition is of importance because it carries 'superiority in knowledge and insight' (Gadamer, 1989: 279). Following the Gadamerian notion of tradition, Alan Chan asserts that Confucian ethics entail 'finding in tradition a reservoir of insight and truth' (Chan, 2000: 245). In the *Analects*, Confucius explicates the idea of tradition: 'I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity' (Analects 7.1) (Lau, 1979:112), and 'I am not one who was born with knowledge, but one who is fond of antiquity and quick to seek it' (Analects 7.20) (Lau, 1979: 116). In this context, Confucius employs the concept of the *Way* (*Dao,* 道) and argues that

people should follow the *Way* as they follow tradition. For Confucius we should trace and follow the knowledge, wisdom and insight largely derived from the experience of the past[20] and embedded in tradition. In so doing, we can learn the *Way* as a practice, which we take for granted, as a means of employing the conventional understanding and knowledge which are formed by tradition.

In Confucius' view, understanding and knowledge can only be practised within the context of tradition. With reverence for tradition, individuals pursue the tenet of the *Way* and can easily grasp the teachings of Confucian filial piety:

> It is natural enough to take the idea of filial piety as a component part of the [East Asians'] respect for tradition….the idea of filial piety as obedience to the father can be taken to refer to the necessity to stand within a tradition in the seeking of wisdom and knowledge. Disobedience, in turn, can be taken to refer to the disregard of tradition, or traditional knowledge….to have filial piety is to have understanding of the tradition handed down by the fathers, and to have the appropriate fore-knowledge for the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom. One must acquire a perspective by immersing oneself in one's tradition before one can embark on the task of interpretation and understanding…. [to be] a person with a certain level of understanding, a person with humanity (*ren*, 仁), one has to learn the way of the fathers, the way of tradition, or simply the *Way*. In other words, we could assume that filial piety means much more than just to follow the instructions of one's immediate parents; it means to follow the tradition, the *Way*. Thus, in Chapter 29 (29.1) of the Xunzi, we find: 'Inside the home to be filial….and outside the home to be courteous….constitute the minimal standard of human conduct….To follow the dictates of the *Way* rather than those of one's father constitute the highest stand of conduct'. (Xunzi, 1994:29.1) (Nuyen, 2004:437-438)

As Palmer argues, Gadamer and Confucius have a similar view of the use of the concept of tradition (Palmer, 2006:81). Confucius considers tradition to be a source of 'insight and truth' (Chan, 2000:245). And like Confucius, Gadamer defines tradition in terms of human self-understanding. Tradition, for Gadamer, is the carrier of a 'superiority of knowledge and insight' as regards truth (Gadamer, 1989:280). The ethic of filial piety likewise requires the obedience of children to parents within the context of a tradition which underpins their parents' knowledge and wisdom.

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[20] Confucius' ideal state was the Zhou dynasty (1045 BC to 256 BC) of ancient China.

In defending tradition Gadamer is challenging the Enlightenment's discrediting of 'prejudice' (Gadamer, 1989:270). The crucial claim for Gadamer here is that 'prejudice' should be recognised as a constituent element of understanding; although at the same time, of course, there is the realisation that 'it is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to the language that speaks to us in tradition' (Gadamer, 1975:239). For Enlightenment thinkers tradition is diametrically opposed to freedom and reason. The recognition of the authority of tradition was seen as 'blind obedience,' and an obstruction to knowledge and truth. But Gadamer argues that tradition carries fragments of truth and fact, such that there is no opposition between tradition and reason. Gadamer argues that genuine authority:

> Rests on recognition and hence an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, accepts that others have better understanding. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience....but rather with knowledge. (Gadamer, 1989:279)

Tradition determines our being and understanding; it is expressed in and through our 'prejudices' and it provides a horizon from which we may view the world. Indeed, human beings must necessarily operate with a 'tradition of traditions': 'tradition is not simply a pre-condition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves' (Gadamer, 1975:261). In the sense that we can shape tradition we are free; certainly, tradition sets limits, but tradition presents us with options or choices. Every tradition is thus a 'living tradition' – that is, continually changing and adapting. Accordingly, history is not the 'no longer existing' but rather past and present are mutually entangled through the notion of self-understanding. This is what Gadamer means by 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) (Gadamer, 1984:38).

In Gadamer's view, tradition serves as the ground of understanding. If tradition is that which moulds and directs our perspectives, then understanding is a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1989:302). Such a notion demonstrates that we are never separate from that which we strive to understand. Furthermore, for Gadamer to live and *be* is to stand within tradition.

Like Gadamer, Confucius stresses that traditional texts are valued as sources of knowledge and wisdom. As explained earlier, Confucius claimed that there was an indivisible connection between tradition and the *Way* (*Dao,*道) – people should follow the *Way* as they follow tradition. Gadamer's acknowledgement of tradition and the practice of the *Way* in Confucian philosophy serve as the foundation for those who seek understanding and knowledge. In Confucian understanding of tradition it is in this sense that man can be said to

make the *Way* great. The *Way* (*Dao,*道) may be seen as the actualization of the moral virtues of the true gentleman (*Chün-tzu*, 君子). Confucius describes the role of the true gentleman in *Analects* 1.2: 'A superior man is devoted to the cultivation of fundamentals; when they are firmly established, the *Dao* will grow' (Analects, 1.2). And need we add that for Confucius, the world is precisely without *Dao*? As he somewhat remorsefully puts it: 'If the Way prevailed in the world, there would be no need for me to change it' (Analects, 18.6).

Such a form of moral understanding which is present in the concept of Confucian tradition seems also to be a characteristic trait in terms of the Gadamer's notion of tradition. In this sense, it is easy to see how one is able to reach an understanding of the notion of tradition from the perspective of Confucius. The notion of tradition could be considered as the ultimate root of the moral teachings of Confucius. As Chan argues, the overall function of tradition – especially in consideration of Confucius' *Analects* – 'lies in its mediating position between *Dao* as the will of Heaven and *Dao* as the way of [the true gentleman] (*Chün-tzu*, 君子)' (Chan, 1984:430).

According to Confucius, thus, Confucian hermeneutics emphasises the *Way* as a means to maintain tradition. Ng argues that learning and following 'the *Dao* is to realize the moral and ritual order established by the ancient sages' (Ng, 2007:378). Compliance with the *Way* is a prerequisite for the recognition of norms and values which are shaped by tradition. In Confucian tradition, therefore, the practice of filial piety is the fundamental basis which ensures norms and values grounded in the employment of moral and practical exercises. In so doing, filial piety furnishes self-understanding of one's own tradition based on conventionally inherited wisdom and knowledge; its practice functions as a conventional norm, which conforms to existing tradition. Thus both Gadamer and Confucius have a shared understanding regarding 'tradition', which plays a significant role within the context of human existence. However, as we will see there are also important differences between the two over the notion of authority and its relationship to tradition. There is a degree of volition Gadamer's conception of authority, which is illustrated in the teacher/student relationship. In applying Gadamer's perspective to East Asian culture I am not making a direct connection between his work and Confucianism, but rather will attempt how the hermeneutic method can be used to interpret filial piety and how that interpretation is politically significant.

2.6 Habermas's Challenge: Critical Objections to the Concept of Filial Piety

The Confucian virtue of filial piety, which requires reciprocal care between parent and child, is our starting point for being human (Liu, 2003:236). Such a relationship is not unique to the East. As we have seen there are Western conceptions of the family as a moral entity. However, what distinguishes the Confucian ideal is the subordination of the child to the parent. Confucianism emphasises authority over liberty and responsibility over rights, but lacks the tradition of an individual's claim of rights against the state, which would counterbalance parental authority.

In Gadamer's view, all understanding is grounded in tradition and the idea of the 'fusion of horizons' which remains central to historical understanding can ultimately only result from a meditation upon tradition. The attempt to fuse past and present 'is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition' (Gadamer, 1989:258). However, the concept of tradition and the idea of belonging to tradition, as claimed by Gadamer, are open to challenge from a liberal Enlightenment perspective. Gadamer overemphasises the significance of tradition; he appropriates the meaning of tradition as the supporting component of authority (Piercey, 2004:261). Consequently, his appropriation of tradition leads to a relatively uncritical integration of existing power structures. As a result, Gadamer has been accused by Habermas of implementing an excessively simple and uncritical idea of tradition which ultimately encourages authoritarianism and dogmatism. For Habermas people need to reach beyond tradition (Habermas, 1977:357, Habermas, 1988:172). (Although ultimately I side with Habermas in this debate I will later challenge Habermas's interpretation of Gadamer, arguing that there is scope for a critique of power in the hermeneutic method).

In general, critical theory is not concerned merely with describing social reality, but seeks to synthesise a scientifically respectable description of social reality with a critical or normative ideal. In other words, the Enlightenment tendency to hold theory firmly apart from practice is rejected in favour of a new approach, one that recognises the interrelatedness of theory and practice. Importantly, the essential guiding value for critical theory is freedom. Critical theory is critical because it has an interest in emancipating people from unnecessary domination, and this presupposes a conception of freedom that contrasts with domination (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994:15-17).

Critical social theory aims to integrate the empirical and normative elements that have become detached under conditions of modernity, and so without violating it over the

'naturalistic fallacy' – that is, critical theory seeks to bridge the gap between 'is' and 'ought'. Avoiding the naturalistic fallacy means always employing the fact-value distinction is an assumption (Held, 1980: 162), and this is achieved through the very notion of criticism: by standing back from existing practices and refusing to accept the normativity of what is 'given' the critical theorist presupposes a standpoint of 'ought' in the face of 'is'. Questions of normativity are only ever posed when what exists is no longer taken for granted. As Albrecht Wellmer argues: 'An ethical question first exists when the agreements of actions with the factually valid norms of a society are no longer recognised as the final instance of a "justification" of these actions' (Wellmer, 1990:293). And as Habermas suggests, we should differentiate between social norms which are justified by nothing more than an appeal to de facto social norms from social norms which are legitimately and reasonably valid (Habermas, 1984:287).

The idea of a critical social theory has at its core a fundamental tension which is derived from the intention of critical social theory to generate a rational critique (Held, 1980:331). Rational justification involves the giving and accepting of reasons (Held, 1980:331). The outcome of such a justificatory process should ultimately be rational, simply because it is fundamentally built on reason. The idea is that any social agent who has any ability to speak or act would ultimately be rationally convinced of the rightness associated with justifying the norm (Held, 1980:330). The outcomes of rational justification processes are acceptable if the processes by which they were arrived at are universally valid (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994:172-173). This is achieved when a claim is justified from an impartial, third-person point of view (Owen, 2002:19).

According to Habermas, communication is inherently oriented towards mutual understanding, and the standards which govern communication are therefore conditional upon reaching mutual understanding and, ideally, rational consensus (Habermas, 1979a:13). Importantly, there are three types of so-called 'validity claim': normativity, truth, and sincerity. Such claims are made on a daily basis through various normal acts associated with language (Habermas, 1984:307-308). By making a statement, there is the claim that such a statement is valid. Therefore, in order to have the ability to conduct rational actions on a communicative basis, there is required a subsequent – but in everyday discourse counter-factual – defence of such claims[21]. Accordingly, communicative rationality entails having the capacity to provide valid justifications. Notably, there is the capacity to acknowledge the validity of such claims.

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[21] The detailed exploration of Habermas's validity claims will be dealt in Chapter 6.

Habermas believes that this forms the foundation of an overall social bond (Habermas, 1979a:34-35). The act of asserting a validity claim subsequently solidifies the mutual commitment in terms of standards of validity, which ultimately means that communication – and, as a result, the overall social relationship – is possible.

As I have explored above, Confucius and Gadamer have a shared understanding in which tradition should be understood as the appropriation of norms and values embedded within existing tradition. If we follow Gadamer's methodology, which entails the fusion of horizons, then the Eastern concept of filial piety can be subject to radical criticism, but rather East must meet West in a hermeneutic process, whereby the internal meaning for Eastern culture for that culture must be acknowledged: there is no Habermasian standpoint outside that fusion of horizons. For Habermas and Apel a Gadamerian 'justification' of filial piety is in effect an ideological reinforcement of existing power relations. Gadamer is, in a negative sense, a conservative. As Chan points out: 'Confucius can be described as a "conservative" thinker in the technical sense that he regards certain values and insights derived from tradition to be of normative significance, and which must therefore be carefully conserved' in urging us to follow the wisdom of antiquity (Chan, 2000:246). As for Gadamer, Georgia Warnke claims that Gadamer is 'fundamentally conservative' in that human agents cannot overcome the authority of tradition to which they belong (Warnke, 1987:136).

In the case of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, human beings cannot completely defy tradition as they are immersed in tradition. In other words, for Gadamer, human beings are unable to identify the problems of tradition as they are always located within the finite limitations of human existence, and it is therefore impossible for them to escape from it. In order to avoid this problem, critical theory advocates the creation of an independent standpoint, external to tradition, from which to examine ourselves and the world in which we live. Apel advocates something like the objective scientific viewpoint, whilst Habermas advocates a viewpoint reached via undistorted communicative means – or what he refers to as 'ideal speech situation'. Both would hold the same objection to filial piety understood as respect for tradition. For both, 'the root of humanity' lies not in tradition but outside of it. Both would say that humanity requires being, in a sense, unfilial to tradition.

The same thing can be said about the conservatism in Confucianism. In Confucius' account, as we have seen, the preservation of antiquity is the most important characteristic in Confucian philosophy. Chan illustrates that the concept of propriety (*li*, 禮) lies in the upholding of tradition in Confucianism:

As an interpreter of tradition, Confucius was convinced that 'the way of the former kings' demands ritual discipline and propriety. This was not well understood or worse, willfully disregarded, which explains why violence and chaos reigned. If the social and ethical significance of *li* were understood and realised in practice, the assumption is that order would naturally prevail. To Confucius, this would be the single most important lesson that one can learn from antiquity. (Chan, 2000:248)

If we follow Chan's interpretation of the Confucian idea of antiquity, then it is much the same as Gadamer's notation of 'historically effected consciousness'. Gadamer limits the norms and conventions of the ontological understanding of human existence to the unreflective perpetuation of the *status quo* of one's own tradition, which is embedded within its own historically effected consciousness (see Chapter 5). With his emphasis on tradition, Gadamer contends that tradition instils historically effected consciousness of temporality into a person's mind within a particular tradition.

The concept of filial piety has been recognised as central to East Asian culture and has been a tool for the ruling ideology of Confucian societies in East Asia. The teachings of Confucius essentially reflect a 'conservative' orientation. Habermas, Apel and other Critical Theorists argue that Gadamer's thesis is also conservative, and there is therefore a fairly similar stance between Gadamer and Confucius in terms of the importance and interpretation of tradition: whilst Gadamer places focus on tradition, Confucius places importance on the custom of antiquity. Confucius recognises the ethical principles embedded within tradition, Gadamer appropriates the significance of tradition.

Gadamer argues that the most important role of philosophy lies in the understanding of the ontological nature of human existence. In other words, following Heidegger's teachings, his primary philosophical inquiries depend on the understanding of the human being in relation to its finite existence. According to Gadamer, the civilisation of human beings would not have been preserved without the force of tradition. On Gadamer's account, the claim of tradition could embrace the ideological distortion of overarching prejudices at all levels. In other words, in Gadamer's view, all human activities could be interpreted from within a tradition in explicating the understanding of the ontological nature of human existence, so that even the ideological distortion can be subject to tradition. In opposition to Habermas's critique of Gadamer's appropriation of tradition, Gadamer defends the force of tradition as positive in emphasising that every aspect of human understanding is ultimately connected to tradition and determined by it (Gadamer, 1990:288).

In contrast, Habermas seeks to 'shake the dogmatism of life-practices' (Habermas, 1977:357) by means of critical reflection whereby human beings can defy tradition. In his view, Gadamer underestimates the power of critical reflection (Mendelson, 1979:59). He argues that Gadamer's recognition of 'prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of critical reflection' (Habermas, 1990a:237). In this sense, it is worth noting that we might be able to rule out and reject the unjust or illegitimate tradition which is fundamentally grounded in 'systematically distorted' dogmatic forces. Thus, tradition could be transformed by means of employing the power of critical reflection (see Chapter section 5.4 for more detail).

Having reviewed the textual evidence, it can be stated that filial piety has served as a resource for sustaining the hierarchical family structure of East Asian Confucian culture. It is noteworthy that filial piety cannot be diminished or lessened so that it is merely duty; ultimately, it is an important virtue in its own right. As has been previously emphasised, the relationship between parent and child is not balanced nor equal, which is what makes filial piety the perfect model when implementing a relationship with a ruler-subject nature (Tan, 2004:8). As Sor-hoon Tan maintains, the idea of filial piety 'is fraught with patriarchal and authoritarian prejudices and would thus require reformation if it were to contribute to the development of [East Asian] culture' (Tan, 2004:2-3).

Viewed from a Habermasian perspective, filial piety is a case of ideological distortion. In particular, the patriarchal relationship between the superior and inferior suggests that there is an unequal relationship. In this regard, Habermas's pronouncement of impartial adjudication of conflicting rights claims is more relevant than Gadamer's seemingly uncritical acceptance of tradition, although such a characterisation needs more elaboration. As I will argue that ultimately Gadamer's hermeneutic method cannot subject the power relations underlying filial piety to criticism, but there are critical resources within hermeneutics and these must be explored. To that end in the next chapter I will look at Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics by exploring his key ideas, such as 'prejudice', 'tradition', and the 'fusion of horizons' making reference to the concept of filial piety.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Reason and Prejudice in Gadamer

In the preceding chapter, I explained the role filial piety plays in Confucian East Asian culture in order to illustrate the difference between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Habermas's critical theory. In this chapter, I present in more detail the major elements of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, with primary reference to his writings in *Truth and Method*. In opposition to the Enlightenment project, which seeks an objective interpretation of meaning, for Gadamer, the core task of hermeneutics is to understand human experience ontologically; that means, as finite and historical. I will clarify Gadamer's linguistic turn – philosophical hermeneutics – by exploring his key ideas, such as 'prejudice', 'tradition', and the 'fusion of horizons', again using filial piety to illuminate distinctions between Western and Eastern conceptions of obligation and authority.

As I have discussed in chapter 2, filial piety has served as a value criterion for the people of East Asian Confucian societies. However, it lacks the normative grounding of authority, simply owing to its taken-for-granted status in East Asian Confucian societies. In other words, as I have already explored in chapter 2 (especially section 2.5), it appears that both Confucius and Gadamer have the same uncritical, conservative perspective on tradition. The role of tradition, when used correctly, raises no issues; that is, if, in principle, tradition can be subjected to criticisms, through, for example, the raising and settling of validity claims, then it can play a positive role. The Hegelian conception of the family is illustrative of a more critical understanding of tradition: although young children are taught to obey, retroactively such obedience can be justified. As adults we understand the importance of the obedience we displayed, or were expected to display as young children; if, however, such uncritical obedience is still expected of us as adults, then this calls into question the critical nature of tradition. The question is whether Gadamer's defence of tradition is in this sense uncritical.

Gadamer emphasises the finitude of human existence and the fact that humans have no other choice but to adapt to pre-existing values. In this way, Gadamer refuses to acknowledge any refutation which a critical reflective viewpoint might offer. In this chapter, through taking a close look at Gadamer's main concepts, I will explore the problems which are caused when we apply Gadamer's hermeneutics to the case of filial piety. It should be remembered that the focus on filial piety is motivated by a concern to explore the bases of political authority, and specifically the role that tradition might play in justifying such authority. As we saw in chapter

2 filial piety is central to underpinning authority in East Asian culture. I begin with an outline of philosophical hermeneutics.

3.1 Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is conventionally defined as the theory and practice of interpretation. It is primarily concerned with recovering the meaning of texts, although it can be understood in a broader sense as the interpretation of human action in context. Hermeneutics is a rejection of abstract understanding: to understand always requires that there be a something before us, such as a text or a human practice. So, in the case of filial piety hermeneutics begins not from an abstract standpoint of validity claims but from the texts of Confucius and other thinkers, and from the actual everyday experience of relationships, such as those between parent and child, and ruler and ruled. The origin of hermeneutics as the art or technique of understanding and interpretation can be found in the Reformation period, which was characterised by a rejection of the Latin Vulgate translation of the scriptures in favour of engagement with the original texts, and a translation of those texts into the vernacular languages of Europe. However, to interpret those texts required a reconstruction of the historical circumstances in which they were written. The modern use of the term 'hermeneutics' can be traced to the liberal theological turn taken within Reformed (or Protestant) Christianity by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. 'Hermeneutics', Schleiermacher writes in the outline of his 1819 lectures, 'as the art of understanding does not yet exit in general, rather, only various specialized hermeneutics exist' (Schleiermacher, 1978:1). For Schleiermacher, the need had become apparent for a comprehensive theory, one which united not only classical and biblical but indeed all interpretive activities – irrespective of the subject matter (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990:13-14). Because he was the first to draw attention to the general principles of understanding as something more than an aid for specific textual difficulties, Schleiermacher is credited with taking the critical first steps toward establishing a general hermeneutic methodology in contrast to a variety of regional hermeneutic approaches (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990:11). In general, Schleiermacher is considered to have created modern hermeneutics.

Whilst Schleiermacher and preceding hermeneutic writers developed a method for interpreting texts – a set of rules which afford the foundation for good interpretive practice regardless of the subject matter (Bleicher, 1980:15), Dilthey aimed to make hermeneutics a universal methodology for the human sciences (*Geisteswissenshaften*) (Gadamer, 1976:xiii). For Dilthey, hermeneutics becomes an independent discipline only when it frees itself from

dogma and ultimately emerges as a historical methodological tool – a prejudice-free method (Bleicher, 1980:24-25). There are, he argues[22], two divergent branches of hermeneutics: theological hermeneutics concerned with the interpretation of the Scriptures, and philological hermeneutics concerned with the revival of classical literature. Gadamer explains the impulse of the two paths of hermeneutics as follows:

> Both involve a rediscovery: a discovery of something that was not absolutely unknown but whose meaning had become alien and inaccessible. Classical literature, though constantly present as material for humanistic education, had been completely absorbed within the Christian world. Similarly, the Bible was the church's sacred book and as such was constantly read, but the understanding of it was determined, and – as the reformers insisted – obscured, by the dogmatic tradition of the church. (Gadamer, 1989:174)

The Reformers had to promote their own reading of the Bible since, in their view, the understanding of it had become dogmatic, and was controlled and institutionalized by the church. And the philological tradition had become obscured by the dogmatic interpretation of the church. Thus, both hermeneutic attempts were preoccupied with the rediscovery of some initial 'original' meaning which was embedded in the texts of the Bible and of classical literature. This orientation to the original sources of meaning in both traditions required the study of Greek and Hebrew in contrast to Latin as the standard written language of the Middle Ages (Gadamer, 1989:174).

Unlike preceding hermeneutic traditions – such as the Romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, the Historical School, and Dilthey – Gadamer provides his own concept of 'philosophical hermeneutics' in his books *Truth and Method*[23] and *Philosophical Hermeneutics*[24]. The concept of 'philosophical hermeneutics' in the narrow sense refers specifically to Gadamer's account of understanding. In Gadamer's view, any act of understanding a text involves interpretation. Furthermore, he considers interpretation to

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[22] As Gadamer indicates in his book *Truth and Method*, the original view of the development of hermeneutics is in Dilthey's 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', in *Wilhelm Dilthey: Hermeneutics and the Study of History,* translated by Fredric R. Jameson, edited by Rudolf A. Makkreel & Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 229-258 (original: 'Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik*', Gesammelte Schriften*, V. 317-38. (Leipzig und Berlin, B.G. Teubner, 1924). See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989), p. 174.

[23] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by William Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1989).

[24] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated by David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

involve understanding – the two do not constitute separate processes; rather, interpretation signifies understanding and vice versa: 'Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding' (Gadamer, 1989:307).

Gadamer recognises the principle of hermeneutics as 'an experience of truth that not only needs to be justified philosophically, but which is itself a way of doing philosophy' (Gadamer, 1989:xxiii). According to Gadamer, the understanding and interpretation of texts cannot be reduced to methodological and scientific reflection: this goes back to the point made earlier, that there is no radical – normative or positivist – standpoint outside the text, or more broadly human practice that allows us to assess the meaning of a text, or the validity of a practice. Understanding and interpretation are inextricably linked together. Hermeneutics is not a positivist method, but is humanistic; it seeks the true meaning of human experience of the world (Gadamer, 1989:xxiii).

Though 'philosophical hermeneutics' might well be extended to include the ideas of Heidegger, Ricoeur and various others, here I will focus on Gadamer's 'philosophical hermeneutics' in particular. Hermeneutics, for Heidegger, is the prolegomena to a true ontology, understood as the interpretation of 'Being'. Heidegger provides the 'phenomenological hermeneutics', which is concerned with the disclosure of the basic existential structures of human existence (*Dasein*) as a necessary precondition for pursuing the question of Being (Muller-Vollmer, 1986:34). Not dissimilar to Heidegger, for Gadamer, the question of truth extends beyond methodological considerations. The main target of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* in this regard is the experimental method of the natural sciences, which has too often been associated with truth in everyday consciousness. Gadamer's continuation of Heidegger's hermeneutic project is intended to counter what both thinkers consider to be the insidious association of truth and method. Gadamer, like Heidegger, claims for hermeneutics a universal status: he is interested in explaining understanding as fundamental to human existence; as such, what is important is not the relationship to a particular discipline – that is, the understanding of phenomenon x – but rather the concept of understanding as the core of our Being in the world (Gadamer, 1976:xxxiv).

From a Heideggerian-Gadamerian perspective, if we question our own existence we ultimately determine that we are bound by the linguistic horizon which we inhabit (Schmidt, 1995a:8). Any process of communication and understanding between the world and others occurs within this linguistic horizon. As for Gadamer, we understand the world and others

primarily within language simply because of the linguistic nature of all experience (Schmidt, 1995b:78); it is this understanding which necessarily involves interpretation. Put simply, if Being is linguistic, and understanding requires language, then the concept of understanding is integral to Being, or in non-Heideggerian terminology 'life'. According to this line of argument, we are interpretive beings and the hermeneutic attitude is a universal characteristic of our experience (see section 3.2 below in detail). As Gadamer writes:

> Philosophical hermeneutics lays claim to universality. It bases this claim on the fact that understanding and interpretation do not mean primarily and originally a methodically trained approach to texts, but are the form in which social human life is achieved – that life which is in its ultimate formalization a language-community. From this language-community nothing is excluded. (Gadamer in Bubner, 1981:57)

The intention of philosophical hermeneutics is not to question how understanding occurs in the human sciences, but rather to ask the question concerning understanding relative to the entire human experience of the world and the practice of life (Bleicher, 1980:120). The human sciences, in other words, are to be 'connected with the modes of experience [which] lie outside [the realms of] science: the experiences of philosophy, of art and of history itself' and in doing so connect the human sciences 'with the totality of our experience of the world' (Gadamer, 1989:xxii-xxiii). In articulating the conditions for hermeneutic practice as such, a philosophical hermeneutics is effectively a hermeneutics of experience. In other words, in the experience we gain through our involvement with philosophy, art, and history, Gadamer attempts to show that truth cannot be validated within the methodological constraints of science. By stressing the universality of hermeneutic experience, Gadamer maintains that we can overcome the 'absolutisation' of the scientific-methodological approach (Bleicher, 1980:118). The scientific method must itself be interpreted hermeneutically.

Although the hermeneutic experience Gadamer describes is not concerned with any particular method of understanding which would result in guaranteed methodological or scientific knowledge, it is nevertheless bound up with an orientation towards knowledge and truth (Gronin, 1995:28). Gadamer obviously has in mind a notion of knowledge and truth which is fundamentally different from that which has been established by the scientific disciplines, as even an artwork has a truth-content for him (Gronin, 1995:33). Rather, for Gadamer, this knowledge must be conceptualised in terms of insights of a pedagogical character, which are impossible to reach via any scientific approach (Teigas, 1995:25).

The importance of the notion of 'understanding' is paramount for Gadamer. He detects a growing resistance to the subordination of understanding to a methodical principle by theorists in all areas of human sciences (Bernstein, 1985:282). 'Truth', he believes, can be experienced in various areas – for example, art, literature, and philosophy – which lie beyond the control of the scientific method:

> The human sciences are joined with modes of experience which lie outside science, with the experience of philosophy, of art and of history itself. These are all modes of experience which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science. (Gadamer, 1989:xxiii)

However, one ultimately requires further legitimation for these modes of experience. Gadamer is of the opinion that such legitimation can be provided philosophically. He maintains that his 'real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing' is involved in all understanding (Gadamer, 1989:xxviii). His theory of the phenomenon of understanding is intended to yield secure philosophical positions, which are subsequently able to enlarge the concept of knowledge and truth derived from other modes of experience which remain unaddressed by the methodical sciences.

Gadamer recognises the notion of understanding within language and establishes the hermeneutic phenomenon as a basic ontological position of human beings. His main concern is to present the hermeneutic phenomenon in its fullest extent (McDowell, 2002:184). However, whilst he warns that his reflections concern the phenomenon of understanding, he does not provide a particular technique or method of understanding. On the contrary, his aim is to show 'what is common to all modes of understanding' (Gadamer, 1975:xiii), and thus to correct our idea of what the human sciences truly are. In short, Gadamer's hermeneutics is a philosophical-ontological position that aims to encompass all human understanding and not a set of methods or approaches to understanding. He wants to show that reality is fundamentally about understanding and that means hermeneutics.

Philosophical hermeneutics thus does not place emphasis on the methodology adopted in the realm of human sciences (*Geisteswissenshaften*) but rather on the link between the experiences gathered through living in this world; it is not Gadamer's intention to reject traditional hermeneutics, which as we saw is narrowly concerned with the interpretation of texts, but rather he seeks to expand the scope of hermeneutics to the point where it is a means by which human beings can correct false self-understandings (Bleicher, 1980:120).

Essentially, Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is concerned with the ontological interpretation of human life through means of understanding and recognising that there are overpowering and uncontrollable forces which are set against a subjective historical nature. From this angle – one which has generated much controversy amongst his critics – the use of his term 'philosophical hermeneutics' ultimately rests upon temporal completion in relation to the 'historically effected consciousness' (see Section 5.3). For Gadamer, the mode of human understanding is fundamentally conditioned by the 'historically effected consciousness' because human beings are never free from historical conditions. Furthermore, a human consciousness based on the ontological-existential position of the human condition cannot transcend the spatio-temporal circumstances owing to the fact that human beings are finite creatures. Moreover, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, Gadamer restricts the standards and principles surrounding human existence to ontological understanding. As we will see, while this does not completely preclude critical reflection it significantly narrows the possibility of a radical rejection of certain cultural practices, such as filial piety. This is because that practice is tied to an entire tradition which we cannot fully transcend.

3.2 Gadamer's Concept of 'Prejudice'

Holub identifies three characteristics of a shift in twentieth century hermeneutics, of which Gadamer is one of the most important initiators. First, hermeneutics is no longer concerned exclusively with the interpretation of texts. Second, in contrast to 'romantic hermeneutics' from Schleiermacher to Dilthey understanding no longer focuses on the psychology of the recipient of a communicative act. And third, twentieth century hermeneutics aims to explore a world more fundamental than Dilthey's separation of the natural and human sciences:

> ….hermeneutics takes leave of the epistemological arena in which previous theories of understanding had operated, and moves into the area of 'fundamental ontology', to use Heidegger's phrase. This means that understanding is not to be conceived transitively; we are not concerned with understanding something. Rather, understanding is grasped as our way of being-in-the-world, as the fundamental way we exist prior to any cognition or intellectual activity. Ontological hermeneutics thus replaces the question of understanding as knowledge about the world with the question of being-in-the-world. (Holub 1991:51-52)

For Heidegger understanding is 'the existential being of the ownmost potentiality of being of *Dasein* in such a way that this being discloses in itself what its very being is about'

(Heidegger, 1996:135) or 'has to do with the complete disclosedness of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, the involvement of understanding is an existential modification of project as a whole' (Heidegger, 1996:137). With regard to the explication of disclosing and potentiality, Heidegger claims that, 'as disclosing, understanding always concerns the whole fundamental constitution of being-in-the-world'. As a potentiality of being, 'being-in is always a potentiality of being-in-the world' (Heidegger, 1996:135). As I understand this, Heidegger is arguing that being is always being *in relation to something* (the 'world'): there is no human consciousness (or self-consciousness) independently of a relationship to the world. So, for example, in a filially pious relationship we are not independent agents, but are in roles (father and son), and those roles themselves only take on meaning against a wider culture. Furthermore, although pre-twentieth century hermeneutics had emphasised the project of eradicating biases in order to achieve an impartial or 'objective' interpretation of the text, Heidegger argues that it is our existence in the world – complete with presumptions, biases and prejudices that makes understanding possible. For Heidegger interpretation cannot be a 'presuppositionless grasping of something previously given':

> When the particular concretion of the interpretation in the sense of exact text interpretation likes to appeal to what 'is there', what is initially 'there' is nothing else that the self-evident, undisputed prejudice of the interpreter, which is necessarily there in each point of departure of the interpretation as what is already 'posited' with interpretation as such, that is, pre-given with fore-having *(Vorhabe),* fore-sight *(Vorsicht),* and fore-conception *(Vorgriff)*. (Heidegger, 1996:141)

In more straightforward language there is no 'view from nowhere', to borrow a phrase from Thomas Nagel.[25] The 'somewhere' from which we view the 'world' is constituted by our presuppositions or prejudices. In Heidegger's words: 'interpretation is always grounded in something we have in advance, in a fore-having, in something we see in advance, in a fore-sight, and in something we grasp in advance, in a fore-conception' (Holub 1991:57). Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, which is the creation of a noun out of a verb ('sein', to be) and a preposition ('da', there) emphasises this existential feature of human 'being' and understanding. However, this introduces a challenge: if there is no standpoint 'from nowhere' is it possible to reconstruct *Dasein*? Ormiston and Schrift argue that for Heidegger interpretation has three aspects – fore-having *(Vorhabe),* a fore-sight *(Vorsicht),* and a fore-

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[25] See Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). The entire book is concerned with the distinction between the 'view from nowhere' and the 'view from somewhere', but the Introduction (pp. 3-12) sets out the problem.

conception *(Vorgriff)*. By fore-having is meant the 'totality of involvements' with 'Being' that we bring with us to every interpretative act, while fore-sight is the perspective we bring to the interpretive act, meaning a kind of anticipation, and fore-conception is a 'conceptual reservoir' from which we can draw in our interpretation (Ormiston & Shrift, 1990:16).

For Heidegger, human beings always view the world through the prism of prejudice, and it is such prejudice which ultimately constitutes their 'ontological-existential' experience. We understand and in understanding we constitute ourselves (Bleicher, 1980:110). Since human beings are 'thrown into the world' – a world we did not create – the finite existence of human experience, made up as it as from prejudice, can never be transcended. For Heidegger, the 'primordiality' of ontological being is entailed in the projecting of understanding. Being is bound up with possibility. The direction of disclosure is from the 'inner' to the 'outer', such that 'innerworldly beings' project themselves towards the world in a relationship of 'care' – or 'taking care'. To 'take care' is to have meaning (Heidegger, 1996:141). Again, in more everyday language, Heidegger is arguing that understanding is not 'neutral' or 'objective', but always involves a subjective normative engagement with the world. Human beings are interpretative beings and interpretation necessary involves 'care'. The three elements of understanding – fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception – are three dimensions of 'care'.

Gadamer understands his contribution to philosophical hermeneutics as a continuation of Heidegger's notion of Being (Gronin, 2002:38). He follows his teacher in accepting Heidegger's affirmation of the pre-structured nature of understanding. This is reflected most directly in his discussion of prejudice *(Vorurteil)*. Although the term 'prejudice' has acquired negative connotations – it is thought to involve bias without judgement – for Gadamer, on the other hand, prejudice is a necessary component of understanding. The Enlightenment, Gadamer claims, is responsible for discrediting the concept of prejudice. However, such discrediting is, he maintains itself the consequence of a prejudice, namely, the methodological claim to truth, as presupposed by the natural sciences (Gadamer, 1989:271). The Enlightenment considers all prejudices to be false, simply because it is prepared only to accept as true those judgements that are the result of a method that aspires to view the world from a de-centred, objective standpoint. Claims that have not passed the test of methodological objectivity are at best provisionally false or at worst in principle unscientific.

For Gadamer, the Enlightenment project rests on 'Cartesian suspicion': 'accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule' (Gadamer, 1989:271). Gadamer counters that prejudice is not an

obstacle to, but rather a condition for, the possibility of understanding, for the reason that it belongs to historical reality itself. The rehabilitation of prejudice as a legitimate scientific concept allows us to probe the finitude of human existence and the necessarily historical fact of being-in-the-world (Gadamer, 1989:277).

If we take the narrower understanding of hermeneutics as concerned with the text, then understanding of that text begins by bringing to bear on it certain preconceptions which, with the help of new projections and anticipations of meaning, such that there is a process of constantly substituting new and better interpretations (Vuyk, 1995:199). Following Heidegger, Gadamer asserts that:

> Every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clear what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation. (Gadamer, 1989:267)

The notions of 'lifeworld' and 'tradition' are intended to demonstrate the way in which all individuals confront themselves as constructed through certain preconceptions, meanings, and expectations (Bleicher, 1980:119), which Gadamer calls 'fore-conceptions' or 'prejudices'. We discover ourselves in a historical continuum and social environment through the process of sharing opinions, beliefs, and meanings (Schmidt, 1985:32-34). In other words, we human beings can comprehend and discover ourselves from within the boundaries of historical backgrounds and cultural traditions (Warnke, 1990:151). Each of us moves within his own horizon of meanings, preconceptions and understandings; thus, for Gadamer, values, beliefs and prejudgements, determined by history and tradition, are necessary conditions for all understanding (Warnke, 1990:154).

Gadamer's message is that all understanding involves preconceptions or prejudices. The understanding of a text is not arbitrary or accidental: the continuous misinterpretation of a word or a sentence will unavoidably affect the textual meaning as a whole and, furthermore, the same effect will arise when stubbornly applying our own fore-meanings or prejudices to the text (Garfield, 2002:97). Importantly, if they must be replaced by other meanings revealed in the process of reading the text, one cannot arbitrarily hold onto them (Garfield, 2002:105). Although one cannot immediately abandon the preconceptions with which one begins understanding a text, it is nevertheless important that one becomes conscious of one's own prejudices so that one can be in a position to accept the new conditions and meanings which

the text imposes (Gadamer, 1989:265-269). The same is true of conversation when an openness is required with respect to the other person (Gadamer, 1989:269):

> But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Gadamer, 1989:269)

If the task of the interpreter, the reader or the participant in a discussion comprises becoming aware of his own prejudices, this process has a philosophical counterpart. The philosophical importance of prejudices can be seen in the following way. Prejudices appear to exhibit a double role (Hoy, 1990:112). They are a primary means of approaching the text or another person and yet, when aware of them, they become resistant to adequate understanding and subsequently inhibit the text from yielding further meanings (Hoy, 1990:113). Thus, in order to overcome possible misinterpretations or limited understandings imposed by our prejudices, there emerges the task – through the act of interpretation – of overcoming their restrictive role by being aware of them and accordingly dissolving their boundaries by adopting new positions (Teigas, 1995:41). This is the first instance of reflective activity of which the individual is capable (Teigas, 1995:45).

Gadamer specifically selects the concept of 'prejudice' with awareness of the fact that, since the Enlightenment, it has acquired a negative meaning (Gadamer, 1989:270). In fact, it signifies a judgement accomplished before the concrete gathering of all information concerning a situation has been achieved. The negative meaning of 'prejudice' is well exemplified in jurisprudence, where prejudicial judgment is to be avoided and vilified (Hoy, 1990:112-113). During the period of the Enlightenment, prejudices had been considered as originating either in authority (transmitted by the state, its institutions, family, or language) or as being the products of ignorance, misjudgement, and miscalculation (Teigas, 1995:37). The criticism was commonly directed towards the notion of authority which, complete with its own power and force, could impose its own prejudices in 'unfounded judgements' (Teigas, 1995:39). The critique against prejudice developed by Enlightenment was also directed against the religious understanding of tradition and was accordingly aimed at understanding tradition without prejudice (Gadamer, 1989:271-277). This is exactly the idea which Gadamer questions: could there ever be any understanding of tradition, of a text, of a society, devoid of any preconception or fore-meaning? If this were the case, reason would constitute the ultimate

source of authority without any historical limit imposed upon it; reason would become 'Absolute Reason' (Pippin, 2002:236). Even Kant, according to Gadamer, had to restrict 'pure reason' only to the *a priori* matrix of categories relating to the knowledge of nature (Pippin, 2002:232), and introduce a posteriori reasoning, which depended on historical empirical claims. Furthermore, this position appears unsustainable, particularly in the case of understanding history and acquiring historical knowledge (Warnke, 1990:151). Any historian involved in understanding history is already immersed in a given context which supplies him with the first conceptions of his object of study (Pippin, 2002:244). He considers a historical 'object' from a certain perspective, which subsequently provides its own fore-understandings. Thus, for Gadamer, the view of understanding history and tradition without preconceptions cannot be supported (Gadamer, 1989:276).

Gadamer therefore embraces an Enlightenment that is 'responsible for both the negative connotations of the notion of prejudice and the negative implications of a recourse to the authority of tradition' (Warnke, 1987:75). The startling consequence of the hermeneutic position is that prejudices which, from the viewpoint of Enlightenment rationalism, appear as obstacles to understanding, are actually historical reality itself and the condition for the understanding of it. Thus, the elimination of prejudice, were it to succeed, would ultimately be the elimination of history – precisely, the history which the historian seek to understand (Weinsheimer, 1985:170). However, it is notable that the historian cannot purify himself of prejudice because he, like those he studies, belongs to and is a creature of history (Weinsheimer, 1985:171). Furthermore, nor can this fact be lamented, for it is history itself which prejudices the historian; and his prejudices, therefore, are the media by which history becomes accessible to him (Gadamer, 1989:276).

History, for Gadamer, is what prejudices us, and if there is any knowledge produced by history, it is prejudiced knowledge. However, if this conjunction of knowledge and prejudice is not to be a mere contradiction, there must be legitimate, justified, appropriate prejudices produced by history (Weinsheimer, 1985:171). That is to say, history must be productive of truth. Thus, Gadamer re-examines the concept of prejudice in order to determine the ground of its legitimacy (Warnke, 2002:82). Descartes distinguishes two different types of prejudice from the perspective of the Enlightenment: those arising from 'over-hastiness' and those from reliance upon 'authority' on the basis of 'the fundamental presupposition of the Enlightenment, namely that methodologically disciplined use of reason can safeguard us from all error' (Gadamer, 1989:277). Over-hastiness gives rise to errors in the use of reason, but authority, in

Descartes' view, is responsible for not using one's reason at all. In achieving an adequate comprehension of a subject-matter – from the perspective of the Enlightenment since the Cartesian tradition – reason and method are allied with one another against prejudice and authority (Gadamer, 1989:277).

By taking 'Enlightenment's critical theory of prejudices', Gadamer, at this point, considers prejudices in a positive way (Bernstein, 1985:272). The concept of prejudice has also been selected in order to refute the prejudice of the Enlightenment; that is, its belief in the elimination of all prejudices (Gadamer, 1989:275). Gadamer points out that prejudices accompany us always and, therefore, 'if we want to do justice to our finite, historical mode of being', we should accept their unavoidable presence (Gadamer, 1989:277). The concept of prejudice, for Gadamer, should not be understood as the refusal of prejudice which is a detrimental obstacle to use of reason and method, as claimed by Enlightenment project, but rather should be grasped as an acknowledgment of the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Prejudices 'constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience' (Gadamer, 1976:9). This claim is certainly open to different interpretations. It could mean that prejudices are 'heuristic', meaning that any scholarly enterprise must start from somewhere, but the starting prejudices must then become subject to criticism. Another interpretation is more relativistic: all understanding is necessarily affected by prejudices, so that we can never fully distance ourselves from them.

Certainly, for Gadamer, prejudices are neither right nor wrong: they are the ground of our knowledge. Following Heidegger, we find ourselves thrown into a world we did not create (Gadamer, 1989:264), but it is nonetheless our world. We cannot ultimately detach ourselves from it – we live in it by projecting the possibilities that we find there. In fact, these possibilities constitute who we are before we can reflect upon them. As Gadamer puts it:

> In fact history does not belong to us; but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.* (Gadamer, 1989:276-277)

In this sense, it is then hardly surprising to notice that the concept of Gadamerian 'prejudice' is, to some extent, similar to that of eighteenth century conservative thinker

Edmund Burke. In other words, the aura of traditionalism which the concept of prejudice carries pervades Gadamer's work and harks back to Burke. In his understanding of the French revolution, Burke provides the critique of abstract reason and subsequently suggests the countervailing importance of prejudice as follows:

> Prejudice i.e., literally what comes before judgement (deliberation, calculation) is the 'clothing' discarded to reveal the nakedness of reason and it is less prone to the distortions of abstract reasoning, but positively it is 'through just prejudice his duty becomes a part of his nature' and together prejudices are a distillation of 'latent wisdom' that is greater than that possessed by any one individual and thus to be cherished as 'bank and capital of nations and ages'. (Burke, 1987:75-76)

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics begins with the concepts of 'prejudice' and 'historicality' (Bleicher, 1980:110), and any understanding involves prejudices and preconceptions. Gadamer seeks to rehabilitate the concept of 'prejudice' which the Enlightenment discredits. However, the other and possibly contradictory aspect of his argument is that our prejudices and preconceptions must be subject to examination during our actual daily involvement in the 'lifeworld': the interpreter (and also the speaker) must become aware of his own prejudices and this implies a distinction between 'valid' and 'invalid' prejudices. Although Gadamer seeks to establish the positive role of prejudice – he nevertheless does not make clear the criteria for distinguishing between valid and invalid prejudices.

3.3 Tradition as the Basis of All Prejudices

According to Gadamer, as was discussed in Section 2.4, tradition is grounded in 'prejudices'. While prejudice forms the basis of tradition the totality of tradition is itself the means by which we evaluate – criticise – our prejudices. There is therefore a feedback mechanism between prejudice and tradition: that makes tradition a critical tool, but one which is not 'abstract'. It is not a 'view from nowhere'. This is important when we seek to understand East Asian culture, and specifically filial piety. It allows us, contra Habermas, to differentiate between filial piety as an essential element of social order, and the language of filial piety as a mere instrument of domination. If we take obedience to parents to be a prejudice then we can assess that prejudice by locating it within, first, the tradition of filial piety, and, second, we assess filial piety with a broader Confucian culture. Filial piety is part of that Confucian

culture, but simultaneously that culture allows us to distinguish legitimate and illegitimate exercises of parental power.

The same demands apply to the interpretation of a text. The interpreter must understand the past and be conscious of the force of tradition that is exerted upon him as an interpreter. Tradition is part of us; we live in it (Gadamer, 1989:302). As 'historical beings', we should not seek to distance ourselves from tradition, but rather employ tradition as a critical tool, recognising the hold that it has on us (Gadamer, 1989:277-285). Such demands illustrate the positive attitude that Gadamer maintains towards tradition, and the space which he allows for it in his hermeneutical analysis.

For historical understanding, every historical, hermeneutical consciousness means that, 'it is not a matter of securing ourselves against the tradition that speaks out of the text then but, on the contrary, of excluding everything that could hinder us from understanding it in terms of the subject matter' (Gadamer, 1989:269-270). What primarily hinders us in terms of understanding the tradition 'is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition' (Gadamer, 1989:270). In effect, this is the 'error' of nineteenth-century historicism:

> Historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices. And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power. (Gadamer, 1989:270)

In Gadamer's view, in the Enlightenment, the concept of prejudice had a negative connotation as an unfounded judgement, and comes down to us as a blind belief which closes itself off from the domain of reason (Gadamer, 1989:270). However, for Gadamer, prejudice need not be taken in its derogatory sense as a one-sided distortion of the truth but is simply the condition in which we at first experience something. Gadamer uses this term, pointedly drawn from the humanist tradition, to refer to the 'judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined' (Gadamer, 1989:270). The Latin *praejudicium*, meaning 'adverse effect', 'disadvantage', 'harm', is derivative: 'the negative consequence depends precisely on the positive validity, the value of the provisional decision as a prejudgement, like that of any precedent' (Gadamer, 1989:270). That prejudice has a positive value (Bernstein, 1985:272), and more so that there are legitimate prejudices, is the

basis on which Gadamer tries to rehabilitate prejudice, authority and tradition against the claims for the autonomous power of reason that emerges in the Enlightenment.

In Kant's motto 'dare to know', we have the motto of the Enlightenment (Ricoeur, 1973:15). The dictum demands that we do not accept authority without question, but rather must decide everything before the court of reason. As a corrective to the authority of tradition which asserts itself in dogmatic interpretation, the Enlightenment strives to understand tradition correctly; that is, to understand it, both reasonably and without prejudice. Therefore, it regards authority as a source of prejudice, and thereby wants to free itself from the prejudices of the past. Its own standpoint becomes that of a radical new beginning – at least, so it seems. Gadamer maintains that the distinction between authority and reason, whereby authority is 'irrational', is valid if the power of authority is substituted for one's own judgement (Hoy, 1978:107, 109). But is authority really a matter of blind obedience? Gadamer argues that: 'it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of the person is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on an act of acknowledgement and recognition – the recognition, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence – i.e., it has priority over one's own' (Gadamer, 1989: 279). This type of authority is not bestowed on a person but earned. It finds its normative force in acknowledgement and acknowledgement is – or, at least can be – the product of an exercise of reason. We are therefore a long way from 'blind obedience'.

Furthermore, for Gadamer the Enlightenment reveals its own prejudice insofar as it denies the historicity of its own concept of reason (Rockmore, 1995:65). The rejection of prejudice is itself a prejudice (Rockmore, 1995:66). By removing *this* prejudice, the way is open 'to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates…our historical consciousness' (Gadamer, 1989:276). Historical consciousness is inescapably situated within traditions. In this sense, it is Gadamer's claim that, 'history does not belong to us; we belong to it' is to be understood. It is also in this context that Gadamer can say that 'the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being' (Gadamer, 1989:276-277).

Holub points out that Gadamer rejects the dichotomy between reason and authority because 'tradition is…a form of authority…. [f]or tradition is merely what generations have sought to preserve against the ravages of time. The act of preservation…is no less a moment of freedom than that of rebellion or innovation' (Holub, 1991:60). There is, however, a

seeming tension in Gadamer's thought. On the one hand, tradition is 'progressive', meaning that we can alter it, but on the other hand he believes in the intactness of a tradition. That tension might be resolved if we perceive the will to keep tradition intact as itself a choice:

> Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, [and] cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. That is why both the Enlightenment's critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being. (Gadamer, 1989:281-282)

Whether Gadamer really resolves this tension is something I will explore by using filial piety in East Asian culture as a case study. But certainly he has been attacked from the 'left' as a 'conservative' (see Bernstein, 1985:295, Wolin, 2000:44). John Caputo claims that Gadamer is critically concerned with looking backward, involved with how truth gets passed down and never places such truth in question; that is, 'the deep unity of tradition is always safe' (Caputo, 1987:111):

> Gadamer describes the continuity of the tradition, but he leaves unasked the question of whether the tradition is all that unified to begin with. He never asks to what extent the play of tradition is a power play, and its unity something that has been enforced by the powers that be. His tradition is innocent of Nietzsche's suspicious eye, of Foucaultian genealogy. He does not face the question of the ruptures within tradition, its vulnerability to difference, its capacity to oppress. (Caputo, 1987:112)

Likewise, Terry Eagleton maintains that Gadamer's notion of tradition implies a 'grossly complacent theory of history in which is not a place of struggle but almost a club of the like-minded' (Eagleton, 1983:72).

But for Gadamer we have to face the fact that tradition is the world in which we move and exercise our critical capacities. We cannot consider ourselves to be living beyond tradition; instead, we must accept the fact that we have been formed by tradition and, through such, everything from the past is transmitted onto, and through, us (Schmidt, 1995b: 73). In a

certain sense, Gadamer's interest and insistence on tradition is justified, simply because tradition can teach us: it includes and transmits *truths*. It is not a simple historical dependence that strives to keep us in contact with tradition, but is rather the valuable insights gained from the experience of the past which we can always interpret and utilise: 'our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part' (Gadamer, 1989:284). Although this quotation itself presents a metaphorical expression, it nevertheless conveys an important insight into human beings' entanglement with tradition. This relationship between ourselves and tradition, as Gadamer reveals, constitutes one of his strongest claims. A similar point, highlighting the importance of tradition for us and our connection with it, is suggested by Ricoeur, who believes that values are not created *ex nihilo* but are always *transvaluations* of previous values which tradition transmits to us (Ricoeur, 1973:154).

However, Gadamer does produce a strong impression of conservatism in his defence of tradition and the authority which it exercises over us – a point Habermas quickly raises against Gadamer. Is all tradition welcome? Is all tradition truthful and acceptable? Certainly, these are questions which any reader of Gadamer could raise legitimately, but more so Habermas who, in line with (the tradition of) Enlightenment, would see in tradition the source of prejudice and ideological beliefs (Habermas, 1986b:316, Habermas, 1988:168). We can apply these questions to filial piety. Children find themselves 'thrown into' a culture and cannot choose it, but there may be scope for criticism if they believe that their father is not acting within the tradition but is abusing it. This requires on the part of children an analysis of the conditions of the practice of filial piety. In essence, the child asks: does filial piety require that obey *this* order? If my father commits murder does filial piety require that I conceal the crime? Since filial piety is connected to wider social and political duties it is likely that a filially pious child will conclude that he should not conceal the crime. But can that decision be made without recourse to standards of rationality that transcend the practice? This is the crux of the debate between Habermas and Gadamer. Habermas argues that there are trans-cultural standards, while Gadamer appear rejects such standards. I say 'appear' because there is a tool that can be applied from within hermeneutics which allows us to criticise a particular cultural practice: the fusion of horizons.

3.4 Fusion of Horizons as the Basis of Tradition

One of Gadamer's major concerns when investigating the notion of understanding is to demonstrate our own position within history, within tradition, and our relation to the past (Figal, 1995:245). In attempting to articulate a representative picture of the individual in history and tradition, he begins by introducing the notion of *horizon*: 'the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer, 1989:302). A person who does not have an horizon can only see what is parochial. However, 'a person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small' (Gadamer, 1989:302). A horizon can be narrow or broad and it can extend or meet other horizons, whether they be temporal (other historical periods) or cultural (other traditions) or intersubjective (other individuals). As long as a person aware of his own horizon is not overwhelmed by what appears to be close to him, he can value equally well things that lie distant on the edge of his horizon (Gadamer, 1989:302).

Horizons are determined by prejudices, but this does not mean they cannot change or that we cannot shift horizons. If we think about temporal horizons – that is, the relationship between past, present and future, prejudices can either be retained or rejected according to whether they help or obstruct the understanding of the past or our orientation to the future (Gadamer, 1989:306). This introduces the secondary concept of the *fusion* of horizons, which is the mode in which past encounters present, and from which tradition is constructed (Gadamer, 1989:306) . In such a fusion our 'historical consciousness' is aware of the tension between the present and the past – it is aware of the otherness of the past horizon of tradition. Nevertheless, our historical consciousness recognises itself as part of that changing tradition and attempts to combine the past with the present. A conscious hermeneutic approach, in its efforts to approach and understand a past horizon of tradition, must project this historical horizon, which is different from our own. By projection is meant the conscious act of reconstructing the past – that is, the past as it appeared to contemporaries – rather than the belief that there is an objective past to be discovered in the manner of the natural sciences. The natural-scientific approach assumes a naïve assimilation of the past: 'in the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs – which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded' (Gadamer, 1989:307). This is possible since our 'historical consciousness' can distinguish between the past and the present. The projected past horizon is then 'removed', simply because it is absorbed by our own historical consciousness which merges with it (Gadamer, 1989:306-307). In other words, the fusion of horizons is not a

straightforward positing of the consciousness of the present against the consciousness of the past but an interaction between the two. Consciousness of the present requires knowledge of the past, because the present is part of a tradition: the past is part of the present. When we consciously study the past – for example, by attempting to interpret past events or texts – we bring to bear the horizon of the present on the past, but the past is already contained in the present.

Gadamerian analysis of the fusion of horizons appears to be that the 'horizon of the present is continuously in the process of being formed' as we continually test our prejudices in our encounter with tradition. Our prejudices are the product of history, so that studying history – understanding our tradition – is a critical process. This shows the falsehood and naïveté of an isolated formation of a horizon of the present without recognising or acknowledging the necessity of knowing tradition (Gadamer, 1989:306). Gadamer's insistence on tradition has been criticised 'from the left', by Habermas and others. In particular, these critics attack the notion of a fusion of horizons for not allowing any scope for the critique of ideology residing within tradition (Eagleton, 1983:72, Caputo, 1987:112, Habermas, 1988:168). We can apply this to filial piety. Here we are confronted with three horizons: temporal, cultural, and personal. A critical hermeneutics would not restrict itself to the personal, so the demand that you obey your parents cannot be accepted at the level of blind obedience, but rather must be contextualised. This can be achieved by, first, understanding the tradition in which it developed. It may be that under certain historical conditions filial piety served an essential function, and so we redescribe filial piety as (for example) 'a practice that ensures an integration of the personal and the social'. We can then adopt the intercultural horizon, by comparing family relations in the East with those in the West, by, for example, comparing Confucian texts with Western philosophical works, such as those of Hegel, which we discussed in Chapter 2. The intercultural fusion of horizons forces us to acknowledge the importance of family, and furthermore requires that we reflect on the role of the family in society. In summary, what appears to be an irrational practice appears rational. However, for radical critics of Gadamer, such a hermeneutic reconstruction of the practice of filial piety concedes too much to power relations because we can never get beyond the horizon. And the horizons do not just come from nowhere: they are the product of the exercise of power. Tradition consists of congealed power relations.

Habermas contrasts critical-theoretical reflection with Gadamer's hermeneutics. For Habermas prejudice can be overcome through critical reflective thinking. In other words,

although the conventional value system might constitute the horizon of value system of each individual in a particular culture, as exemplified by the example of filial piety in the Confucian East Asian case, the critical assessment of such could ultimately reveal the fundamentally conflictual structure of society. Against the appropriation of merely conventional value the task is to reveal hidden pre-understandings, that is, forces which condition us without our knowledge. Filial piety might have served as a value system – prejudice or tradition in Gadamer's terminology – in Confucian East Asian culture; nonetheless, it has very significant implications for the autonomy of each individual. As examined in Chapter 2, and discussed further in Section 4.4, filial piety is an implicit rejection of the reciprocal and free relationship between parents and their children, and is thus incompatible with freedom and equality.

The fundamental value of filial piety is inseparable from Confucian East Asian culture. As Habermas argues, critical thinking aims to reveal the conflictual structure of historicity. This recognition subsequently opens up a path leading towards something which can be cautiously referred to as 'critical interpretation'. When we become aware of power relations in all interpretive situations, critique allows a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives or interpretations to be acknowledged. Gadamer's fusion of horizons is fundamentally consensual: although there is a plurality of horizons, there is an implicit integration at work. Critique, in this sense, takes place as a force which fundamentally liberates the conflict of interpretations, taking as its guide the maxim that no one's voice should be silenced. Critical reflection can make explicit the implicit presuppositions (or prejudices in Gadamer's terminology) of, for example, particular interpretative situations (as shown in the concept of filial piety in Confucian East Asian culture), even if it is not possible to make explicit all pre-understandings.

Every society has its own conventional values and norms and filial piety is regarded as one of the most influential characteristic of Confucian ethics. The practice of filial piety has acquired its normative power as a result of two thousand years of cultural development, underpinned by both practice and ideology. Gadamer argues it is impossible for those brought up in such a tradition to transcend it, because human beings are finite and historical. If we follow Gadamer's understanding of ontological-existential condition, then there is no standpoint outside Confucian culture that could ultimately allow members of that culture to reject filial piety. This does not mean that criticism is not possible, but rather that there is no ultimate grounding or justification. However, for Habermas, the ethical practice in a particular tradition and cultural context can and should be modified through critical reflection. In

Chapter 4 I turn to Habermas's argument, but before turning to that it is important to clarify exactly what is meant when I describe Gadamer as a 'conservative'.

3.5 Gadamer's Self-Understanding

We can interpret both Habermas and Gadamer on two levels: the meta-theoretical and the substantive. Sometimes these levels cross over and substantive claims are derived from meta-theoretical commitments. It is, nonetheless, important to make an analytical distinction between them. Before leaving this discussion of Gadamer I want to take stock of what I have described as his 'conservatism'. I believe that it is justifiable to describe him as a conservative, and that this substantive position is derived from his hermeneutics, which I have discussed above, but furthermore that Gadamer does in fact consider himself to be a conservative. This is not a case of him simply being labelled as such by critics from the left.

Gadamer argues that the recognition of the prejudicial structure of understanding will lead to respect for authority and that 'conservatism is advantageous for seeing a truth that is easily hidden' (Gadamer, 1976:33). And in reflecting on the role of the teacher he argues that although maturity is a process that diminishes the authority of the teacher a mature person is not free from all tradition in the sense that his judgements are based on 'free insight' or 'grounded on reasons'. Tradition, which is the ground of our judgements, fundamentally determines our institutions and attitudes:

> What makes classical ethics superior to modern moral philosophy is that it grounds the transition from ethics to 'politics', the art of right legislation, on the indispensability of tradition. By comparison, the modern Enlightenment is abstract and revolutionary (Gadamer, 1989:280-281).

But Gadamer also makes an important distinction, which helps to clarify the difference between the meta-theoretical and the substantive. The Romantic opposition of tradition and enlightenment – more precisely, the Enlightenment – is a substantial opposition, because 'tradition', as a meta-theoretical concept, is not opposed to enlightenment. It is only under specific historical conditions that the opposition arises and we get not simply tradition but also 'traditionalism'. At a meta-theoretical level Gadamer is opposed to 'traditionalism' as a kind of false consciousness, but under certain historical conditions it is necessary to affirm tradition, just so long as it is recognised that 'even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed' and conversely 'even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation' (Gadamer, 1989:281-282).

Essentially, there are two substantive forces pulling at Gadamer; one in the direction of conservatism and another in a 'progressive' direction. The past is always in the present, and that means we must reconstruct the past in order to understand the present. A crude conservatism would oppose past and present, as would a crude anti-conservative rationalism. However, because we cannot simply assimilate past and present there is always a tension between them. Gadamer's conservatism consists in his inability fully to transcend the past. Against his more polemical opponents I have tried to stress that this is not a defence of 'blind authority' (Gadamer, 1976:33-34).

Chapter 4: The Problem of Reason and Prejudice in Habermas

In the previous chapter, I dealt with the key features of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, understood as the recognition of one's finitude and historical experience. Gadamer focuses on the hermeneutical conversation in which understanding between the text and the reader is achieved. Although Habermas and Gadamer agree that reaching of agreement is at the heart of resolving conflicts – both practical and epistemic – between individuals, they differ on the issue of *how* agreement between interlocutors is achieved. Whilst Gadamer presents his philosophical hermeneutics as the formulation of the ontological understanding of human existence, Habermas suggests the possibility of an 'ideal speech situation' based on rationally motivated mutual understanding. In this chapter, then, I want to draw on Habermas's explication of a rationalist perspective grounded in his communicative action theory.

Both Gadamer and Habermas emphasise dialogue, but the importance that dialogue plays for each of them is significantly different. Gadamer sees dialogue as a way of coming to an agreement between partners. It involves thinking about how interlocutors may reach an understanding of the subject matter at issue. However, his emphasis on dialogue lacks a methodology on how to communicate – that is, criteria for successful communication – as well as a regulative ideal of dialogue, meaning a conception of rules constraining dialogue. As described in the previous chapter, Gadamer's understanding of ontological existence is crucial in the explanation of human existence. In spite of this, his philosophical hermeneutics simply scrutinises the basic existential structure of human existence (*Dasein*), concentrating only on the disclosure of 'Is', rather than placing in question the 'Is' by reference to normative standards ('ought'). On the other hand, Habermas's position on dialogue/conversation sets out what is required for a conversation, such that dialogical partners are oriented to arrive at a *counterfactual* understanding of what is at issue. Although Habermas later distanced himself from an understanding of the 'ideal speech situation' as an idealisation detached from everyday conversation – calling idealised speech 'a universal presupposition of argumentation' (Habermas, 1990c:88, 204) – he nonetheless, through the idea of the raising and settling of validity claims, calls into question what Gadamer accepts as 'existential'.

The weaknesses of Gadamer's explanation of communication, and the corresponding strengths of Habermas's position, can be illuminated by reference to filial piety. Without a methodology for assessing valid speech and normative rules regulating speech, we are incapable of coming to a judgement over the legitimacy of personal – and, importantly,

political – relations grounded in filial piety. Filial piety powerfully illustrates the difference between Habermas and Gadamer: without criteria for assessing valid and invalid speech, any kind of power relationship – however oppressive – can be subsumed under 'filial piety'. Of course, it can also be argued that Habermasian discourse ethics is 'corrosive' of filial piety and that carries implications for East Asian culture, and I will discuss this later.

4.1 Habermas as a Defender of Reason

As can be seen from his various works, Habermas sets out to defend the concept of rationality[26]. He can thus be considered a leading defender of the Enlightenment project and its universalism (see chapter 6). He seeks to incorporate the 'turn to language' in philosophy into a new defence of Enlightenment reason. Whereas the Enlightenment stressed the subject-object relationship Habermas incorporates the insights of Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wittgenstein into a new relationship based on intersubjectivity mediated by language. He did not, it should be noted, seek to rehabilitate Western thought *as* Western thought, but rather project a universalist understanding of reason – a fact which has important implications for the relationship between Western and Eastern thought and the legitimation of authority in East Asian societies. The Enlightenment project, as it appears in Habermas's work, revolves around the claim that the capacity of rational communication distinguishes humans from non-humans. The ability to communicate in an abstract form is a quintessentially human capacity. For Habermas the 'concept of enlightenment' operates as 'a bridge between the idea of scientific progress and the conviction that the sciences also serve the moral perfection of human beings' (Habermas, 1984:147). Placed in historical context, the Enlightenment – with an upper case 'e', as distinct from 'enlightenment' – aimed at empowering individuals to challenge the authority of church and state. And enlightenment is a human capacity that calls for the courage 'to make use of one's own reason, that is, autonomy or maturity (*Mündigkeit*)' (Habermas, 1984:147). Furthermore, 'the sublime passion of enlightenment can derive support from the experience that moral-practical prejudices have in fact been shaken by the critical force of the sciences' (Habermas, 1984:147). Habermas's critical theory is, in effect, a defence of the

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[26] Habermas is aware that the chief adversary of such rationalism is postmodernism, which fundamentally denies the universalist claims of the Enlightenment. From a postmodernist perspective Habermas is as guilty as Gadamer of legitimating ideology, and the power relations underlying ideology. Needless to say, Habermas rejects this, maintaining that his purpose is to use communicative rationality to challenge power relations and provide answers to the most problematic and complex questions of social life. See Erik O. Eriksen & Jarle Weigard, *Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 1.

Enlightenment against three groups: first, radical counter-Enlightenment theorists – a group that includes 'first generation' critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1973), as well as post-modernists; second, 'positivist' theorists, who take the subject-object relationship, rather than the subject-subject relationship, as primary; and third, moderate conservative critics of the Enlightenment, such as Gadamer.

The concept of Enlightenment raises important questions, perhaps the most important of which is: How does reason justify itself? Habermas accepts that it is questionable whether any society has ever truly been founded on a rational consensus, but he maintains that the universal human impulse to communicate implies an underlying conception of reason. Reason, although merely the product of imperfect human discussion and debate, can work against prejudices. It could form the basis of a critical public sphere and so reinforce democracy. Habermas does not pretend that prejudices can be instantly removed or discarded, but despite what the anti-modernists – including postmodernists[27] – say, reasoned communication can, over time, weaken them. In this sense, for him, the Enlightenment project can be bolstered by a theory of communicative action. Since prejudice plays a crucial role in sustaining relationships based on filial piety, as we shall see his argument has important implications for the legitimacy of such patriarchal practices.

4.2 Weber and the Concept of Rationality: Confucian Culture

An important starting point in understanding Habermas's conception of reason is the work of Max Weber, who – significantly for me – was fascinated by the distinction between East and West. His work is important in the development of my thesis, because ultimately I want to reduce the gap between East and West by arguing that in normative terms there are a variety of forms of reason, and these are present in both cultures. Weber is part of a tradition that characterises the East as less sophisticated than the West, and although Habermas does not adopt wholesale Weber's critique there is a strong influence of Weber on Habermas. While ultimately I want to defend Habermas against Gadamer it is also important to critique what I would describe as the teleological aspects of his work, some of which he owes to Weber. In *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* Weber contrasted Eastern culture with Puritan-influenced Western culture. Central to Weber's understanding of the distinction between West and East (Occident and Orient) is the role that the extended family – sibs, or siblings – plays in the latter, and the way that Puritanism has completely broken the power of

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[27] In this context, Habermas mainly tried to defend the Enlightenment project against the postmodernists' attack in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

the extended family (although the extended family in the West may have already been relatively weak). Chinese – Confucian – religion was immanent rather than revealed, and did not make any great distinction between 'this world' and the 'other world'. Furthermore it never developed the institutional character of the revealed religions of the West; there was no powerful priesthood and 'no independent religious forces to develop a doctrine of salvation or an autonomous ethic and education' (Weber, 1951:142). Religion had only a 'taming influence' 'in the face of the powerful associations of local sibs bound by tradition' (Weber, 1951:143). Weber claims that Chinese language has no word for 'religion':

> There was first: 'doctrine' – of a school of literati; second: 'rites' – without distinguishing whether they were religious or conventional in nature. The official Chinese name for Confucianism was 'doctrine of the Literati' (ju chiao). (Weber, 1951:144)

Weber identifies a number of key characteristics of Confucianism, and I will focus on those aspects relevant to my thesis: specifically, the rejection of metaphysics and the importance of propriety and piety.

In summarising the differences between Confucianism and Puritanism Weber argues that the former seeks to reduce tension in the world to a minimum. To achieve this required 'ceremonial and ritualist propriety in all circumstances' and 'the appropriate means to this goal were watchful and rational self-control and the repression of whatever irrational passions might cause poise to be shaken' (Weber, 1951:228). There is no desire for life after death; the reward for virtue was health, long life and a good name after death. There was no transcendental element to religion. And there is no conception of sin or evil, but only aesthetic 'equivalents' such as the condemnation of an action as indecent or not in good taste, and these were not offences against God, but against political authorities, parents, and ancestors (Weber, 1951:228-229). There are several important consequences of this rejection of metaphysics. First, there is a stress on shame (losing face) over guilt (doing wrong in an internalised sense), and this is emphasised in the distinction between 'sin' and 'bad taste', where the latter is essentially shameful. Second, there is no conception of the 'soul' as separate from occurrences. There is certainly a striving towards a 'unified personality', but 'life remained a series of occurrences…it did not become a whole placed methodically under a transcendental goal' (Weber, 1951:235). It should be acknowledged that the 'soul' is certainly a contested concept in the West. Locke rejected the soul in favour of a self tied together through memory and intention (Locke, 1975:335-336), but the point is that there *was* a contest in Western thought,

which suggests that the belief in an immaterial and potentially immemorial soul was a deeply held belief. Weber appears to be suggesting that such a notion did not exist in Confucian culture. If we follow Gadamer's view of prejudice and tradition we can say that the soul was a prejudice in the West and the 'serial' view of the self or person – where 'person' or 'personality' captures the public nature of the human individual as distinct from the private or inward 'self' – is a prejudice of the East. We can then anticipate a Gadamerian response to Habermas: critique of East Asian culture rests on a conception of the self that is actually contested in the West and can in no sense be said to be transcendental. In fact, as we will see Habermas avoids this charge by substituting 'intersubjectivity' for 'subjectivity'.

This point brings us to the third consequence of the rejection of metaphysics: 'not reaching beyond this world, the individual necessarily lacked an autonomous counterweight in confronting this world' (Weber, 1951: 235). In the West the Church was certainly a source of oppression but it also provided a normative counterbalance to secular power. The clash of conscience in which a person is pulled between God and secular authority leads to the formulation of a political theory – or theories – that emphasise respect for the individual. A religion of transcendence opens up a space between the 'individual' and the 'world':

> Completely absent in Confucian ethic was any tension between nature and deity, between ethical demand and human shortcoming, consciousness of sin and need for salvation, conduct on earth and compensation in the beyond, religious duty and socio-political reality. Hence, there was no leverage for influencing conduct through inner forces freed of tradition and convention. Family piety, resting on the belief in spirits, was by far the strongest influence on man's conduct. Ultimately family piety facilitated and controlled, as we have seen, the strong cohesion of the sib associations. (Weber, 1951:235-236)

This then leads to the fourth point: whereas Confucianism reinforced the power of the extended family (sib associations), the 'ethical religions' – meaning above all the 'ethical and asceticist sects of Protestantism' – shattered the 'fetters of the sib' (Weber, 1951:237). These religions replaced the 'community of blood' with the 'community of faith'. It also had a major impact on the development of capitalism, which is, of course, Weber's central concern. Once the bonds of blood are broken it is possible to construct economic relations on the basis on impartial law and on the qualities of individual's work (that is the secularised idea of the religious 'vocation', or calling). Weber is damning about Chinese 'dishonesty' which is, he argues, a result of nepotism over impartiality.

At the heart of Weber's thesis about Protestantism (specifically, Calvinism) and the rise of capitalism is the accidental or unintended connection between the two. One aspect of this is the rejection of blood-ties as 'creatural' and not compatible with the will of the Creator (God). A consequence of this was the development of associations that did not involve the 'idolatry of blood'. This is, then, a fifth point: differing conceptions of community. Weber argues that the Confucian ethic valued human obligations of piety created by inter-human relations such as 'prince and servant, higher and lower official, father and son, brother and brother, teacher and pupil, friend and friend' (Weber, 1951:241). For Puritans the relationship to God always took precedence: if your brother was predestined to damnation that was more important than your blood tie to him, and since Calvinists looked for signs in this world for one's fate in the next then a person may quite deliberately avoid favouring his brother because this would suggest that blood ties were indeed more important than your relationship to God.

Weber's analysis may be subject to empirical criticisms from economic and cultural historians, but it is useful in revealing the broader context of filial piety. The striking feature of Western thought – and this must encompass both Gadamer and Habermas – is its transcendental nature, in contrast to the immanence of Confucianism. Although as I have argued above not all Western thinkers accept transcendentalism – the British empiricists, such as Locke and Hume did not – it nonetheless forms the Gadamerian horizon against which arguments about individual rights and political authority are developed. Indeed, it could be argued that the distinction is so fundamental that there is no standpoint from which filial piety can be criticised. To assert the 'rights' of children against 'parents' is to create a fissure or rupture in human relations that is not so much wrong as impossible to conceptualise. Weber himself seems to endorse this in so far as he is offering a sociological analysis rather than a moral-philosophical critique. Although he clearly admires the Calvinist-inspired Protestantism that he claims drove the development of capitalism he is not saying that it is 'better', even if his reflections on Chinese 'dishonesty' sometimes give that impression. The rationalism of Western capitalism is in any case entirely instrumental. To offer an alternative perspective – but one which is influenced by Weber's rationalisation thesis – I turn now to Habermas.

4.3 Weber and the Concept of Rationality: Habermas's Critique

We can see then that the concept of rationality 'is a great unifying theme in Max Weber's work' even though its meaning has been subjected to a multiplicity of interpretations (Brubaker, 1984:1). Habermas sees Weber as a classical figure overwhelmingly concerned

with the modernisation of human development in the Western world. According to Habermas, Weber's contribution to the theory of rationalisation lies in his study of 'a universal-historical process of rationalization' (Habermas, 1984:143). Weber's underlying aim is to explain how the development of modern Western civilisation differs from every other. Although Habermas initially accepts Weber's explanation of rationalisation, he modifies Weber in important ways (Habermas, 1984:145-156).

The development of reason as a historical phenomenon is described by Weber as the result of the emergence of the Protestant ethic, which fundamentally enabled instrumental rationality (*Zweckrationalität*) to be motivationally and institutionally rooted and thus permitted the launch of capitalism (White, 1988:92). Habermas rejects this account of reason (Brubaker, 1984:1-2), arguing that Weber's account of reason cannot explain the full range of manifestations of reason. Capitalist-instrumental rationality is only one form of reason. To account for the achievements of the Enlightenment it is necessary to supplement instrumental (or strategic) rationality – which Habermas accepts is an important part of Western society – with the notion of communicative reason, grounded in the counterfactual capacity of language to call into question existing norms (Habermas, 1984:233).

According to Habermas, Weber was too narrowly concerned with analysing the 'modernization processes' which underlay the development of capitalism and also – and relatedly – the emergence of unified nation-states in the eighteenth century (Habermas, 1984:216). His enquiry entailed the institutionalisation of purposive-rational action as a process of societal rationalisation. This development, for Weber, presupposed a process of cultural rationalisation involving the differentiation of value spheres – of science, art, and legal and moral representations – which began to follow their own independent and autonomous logics (Habermas, 1984:166, 175). Whereas these value spheres and systems of action are undifferentiated in the magical-mythical worldviews of primitive cultures, the modern worldview is highly differentiated. However, for Weber, this very differentiation has provoked a conflict between the practice of a religiously based ethic of brotherhood and the other systems of action – principally the legal system, scientific enterprise and technology – with which it is incompatible (Habermas, 1984:233-234). The progress of society toward ever more control over nature ultimately reduces the significance of the ethic of 'brotherliness', as the activities of individuals are increasingly organised for the pursuit of systemic ends, such as economic growth and stability. The rationalisation of society, then, leads to a 'loss of meaning', as collectively shared convictions disappear, and a 'loss of freedom', as individual

activity is increasingly regulated by bureaucracy (Habermas, 1984:233). Ironically, in Weber's account, the consequence of these processes of rationalisation of modern life gradually turned out to be an 'iron cage' characterised by a 'loss of meaning' and a 'loss of freedom', as a result of the institutionalisation of 'cognitive-instrumental rationality' in the economic and administrative system of the modern state (Habermas, 1984:233, 244, 250-251).

Habermas espouses Weberian analysis of the processes of rationalisation, but argues that Weber's illustration of an 'iron cage' is not a fundamental feature of all forms of modern society. Instead, Weber's acknowledgement of societal rationalisation should be comprehended as a 'selective pattern of rationalization' in capitalistic society that leads to the dominance of purposive rationality (Habermas, 1984:181-183). According to Habermas, Weber's analysis initially focuses on the 'emergence and development of capitalist society, or of modern social systems in general, to set out a theory of rationalization' so that his explanation of institutionalisation is only limited to the capitalist enterprise. In fact, the dominance of the purposive rationality of business-related activity in the capitalistic society claimed by Weber does not sufficiently present 'the transition from cultural to societal rationalization' (Habermas, 1984:221).

The postulation of a 'universal-historical process of the disenchantment' out of the magical-mythical worldviews of primitive cultures leads to the differentiation of value spheres in the modern world (Habermas, 1984:167). Weber is interested in two accounts of rationalisation: 'the rationalization of worldviews' of cognitive, normative and expressive aspects on the one hand, and 'the transposition of cultural rationalization into societal rationalization' on the other (Habermas, 1984:168).

Habermas then reconsiders the outlook of cultural rationalisation suggested by Weber's treatment of the world religions (Habermas, 1984:166, 195). As we saw earlier in his comparative study of religion, Weber analysed the process of disenchantment in which the magical-mythical aspect of the world fell into 'three of the great world religions: the Chinese (Confucianism, Taoism), the Indian (Buddhism, Hinduism), and ancient Judaism' (Habermas, 1984:200)[28]. In particular, Weber was interested in how this universal rationalisation process happened in the West, such that it gave rise to a process of 'societal rationalization', that is, a rapid change in the degree to which areas of social life, especially the economy and

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[28] Habermas adds that 'Weber was not able to carry out the projected investigations of Christianity and Islam' Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society,* translated by Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 200.

administration, were organised according to the decisive factor of purposive rationality. In Weber's view, it was the 'Protestant ethic' that generates an ascetic, disciplined behaviour of life that can be turned outward to 'extra-religious' areas of social activity (Sitton, 2003:15-16).

On Habermas's account, Weber focuses on a too limited analysis of the process of modernisation to consider the implications of the different value spheres. Each of the universal validity claims of truth, of normative rightness, and of authenticity corresponds to the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic form of rationality (Habermas, 1984:177-197). Whilst for Weber the cultural value spheres are important elements for the development of modern societies, and they 'steer the differentiation of societal subsystems or spheres of life' (Habermas, 1984:183) he overemphasises one value sphere: his aim of investigating the modern structures of consciousness resulting from disenchantment depends on privileging purposive rationality at the expense of other value spheres within the context of the capitalistic system:

> [Weber] traces religious rationalization with a view to the rise of the capitalist economic ethic, because he wants to clarify decisively those cultural conditions under which the transition to capitalism could be accomplished so as to solve the basic evolutionary problem of socially integrating a differentiated subsystem of purposive-rational action. He is solely interested, therefore, in the ideas that make it possible to anchor purposive-rational action in the system of social labour in a value-rational way, that is, to institutionalize it and to provide a motivational base for it. (Habermas, 1984:198)

For Habermas, Weber's overemphasis on purposive-instrumental rationality at the expense of moral-practical and aesthetic-practical rationality is an expression of the partial and 'imbalanced' character of rationalisation in capitalism, rather than of rationalisation per se (Habermas, 1984:183, 233).

Due to Weber's theory of action resting solely on an analytical concept of purposive-instrumental rationality rooted in the logic of institutionalisation of rationalisation of the modern societies in the Occidental world, his theory cannot do justice to the full range of historical phenomena (Postone, 1990:172). Hence, Habermas asserts that a theory of communicative action should be established as an alternative to Weber's theory (see chapter 6 for more detail). Moreover, a theory of modern society cannot be founded on a theory of action alone. What characterises modern society is that important dimensions of social life – for example, the economy and the state – became integrated in a quasi-objective manner

(Postone, 1990:172). They cannot be comprehended by action theory, but must be understood systematically. In this sense, Habermas indicates that his aim of rebuilding Weber's analysis requires a theory of society and a theory of communicative action which unite a systems-theoretic with an action-theoretic approach (Habermas, 1984:270).

Habermas condemns the 'paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness' grounded in the conceptual structure of a cognitive-instrumental subject-object relationship. The theoretical shortcomings of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness ultimately reveal the restrictions of any social theory based on that paradigm (Postone, 1990:172-173). Hence, we need a fundamental shift from self-consciousness to what Habermas calls 'a paradigm of linguistic consciousness' in support of 'intersubjective understanding or communication' (Habermas, 1984:390). Put another way, self-consciousness is dependent on linguistic consciousness – intersubjectivity precedes subjectivity.

Habermas's theory of communicative reason is intended to provide the basis for a new theory of action. Unlike the functioning of magical-mythical worldviews of primitive cultures, the modern understanding of the world necessarily entails the differentiation of objective, social, and subjective 'worlds' (Habermas, 1984:48, 64-70). The modern understanding of the world is, for Habermas, reflexively conscious of its practices, meaning that understanding is socially mediated and yet universal, in contrast to a classical Enlightenment understanding of the world as the product of a conscious subject. This modern enlightenment self-conception is the result of a universal-historical process of the rationalisation of worldviews (Habermas, 1984:67-69). The process of rationalisation entails not only cognitive rationality premised on a success-oriented attitude, but also the development of communicative rationality which has the intention of reaching understanding with other agents. Habermas thus advances a concept of communicative rationality that is grounded in an innate disposition towards linguistically mediated communication (Habermas, 1984:70-74). For Habermas, a decentred understanding of the modern world depends on the possibility of communication based on uncoerced agreement. In summary, we can say that Habermas distinguishes between action oriented to success and action oriented to reaching understanding. He contends that 'reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech', although 'not every linguistically mediated interaction is an example of action oriented to reaching understanding' (Habermas, 1984:287-288).

Habermas identifies two types of action, strategic action and communicative action. He argues that the distinction between the two does not rest on seeing an action from two distinct

analytical pure perspectives, such as instrumental and non-instrumental modes of interaction, but rather, it rests on the attitude of the actors: 'social actions can be distinguished according to whether the participants adopt either a success-oriented attitude or one oriented to reaching understanding. And, under suitable conditions, these attitudes should be identifiable on the basis of the intuitive knowledge of the participants themselves' (Habermas, 1984:286). The distinction must be about motivation rather than action, because social practices are necessarily complex interactions of instrumental and non-instrumental behaviours. For Habermas the possibility of communicative action depends upon individuals not fundamentally being concerned with their personal achievements or successes, but seeking a common understanding. The underlying idea of communicative action is that communicatively interacting partners do not pursue the 'egocentric calculations of success' (Habermas, 1984:286).

In coming to an understanding, actors necessarily ground their speech acts in three 'world relations' (objective, social, and subjective) and claim validity for those speech acts under three corresponding aspects (propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness) (Habermas, 1984:305-308). Speech acts can coordinate interactions rationally, that is, independently of external forces, such as sanctions and traditional norms, when the validity claims they raise are criticisable (Habermas, 1984:297-305).

It may therefore be further asserted that, from Habermas's perspective, the fundamental root of non-strategic rationality resides in communication, or more precisely in counterfactually presupposed communication. It must be presupposed because Habermas accepts that everyday speech is necessarily distorted. A deeper and multifaceted style of reasoning is what characterises a rational society, and not reason narrowly understood as strategic or instrumental. Moreover, at the core of communicative action is the capacity for, and the possibility of, critique (Habermas, 1984:104-106, 295-305).

The theory of communicative action is premised on the understanding of the process of cultural rationalisation in relation to the differentiation of value spheres, which culminates in the institutionalisation of the specialised forms of argumentation. According to Habermas, the three forms of institutionalisation are:

(a) the establishment of a scientific enterprise in which empirical-scientific problems can be dealt with according to internal truth standards, independently of theological doctrines and separately from basic moral-practical questions; (b) the institutionalization of an artistic enterprise in which the production of art is gradually

set loose from cultic-ecclesiastical and courtly-patronal bonds, and the reception of works of art by an art-enjoying public of readers, spectators, and listeners is mediated through professionalized aesthetic criticism; and finally (c) the professional intellectual treatment of questions of ethics, political theory, and jurisprudence in schools of law, in the legal system, and in the legal public sphere. (Habermas, 1984:340)

The differentiation of validity claims are features of speech corresponding to the three different worlds that are constituted through a speech act: an objective world of state of affairs, a social world of justifiable moral principles, and a subjective world of sincere expression of one's subjectivity. Habermas claims that three different value spheres are associated with certain validity claims defended through reasons (Habermas, 1984:305-308).

4.4 The Theory of Meaning as Pragmatic

For Habermas the enterprise of universal pragmatics is based on the postulate that what is 'fundamental to all speech is the type of action aimed at reaching understanding' (Habermas, 1979a:1). There are multiple sources of influence on the development of Habermas's universal pragmatics, but a key one is John Austin, who distinguished three elements of a speech act: the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary. A locution relates to the content of what is said, whereas the illocutionary is concerned with how something is said (statement, order, question and so on). The perlocutionary relates to the intended or unintended impact of the speech act on the addressee (Austin, 1975: 94-108). It is central to Habermas's project that the illocutionary is primary, and this is what underwrites the validity-claims:

> That the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the original mode of language use, upon which indirect understanding, giving something to understand or letting something be understood, and the instrumental use of language in general are parasitic. In my view, Austin's distinction between illocutions and perlocutions accomplishes just that. (Habermas, 1984:288)

In Habermas's account, 'reaching understanding is considered to be a process of reaching agreement among speaking and acting subjects' (Habermas, 1984:286).

What makes Austin important for Habermas is his emphasis on the pragmatic dimension of language, as distinct from the semantic and syntactic dimensions. Semantics is concerned with the meaning of sentences (in Austin's scheme, the 'locutionary'), whilst syntactics focuses on the relationship between signs in a sentence. Pragmatics is concerned with 'language-in-use', and thus fundamentally with the relationship between speaking subjects. But Habermas goes beyond Austin in seeking to discover the universal structure of

the pragmatic dimension of language, hence the term 'universal pragmatics'. The aim of universal pragmatics it is to present 'an explicit description of the rules that a competent speaker must master in order to form grammatical sentences and to utter them in an acceptable way' (Habermas, 1979:26). Habermas presents his scheme as a 'rational reconstruction' of linguistic competences. It articulates a competent speaker's pre-theoretical knowledge in the form of explicit rules (Habermas, 1979:15-20). Thus it seeks to reconstruct 'general and unavoidable presuppositions of communication', not merely the pragmatic competence of the speakers in a given 'natural' language (Habermas, 1979:23). In other words, there are universal pragmatic structures to language that transcend any particular natural language, such as English, German or Korean. The classical Enlightenment possibility of a 'universal and unconstrained consensus', and with it the ideas of 'autonomy and maturity (*Mündigkeit*)' (Habermas, 1984:147), are given fresh life with the one thing which 'raises us out of nature' and 'the only thing whose nature we can know: language' (Habermas, 1986a:314).

Habermas's theory of meaning is formal-pragmatic in that it seeks a 'concept of interaction among speaking and acting subjects, interaction that is mediated through acts of reaching understanding' (Habermas, 1984:276). Importantly, Habermas begins by providing a definition of the term 'language'. He follows the German theorist of linguistics, Karl Bühler, who states that language may be considered as a tool utilised by an individual to communicate a message concerning the world to another individual (Bühler, 1985:70). Moreover, Bühler's three functions of the exercise of signs are formulated by Habermas as:

> The cognitive function of representing a state of affairs; the expressive function of disclosing the experiences of the speaker, and the appellative function of directing requests to addresses. From this perspective, the linguistic sign functions simultaneously as symbol, symptom and signal. It is a *symbol* in virtue of being correlated with objects and states of affairs, a *symptom* (indication, index) in virtue of its dependence on the sender, whose subjectivity it expresses, and a *signal* in virtue of its appeal to the hearer, whose external or internal behaviour it steers like other traffic signs. (Habermas, 1984:275)

In Bühler's view, any use of language comprises three dimensions, namely the speaker, the hearer, and the world itself, with the general theory of language stipulating that all three sides of the triangle must be involved (Finlayson, 2005:32). This argument is adopted by Habermas, and further states that the theory of meaning in the context of 'truth-conditional' is incorrect when placing direct and sole emphasis on only one element whilst ignoring the other two

(Finlayson, 2005:32). Crucially, the relationship between hearer and speaker must not be ignored, marginalised or downgraded.

In contrast to a theory of language that does full justice to the relationship between speaker and hearer 'truth-conditional' theory states that the fundamental units of meaning-bearing language come in the form of proposals and suggestions. Pragmatic theories of meaning take the fundamental units to be utterances (Finlayson, 2005:33). In real-life situations, utterances comprise propositions directed in a certain way to hearers. Accordingly, truth-conditional theories that squeeze out the pragmatic dimension of language are rejected by Habermas, because not only can they not constitute a general explanation of meaning, but they fail to account for most forms of language (Finlayson, 2005:33-34). Rather, Habermas argues that pragmatic speech practices need to be analysed in order to gain insight into their full meaning (Habermas, 1984: 275-279):

> One simply would not know what it is to understand the meaning of a linguistic expression if one did not know how one could make use of it in order to reach understanding with someone about something. One can see from the very conditions for understanding linguistic expressions that the speech acts that can be formed with their help have a build-in orientation toward a rationally motivated agreement with regard to what is said. (Cooke, 1998:228)

Furthermore, Habermas claims that the underlying foundation of speech, and its ultimate purpose, is to organise and direct individual agents' contrasting actions in a non-conflictual way, which will ultimately facilitate understanding and comprehension (Finlayson, 2005:34). Habermas takes it to be a fact that 'reaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech' (Habermas, 1984:287). Language is able to achieve this overall aim by drawing a universally accepted conclusion on how to achieve understanding.

Habermas maintains that in propositional logic validity indicates an 'internal relation between the semantic content of expressions,' (Habermas, 1984:9), but validity in language is broader, such that a linguistic expression or speech act is 'internally connected with reasons and grounds' (Habermas, 1984:9, 301). The pragmatic meaning of speech is dependent on the meaning of utterances which carry illocutionary force (Finlayson, 2005:37). The meaning of a speaker's utterance is therefore not internal to the sentence, but draws on validity-claims that are external to the sentence. Going back to Austin, the locutionary (meaning within a sentence) is affected by the illocutionary (that is, the mode of expression, or relationship presupposed between speaker and hearer).

Instead of accepting the conditions of the propositional theory of meaning, that is, the recognition of cognitive truth which can be validated as either true or false, Habermas claims that reason and validity extend beyond the cognitive (Finlayson, 2005:37). As Habermas argues 'we understand the meaning of a speech act when we know what would make it acceptable' (Habermas, 1984:297). On Habermas's account, the goal of speech is to arrive at an understanding between conversational participants who can coordinate actions in order to reach agreement through intersubjective and reciprocal communication between a speaker and a hearer.

Habermas considers that the meaning of an utterance is fundamentally a shared understanding between a speaker and a hearer; not 'shared' in an instrumental sense, but shared based on a presupposition of equality between speaker and hearer. Without this recognition of equality a theory of meaning would be reduced to a conflict between participants (Finlayson, 2005:38). And meaning entails an intersubjective understanding between interlocutors, rather than the speaker's understanding of the external and objective world (Habermas, 1984:275-276, 328-337). In Habermas's view, reaching understanding is thus an impossible task unless there is consensual agreement of participants in communication with regard to a particular object, rule or state of affairs.

On this point it is useful to reflect on how Habermas's argument elucidates the role that filial piety plays in East Asian culture. It should first of all be clear that the practice can only be evaluated against implicit standards of validity. In requiring obedience the father (or father figure) is giving the son reasons for such obedience, but there is what Habermas terms a performative self-contradiction at work. In the explicit level of content – the demand for obedience based on a patriarchal relationship – father and son are unequal, but in communicating his demands the father is treating the son as an equal. To redeem the validity claim requires that the father move from the position of a superior to that of an equal. It may still be possible to justify filial piety, by, for example, arguing that in the face of societal change the practice marks out a special relationship that is not subject to the nexus of the market. However, this is a transformation from the obedience traditionally demanded of children to a newly recharged relationship.

Viewed in terms of instrumental reason we can observe that capitalism has threatened traditional East Asian cultural forms. Industrialisation and urbanisation have forced a more Western pattern of family life on Asian society. In particular, expressive individualism corrodes the demands of filial piety. With this in mind, it may be observed that societies in

East Asia are progressively moving towards a less authoritarian framework, with the relationship between children and parents seeming now to be more balanced (Kuo, 1998:224). As Hashimoto argues, the foundation of filial piety is built upon a relationship between parents and children that is hierarchical in nature, and the transition to Western modes and practices conflicts with such hierarchy, with Western ideals emphasising 'equality, individual rights, [and] freedom of choice' (Hashimoto, 2004:182-183). It is this particular notion which has the capacity to significantly change the overall value associated with Confucianism. Ultimately, Western concepts and approaches encourage individuals to demand mutual respect in all relationships (Sung & Song, 2009:45). Notably, such concepts neglect any form of authority considered to be ungrounded or superfluous to current social, political and economic demands.

4.5 Types of Action

Habermas assumes that everyday speech has two features: a strategic component aimed at success and a communicative aspect aimed at understanding. Habermas's aim is to provide a theory of communicative action that allows for the critical validation of claims made in everyday discourse. In his earlier work he posited an 'ideal speech situation', and I will continue to use that term, but it should not be mistaken for an actual position, or even a hypothetical standpoint. The term is simply shorthand for the raising and settling of 'validity claims'. As Meadwell observes:

> The purpose of the ideal speech situation is to argue for the primacy of communicative over strategic action…. in criticizing the privileged position that positivist science gives to instrumental reason as co-equal. Instead communicative action and understanding are essential elements of the ideal speech situation while strategic action is not a constitutive feature of this counterfactual ideal. (Meadwell, 1994:713)

Habermas concedes that the linguistic practices of everyday life could be manipulative or 'distorted' (Habermas, 1984:288), but that communicative action is counterfactually presupposed in distorted, strategically-oriented, speech. Reaching understanding is a primal purpose of human speech. As I argued in Section 4.3 Habermas employs Austin's speech act theory in order to explicate his theory of communicative action and understanding. On Habermas's account, which gets its inspiration from Austin, speech act theory can provide a basis for universal pragmatics given the fact that it puts forward 'the conditions for a happy employment of sentences in utterance' (Habermas, 1979b:26).

Habermas interprets Austin's three aspects of a speech act in the following way:

The term 'locutionary' to the content of propositional sentences (*p*) or of nominalized propositional sentences (that *p*). Through locutionary acts the speaker expresses states of affairs; he says something. Through illocutionary acts the speaker performs an action in saying something. The illocutionary role establishes the mode of a sentence employed as a statement, promise, command, avowal, or the like. Under standard conditions, the mode is expressed by means of a performative verb in the first person present; the action meaning can be seen particularly in the fact that 'hereby' can be added to the illocutionary component of the speech act: 'I hereby promise you (command you, confess to you) that *p*'. Finally, through perlocutionary acts the speaker produces an effect upon the hearer. By carrying out a speech act he brings about something in the world. Thus the three acts that Austin distinguishes can be characterized in the following catchphrases: to say something, to act in saying something, to bring about something through acting in saying something. (Habermas, 1984:288-289)

By giving an example, 'Shoot her!', Austin claims that a locutionary act entails saying something. We can assume that a locutionary act is simply expressing a state of affairs. However, in saying 'Shoot her!', it is also implicit that we are ordering someone to shoot her. Accordingly, it is the carrying out of an action through the medium of language. In other words, in saying something it is implied we are performing something such as offering advice, making a request, promising something, issuing a warning, and so on. And by saying 'Shoot her!', the speaker intends something, and is seeking to persuade others. This kind of persuasive speech act is a perlocutionary act (Austin, 1975:101-102).

Notably, according to Habermas, a perlocutionary act and illocutionary act have three key differences, which are: the overall objective of speech utilisation; the conditions of success; and the link between the expressibility of such objectives and success (Wood, 1985:157). Essentially, a perlocutionary act does not have a direct link with what is said, whereas an illocutionary act directly follows on from the meaning of what is said (Habermas, 1984:290). Although we can acknowledge that the overall conditions of success in the instance of an illocutionary act these can only be ascertained after the speech act has been performed because the illocutionary act is *necessarily* connected to the locutionary. This does not apply to the perlocutionary, which is only *contingently* related to the locutionary component of the speech act (Habermas, 1984:290-291). Moreover, it is acknowledged that the overall purpose

of the illocutionary act can only be fulfilled through linguistic expression and by no other means, whereas the purpose of a perlocutionary act can be achieved in many different ways (Habermas, 1984: 292). For example, fear might be the perlocutionary effect of a particular speech act, but fear can also be the effect of a non-linguistic act.

The underlying distinction between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary effects rests on the distinction between two types of orientation which an actor can adopt: orientation to understanding and orientation to success (Habermas, 1984:286). In Weber's account, the concept of 'purposive-rational' action is reduced to the effectiveness with which a means can be used to reach a certain end. According to Habermas, a success-oriented action is identifiable as strategic action, while understanding-oriented actions aim at reaching a rational consensus between interlocutors. Habermas explains the attitudes underlying the two actions as follows:

> This is not a question of the predicates an observer uses when describing processes of reaching understanding, but of the pre-theoretical knowledge of competent speakers, who can themselves distinguish situations in which they are causally exerting an influence upon others from those in which they are coming to an understanding with them, and who know when their attempts have failed. (Habermas, 1984:286)

On Habermas's account, those different attitudes can be identified by the awareness on the part of the participants that they are adopting either a success-oriented action or one oriented to reaching understanding (Habermas, 1984:286). He connects this distinction in attitude back to Austin. Whereas perlocutionary acts tend to be strategic, illocutionary acts are 'oriented to reaching understanding'. What is more, while illocutionary acts are, for Habermas, 'extramundane' – meaning they exist apart from the physical act of expression in the sense that the validity claims are not identical to what is actually communicated – they are neither metaphysical nor 'innerworldly' (Habermas, 1984: 293). This represents a departure both from the classical Enlightenment emphasis on the subject and on the idea of – in Kant's sense – things that exist in themselves. The validity-claims raised by language come closest to things that exist in themselves, but they are part of our world, even if not 'causally produced effects' (Habermas, 1984:293)

Perlocutionary actions are parasitic on illocutionary actions in that 'speech acts can indeed be employed strategically, [but] they have a constitutive meaning only for communicative action' (Habermas, 1984:295). A communicative action is distinguished from strategic action by the fact that understanding – or coming to an understanding – 'are not

related to one another as means to [an] end' (Habermas, 1984:287). This is important because there is a sense in which strategically we can come to an understanding collectively, but it is instrumental, for the 'understanding' is tied to and subordinate to the end goal. Coming to an understanding about how to most effectively fight a war is not 'understanding' in Habermas's sense, whereas coming to an understanding on the ultimate purpose of a war would be. This affects how discussion is carried out. In the latter case no opinion is ruled out, and success depends on the force of the better argument. In the former case, the communicative act is constrained by an end that is placed beyond discussion.

As I have explored above, Habermas differentiates three worlds and three corresponding validity claims. He argues that different validity claims underlie different kinds of speech acts, and as such 'the validity of speech acts oriented to reaching understanding can be contested under precisely three universal aspects' (Habermas, 1984:319). This classification of speech acts is determined primarily by the intention of the speaker (Habermas, 1984:319, 325-326), and there are three speech types: constative, expressive, and regulative. Constative speech acts entail the speaker referring to a state of affairs in the world in an 'objective' sense. In an expressive speech act the speaker draws attention to something existing in his own subjective world, and in so doing he reveals to somebody else an experience to which he has privileged access. In contrast, in a regulative speech act the speaker identifies something in a shared social world, such that he seeks to establish an interpersonal relationship that will be acknowledged by others as legitimate (Habermas, 1984:325-326).

Habermas identifies the typology of speech acts as world-attitudes through a focus on actor and world relations. That is, when the speaker refers to constative, expressive, and regulative speech acts, his or her corresponding world-attitudes are objectivating, subjective, and norm-conformative worlds (Outhwaite, 1994:47). Habermas claims that 'regulative and expressive speech acts are constitutive for normatively regulated and dramaturgical action' (Habermas, 1984:327). Thus, Habermas suggests that the classification of speech acts allows us to focus on three 'pure types' – or what he terms 'limit cases' – of communicative action: conversation, normatively regulated action and dramaturgical action (Habermas, 1984: 327-328). In so doing, the individual participants can get a suitable guideline for constructing 'linguistically mediated interaction' (Outhwaite, 1994:47-48).

As we have seen throughout this chapter, Habermas takes language as a principal tool for developing his theory of communicative action. He sees language as a universal medium for having uncoerced interaction between human beings:

> The concept of communicative rationality has to be analyzed in connection with achieving understanding in language. The concept of reaching an understanding suggests a rationally motivated agreement among participants that is measured against criticisable validity claims. The validity claims (propositional truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness) characterize different categories of a knowledge embodied in symbolic expressions. (Habermas, 1984:75)

According to Habermas, teleological or goal-directed action presupposes 'relations between an actor and a world of existing states of affairs' (Habermas, 1984:87). What constitutes the objective world is determined not so much by what is in the world but by a particular relationship to the world (so Habermas here rejects a 'correspondence theory' of truth). The 'objective attitude' takes the form of producing speech acts that conform to a cognitive-propositional model (Habermas, 1984:87). The actor can seize the objective world by adopting the assertions of true or false and bringing about goal-oriented interventions that turn out to be a success or a failure. Habermas is here strongly influenced by what might be termed the 'first turn to language', which is found in the work of Frege. For Frege truth and falsity are properties of sentences and not of the world[29], but Frege did not get beyond the semantic-syntactic dimension of language. It took a 'second turn' – the turn to pragmatics in the later work of Wittgenstein (for example, in the idea of language games) – to permit a full development of a theory of communicative action.

Unlike teleological or goal-oriented action, the concept of normatively regulated action refers to 'members of a social group who orient their action to common values' and 'compl[y] with (or violate[s]) a norm when in a given situation the conditions are present to which the norm has application' (Habermas, 1984:85). The presumption of this action lies in individual actors who might confront two worlds: 'the objective world of existing states of affairs' on the one hand, and 'the social world to which the actor belongs as a role-playing subject' on the other. It presupposes 'a social world consist[ing] of a normative context that establishes which interactions belong to the body of justified interpersonal relations' (Habermas, 1984:88). With the concept of normatively regulated action, the actors can perceive the twofold meanings of

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[29] This must be so in order to distinguish the 'sense' and 'truth' of a sentence. We can make sense by talking about non-existent things, such as unicorns, but we are not referring to something that exists. See Anthony Kenny, *Frege,* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), pp.126-141.

the world, that is, the objective world corresponding to states of affairs, and the social world with regard to social norms (Habermas, 1984:88).

Habermas draws on Erving Goffman's notion of dramaturgical action (Habermas, 1984:80). Dramaturgical action is different from teleological or goal-oriented action or normatively regulated action; it depends on the performance of action in which an individual actor discloses something in relation to the actor's subjectivity. This subjective world is 'defined as the totality of subjective experiences to which the actor has, in relation to others, a privileged access' (Habermas, 1984:91). This subjective world associated with actors' subjective experience includes desires and feelings, and, in this sense, actors can behave reflectively according to their own subjective practices (Habermas, 1984:91). After all, the dramaturgical action refers to an actor's 'truthfulness' with reference to the world-attitude of one's subjectivity.

On Habermas's account, communicative action pertains to action oriented to reaching an understanding. And it presupposes 'a linguistic medium that reflects the actor-world relations' (Habermas, 1984:94). His primary concern is to establish coercion-free communication. With communicative action, relations can be established between actors who are able to speak and act so to achieve mutual consensus. As Habermas puts it, actors 'seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement' (Habermas, 1984:86). An action oriented to reaching understanding can be understood as 'a cooperative process of interpretation aiming at situation definitions that are intersubjectively recognised' (Habermas, 1984:69-70).

The concept of communicative action presupposes not only three worlds but three distinct attitudes on the part of the speaker (Habermas, 1984:94). Habermas maintains that one-sided interpretations of communication can be exposed by identifying forms of human interaction that cannot be explained without the availability of the three distinct attitudes. He offers some cases:

> …first, the indirect communication of those who have only the realization of their own ends in view; second, the consensual action of those who simply actualize an already existing normative agreement; and third, presentation of self in relation to an audience. In each case, only one function of language is thematized: the release of perlocutionary effects, the establishment of interpersonal relations, and the expression of subjective experiences. By contrast, the communicative model of action, which defines the traditions of social science connected with Mead's symbolic interactionism,

Wittgenstein's concept to language games, Austin's theory of speech acts and Gadamer's hermeneutics, takes all the functions of language equally into consideration. (Habermas in Outhwaite, 1994:71-72)

Accordingly, in the context of communicative action, speech acts are best understood as tools used by individuals in a range of different contexts, and responding to different needs, some of which will certainly be instrumental but others will be an attempt to achieve an understanding. In the latter case human beings are utilising the tendency to 'mobilise the rationality potential' which is built into all language (Habermas, 1984:99). Significantly, other action models place the focus on the claim of verification and validity in a 'one-world' (as distinct from three worlds) relation (Habermas, 1984:94-95, 99). In this instance, however, the communicative model has the potential to thoroughly explain and clarify the 'rational internal structure' concerning the overall method of establishing a valid agreement from an intersubjective standpoint (Couture, 1993:406). Importantly, only the building of such an agreement has the potential to form the basis of cooperation (Habermas, 1984:94-95, 99). Significantly, achieving understanding in relation to 'an utterance – that is, a sentence employed communicatively' is only established when all actors understand the link between a speech act and what makes it both adequate and suitable (Habermas, 1984:297):

A hearer understands the meaning of an utterance when, in addition to grammatical conditions of well-formedness and general contextual conditions, he knows those essential conditions under which he could be motivated by a speaker to take an affirmative position….These last conditions are divided into two further categories: conditions of satisfaction – formulated to begin with in semantic terms – are interpreted in terms of obligations relevant to the sequel of interaction….and conditions of the agreement that first grounds adherence to the obligations relevant to the interaction sequel. (Habermas, 1984:298-300)

So we can see how Habermas links reasons and actions through the medium of language. The concept of communicative rationality, he argues, depends primarily on the 'consensus-bringing force of argument speech', in which participants overcome their subjective points of view and reach mutual understanding based on rationally motivated agreement (Habermas, 1984:10). Thus, participants – speakers and hearers – can ultimately attain uncoerced, unifying consensus.

As I have explored in this chapter, the mutual understanding between the speaker and the hearer serves as the basis for Habermas's communicative action theory. However, a

problem concerning the lack of mutual understanding between the interlocutors – parents and children – arises when the filial piety of Confucian East Asian culture is put into the context of Habermas's communicative action theory. In this particular situation, the speaker (parents) can force a conversation onto the hearer (children), and the conversation may turn into a verbally mediated exercise of power – that is, unequal communication on the basis of excessive authority of parents over children – rather than one of genuine communication, as Habermas claimed.

In other words, if the practice of communication between parents and children is mainly dependent on parents' excessive dominance over children in order to keep parents' illegitimate authority, then this kind of speech act might not be carried out as reciprocal understanding between them. In this sense, it is evident that mutual understanding based on a rationally motivated conversation between actors – parents and children – in speech situations seems to be an impossible mission. Moreover, an exercise of lopsided coercion of parents' authority over the children might damage the intersubjective understanding between parents and children. Hence, Habermas's theory of communicative action can serve as reasonable ground on which to transform the problems raised by filial piety.

It is important to underline that filial piety is not merely a relationship between child and parent and thus part of the private sphere, but also underwrites political authority. One of the questions that we will explore later in this thesis is whether Habermas's discourse ethics presupposes a radical erosion of East Asian cultural practices, or whether filial piety can be reinterpreted so as to render it compatible with the equality implicit in the idea of offering and redeeming validity claims.

Chapter 5: Gadamer and Habermas on Tradition

In the preceding two chapters, I explored the essentials of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and Habermas's communicative action theory. In chapter 3, I dealt with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in relation to its key features: 'prejudice', 'tradition', and the 'fusion of horizons'. Gadamer contends not only that a historically effected consciousness of temporality requires awareness of tradition, but that tradition simultaneously rests on, but permits a critique of, prejudices. In this chapter, I will expound upon Gadamer's concept of tradition in more detail in relation to Habermas's critique of it. In so doing, I will explore the validity and the possible applications of Gadamer's understanding of tradition in connection to the concept of filial piety (see sections 5.2 and 5.3 below). As I will argue, ontological understanding of human existence, which is the basis of Gadamer's philosophy, raises the problem of 'is' and 'ought'. Tradition can have normative force, simply by virtue of being accepted. However, once tradition is challenged, a problem of normativity – of 'is' and 'ought' – arises. This becomes evident once we put into question the practice of filial piety. For Gadamer, tradition determines the limits of human existence – of *Dasein*. But for Habermas, the dogmatic force of tradition and authority must be dissolved through another force: the 'force of the better argument'.

5.1 Gadamer on Authority as Acknowledgement

As I have argued, the concepts of prejudice, tradition and the fusion of horizons are central to Gadamer's hermeneutics. In his book *Truth and Method* these notions are introduced under the title of 'The Historicity of Understanding as a Principle of Hermeneutics' (Bilen, 2001:9). For Gadamer, such notions carry a range of negative implications and suggestions (Bilen, 2001:9). As the book title implies, the primary goal is to show that the scientific method cannot extend its range to the spheres of human science (*Geisteswissenshaften*), and that the scientific method cannot be identical to the search for truth. He maintains that truth can be experienced in the areas of art, literature, and philosophy: 'These are all modes of experience [in] which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science' (Gadamer, 1989:xxiii). Gadamer seeks to defend the human sciences, which lie beyond the practices of the scientific method and rehabilitate other modes of knowledge and truth which are premised on human experience.

As we saw in chapter 3 Gadamer condemns the Enlightenment distinction between reason and prejudice. He also accuses the Enlightenment project of a false dichotomy between freedom and authority (Holub, 1991:60). By contrast, he argues that authority for the most part rests on superior 'insight' and 'judgement' not on the 'subjection and abdication of reason, but on the knowledge…that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence – i.e., it has priority over one's own' (Gadamer 1989:279). The key distinction between authority defined as the demand for blind obedience and authority as the recognition of superior insight is that the latter requires an act of recognition on the part of those subject to such authority. Authority, Gadamer maintains, must be earned: 'This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, [and] the expert.' (Gadamer, 1989:279-280)

Gadamer considers that the teacher's authority is appreciated by students who acknowledge his or her superior knowledge. In this sense, for Gadamer, it is not an example of blind obedience, but is dependent on recognition of superior knowledge. For Gadamer, this kind of authority presupposes an overt act of judgment on which 'true' authority is recognised. Moreover, Gadamer declares that 'granted, authority exists in countless forms….as I see it, there are compelling reasons for viewing acknowledgement as the determining factor of true authority relationships' (Gadamer, 1986:285). He wants to demonstrate that the concept of authority could operate as a non-dogmatic force by showing that there are cases of authority which are widely accepted as legitimate (Lawn, 2006:37).

In dealing with the notions of authority and tradition, Gadamer poses a question which can be taken as a challenge to Habermas's ideas of critical reflection and emancipatory reflection: 'whether reflection always dissolves substantial relationships or is capable of taking them up into consciousness' (Gadamer, 1976:34). For Gadamer, there is a positive face of authority that is dependent upon recognition, involving reflective approval of another person's superior judgment. However, for Habermas, the concept of 'authority' is by definition dogmatic (Habermas, 1977:357). 'Authority' has connotations of something oppressive, frequently demanding legitimation through ideological means that provide the illusion of the manifestation of freedom. He argues:

> Without proviso, on principle, of universal and dominance-free agreement, therefore, it is impossible to differentiate in a fundamental way between dogmatic acknowledgement and true consensus. Reason, as the principle of rational discourse, is

the rock on which existing authorities split, not the one on which they are founded. (Habermas, 1986b:316)

What is at issue between Gadamer and Habermas is whether authority is by definition dogmatic, and a threat to freedom, or whether reason in fact requires recourse to authority and prejudice (Holub, 1991:68-69). Gadamer explicitly refers to the acknowledgement of 'true authority' in contrast to dogmatic authority. A non-dogmatic 'true authority' rests precisely on the part of those 'subject' to such authority (Gadamer, 1989:272). The Gadamerian notion of reflective acknowledgement, then, takes place only in certain particular cases, under particular circumstances. Yet, as Robert Paul Wolff notes:

There are, of course, many reasons why men actually acknowledge claims to authority. The most common, taking the whole of human history, is simply the prescriptive force of tradition. The fact that something has always been done in a certain way strikes most men as a perfectly adequate reason for doing it that way again. Why should we submit to a king? Because we have always submitted to kings. But why should the oldest son of the king become king in turn? Because oldest sons have always been heirs to the throne. The force of the traditional is engraved so deeply on men's minds that even a study of the violent and haphazard origins of a ruling family will not weaken its authority in the eyes of its subjects. (Wolff, 1999:65)

As Wolff argues, it is because of the 'prescriptive force of tradition' that Habermas is suspicious of Gadamer's notion of the authority of tradition, which preserves an unreflective perpetuation of the status quo. For Gadamer, another's authority takes the place of one's own reflective judgement.

Gadamer tries to empower authority as a legitimate entity by emphasising that not all traditional authorities, and not all acts of conservation of tradition, are necessarily unreflective and dogmatic. However, on Habermas's interpretation, Gadamer's concept of 'acknowledgment' signifies not only an unreflective form of obedience but also a dogmatic one; hence, such authority generates a state of unfreedom. The case of filial piety usefully illustrates what is at issue between Habermas and Gadamer.

As I have examined in chapter 2, Habermas and Gadamer might agree that there is nothing wrong with the reciprocal relationship between parents and children if it is connected with the emotional bond between them. However, there is a clear disparity between Habermas and Gadamer with regard to how they might interpret and possibly justify filial piety. The traditional idea of filial piety in Confucian East Asian culture has reinforced the absolute

authority of the parents over the children. In other words, having a respect for the parents is the expected behaviour of children because it is one of the most important obligatory values in Confucian East Asian culture. The children's attitude towards their parents is the primary value in evaluating whether the children are filial or unfilial. Thus, disobedience to one's parents is considered unfilial behaviour in Confucian East Asian culture. It means that children have to obey their parents without question.

What makes Gadamer's position problematic is its conservatism. In arguing this I am not simply 'labelling' him a conservative and assuming that this is a bad thing. But rather, my argument is that conservatives assume time has a particular structure – what comes before has normative power over what comes later. Put more simply, experience matters, so that we are always in debt to the past. This means parents necessarily have normative authority over their children. This is not merely a limited authority covering the period of immaturity, but an 'existential' authority that can never be overturned. If we take a Habermasian perspective then potentially all human beings have recourse to a normativity that is non-temporal, such that children may have authority over their parents – not a personal authority but one which derives from the force of the better argument. Of course, it could be argued that parents and children are not equal but equally situated: parents are the children of *their* parents, and the children will themselves be parents. Consequently, we are all in a situation of domination and superiority. What, however, is notable is that at no point is there a true reciprocity – in every parent-child relationship we are *either* dominant *or* subordinate. We are never equals. And it is the normative power of tradition that makes reciprocity impossible.

A Gadamerian response would be to argue that there is no way out of the structure of time and that the Enlightenment simply substitutes one set of prejudices for another, with the implication that the Enlightenment itself is an exercise of power and domination. But such a critique of the Enlightenment rests on an outdated understanding of reason. Gadamer assumes that the Enlightenment distinction between reason and authority is grounded on a 'transcendental subjectivity', that is, it is fundamentally metaphysical and stands over and against the empirical world. This argument, Habermas argues, fails to acknowledge the turn to language and the substitution of intersubjectivity for the subject-object relationship:

> Gadamer fails to appreciate the power of reflection that is developed in understanding. This type of reflection is no longer blinded by the illusion of an absolute, self-grounded autonomy and does not detach itself from the soil of contingency on which it finds itself. But in grasping the genesis of the tradition from which it proceeds and on

which it turns its back, reflection shakes the dogmatism of life-practices. (Habermas, 1977:357)

So Gadamer believes that Habermas's position with respect to reflective emancipation is ultimately rooted in the Enlightenment's view of authority, which is critically biased. Furthermore, Gadamer assumes that there is a fundamental difference between true authority, i.e. that which is built upon a foundation of reflective recognition, and dogmatic authority, which is only in place for the sake of achieving some form of dominance or control. In order to further illustrate this point, Gadamer discusses the relationship between the student and teacher as being 'true authority' (Teigas, 1994:124-125). As Gadamer argues:

The presupposition is that reflection, as employed in the hermeneutical sciences, should 'shake the dogmatism of life-praxis'. Here indeed is operating a prejudice that we can see is pure dogmatism, for reflection is not always and unavoidably a step towards dissolving prior convictions. Authority is not always wrong. Yet Habermas regards it as an untenable assertion and treason to the heritage of the Enlightenment, that the act of rendering transparent the structure of prejudgements in understanding should possibly lead to an acknowledgment of authority. Authority is by his definition a dogmatic power. I cannot accept the assertion that reason and authority are abstract antitheses, as the emancipatory Enlightenment did. Rather, I assert that they stand in a basically ambivalent relation, a relation I think should be explored rather than casually accepting the antithesis as a 'fundamental conviction'. (Gadamer, 1976:32–33)

For Gadamer 'reason' is a mere replacement for what is undoubtedly a complicated link between tradition and authority. The point is that because the Enlightenment itself is built on a prejudice – the prejudice against prejudice – then 'reason' is itself opaque. When Habermas talks about reflective judgement he is simply using a 'black box' concept to cover what is a complicated relationship between tradition and authority, where authority is modelled on the recognition of expert competence. The relationship between teacher and student is not straightforwardly one of subordination, for teachers can learn from students, and the act of acknowledging the teacher's authority is not a one of decision but is part of a relationship: acknowledgement is continual and can be suspended or withheld. So the teacher-student relationship, which is an example of 'expert authority', can provide a paradigm for legitimate authority: in an instance where an individual seeks information in a field of which another individual is an expert, it is then logical and rational to expect that there is the need for one person to rely upon another in the sense of requiring instruction and guidance. Gadamer states

clearly that a relationship of this type 'needs to be affirmed, embraced, [and] cultivated' (Gadamer, 1989:281). And he argues that through the use of reflective judgement an individual positions himself at the receiving end of such an authority relationship, to the point where the student has gained sufficient knowledge and understanding and the relationship changes (Gadamer, 1989: 278-279). And Gadamer states that:

> [Authority's] true basis is an act of freedom and reason that grants authority of a superior fundamentally because he has a wider view of things or is better informed – i.e.,….because he knows more. Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but *can, in principle, be discovered to be true*. This is the essence of the authority of the teacher, the superior, [and] the expert. The prejudices they implant are legitimised by the person who presents them. But in this way they become prejudices *not just in favour of a person but a content*, since they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways – e.g., by good reasons. (Gadamer, 1989:280; emphases added)

The key points in the above quotation are, first, that what an authority figure claims can be discovered in other ways, perhaps through a different teacher, and, second, that authority has dual sources of legitimacy: the student acknowledges the person of the teacher but also what he or she says. This does not mean that there is an abstract standpoint of reason, which is detached from tradition – that would entirely contradict Gadamer's epistemology – but rather that we can verify the claims that an 'authority figure' makes by testing them against those of another authority figure. That need not involve talking to someone else, but it could involve reading texts. With the aforementioned in mind, Gadamer seeks to highlight specific cases whereby authority can be recognised, and also the fact that, in such instances, the information and know-how gathered through other individuals is not necessarily dogmatic (Gadamer, 1989:279).

In Habermas's view Gadamer does not adequately distinguish between 'a pseudo-recognition based on [fear and] force', and a genuine 'non-coercive recognition' (Habermas, 1986b:316). Moreover, even if a student has conceded the teacher's insight and knowledge, the reflective power of the student still exists (Lawn, 2002:38). And although Gadamer stresses the role of verification he does not explain what happens when a student as a result of a process of testing the teacher's claims comes to conclude that the teacher's claims are fundamentally flawed. Indeed, Gadamer does not explain how the student is to compare

competing sources of authority without recourse to standards of rationality that transcend 'prejudice'. In short, every time Gadamer attempts to show how authority can be legitimate he comes up against the problem of prejudice.

Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship cannot be reduced to a dyadic relation, but must be seen within the overall context of education in society. Both teacher and student are institutionally defined roles, and Gadamer, of all people, should be aware of this. After all, tradition implies complex institutions. The idea of a university only makes sense within a tradition; for example, the development of universities from seminaries, and the eventual 'emancipation' of universities from the Church is a phenomenon that requires hermeneutic interpretation. As Emily Borda argues, the teacher may be engaged in socialising students on a much wider scale (Borda, 2000:1032). What is at issue here is the role of ideology, understood as culturally mediated power. With this in mind, and to see more clearly how ideology operates through – in this case - education, it is necessary to closely examine various aspects of the education process, e.g. funding processes, management, school curriculum, and the relationship to the state (Borda, 2000:1037). Importantly, Gadamer's own stance on authority is not centred on structural-level analyses, and this must be acknowledged and recognised as a serious limitation to his analysis, which predominantly focuses on individual cases (Borda, 2000:1033-1034). Gadamer places emphasis on the concept of 'true authority', which is built upon the student's own understanding and acceptance of the teacher's authority from an entirely personal perspective. The failure to acknowledge the social and institutional framework in which such a relationship develops means that Gadamer cannot recognise the possibility that this relationship might be dogmatic (Borda, 2000:1034-1035).

5.2 Tradition as an Act of Preservation

Gadamer claims that adherence to authority is built on a foundation of reason and freedom and not power and unpredictability. His argument, as we have seen, is an appeal to the idea of expert authority, and the recognition on the part of the recipients of the authority figure (Gadamer, 1989:279). Recognition of expert authority implies consciousness that we are part of a tradition. This argument extends beyond an acceptance of institutional relationships. Expertise is a scarce commodity, requiring investment by those who acquire it, and thus we could just see expertise as a social product. Habermas would acknowledge this, and it is precisely one of the reasons why he is critical of Gadamer's appeal to expert authority: institutions embody inequality and coercion and therefore relations that presuppose the

existence of a particular institution are coercive. This is not to say that we can eliminate institutions, any more than we can eliminate strategic reason. But what we cannot do, Habermas argues, is use the existence of a particular relationship to legitimate prejudices and traditions. So if Gadamer is to counter Habermas he must show that expert authority rests on more than institutional authority, and this might be achieved if the teacher-student relationship is understood as the introduction to a tradition, or way of thinking.

Importantly, the concept of tradition, in Gadamer's view, is that which peoples, generation after generation, have continued to adhere to and preserved despite the passing of time (Gadamer, 1989:281). Furthermore, respect for tradition depends not on a quasi-objective attempt to preserve tradition, but rather on an attitude, which he terms 'traditionalism':

> The concept of tradition, however, has become no less ambiguous than that of authority….The romantic critique of Enlightenment is not an instance of tradition's automatic dominance of tradition, of its persisting unaffected by doubt and criticism. Rather, a particular critical attitude again addresses itself to the truth of tradition and seeks to renew it. [Thus] we can call it 'traditionalism'.
>
> It seems to me, however, that there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. However problematical the conscious restoration of old or the creation of new traditions may be, the romantic faith in the 'growth of tradition', before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced. The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, [and] cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. That is why the Enlightenment's critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being. (Gadamer 1989:281-282)

What binds students and teachers together – assuming that their relationship is not purely instrumental – is a shared attitude: a willingness to explore tradition. In this sense, as the

quotation suggests, the positing of tradition as something opposed to the present is as false as taking 'enlightenment' to be the opposite of tradition: the enlightenment is tradition and tradition is a living thing. Gadamer thinks that 'we have to recognize the element of tradition in the historical relation and enquire into its hermeneutical productivity' rather than trying to avoid or cancel tradition (Gadamer 1989:283). Whereas the classical Enlightenment forced a dichotomy between freedom and authority Gadamer argues that both freedom and authority are contained in tradition. He accepts that traditions can be coercive – that there is coercive as well as expert authority – but identifying two different elements of tradition, namely, freedom and authority, and forcing them into opposition fails to do justice to the complex relationship between the two. Even the relationship between student and teacher can manifest both forms of authority. Furthermore, Gadamer rejects the idea that preservation and change are polar opposites. In making a decision to preserve a tradition we are affecting a change: we become conscious of a tradition through the fusion of horizons, and that act of fusion itself changes, at the same time as preserving, tradition. This is not a contradiction in terms, because tradition is a lived phenomenon, that has to be continually recharged: 'even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated' (Gadamer, 1989:281), and 'preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one' (Gadamer, 1989:281). In defending the lived nature of tradition Gadamer stresses the idea, which I discussed earlier, of a 'historically effected consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*):

> [There is] a certain legitimate ambiguity in the concept of historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), as I have employed it. This ambiguity is that it is used to mean at once the consciousness effected in the course of history and determined by history, and the very consciousness of being thus effected and determined. Obviously the burden of my argument is that effective-history still determines modern historical and scientific consciousness; and it does so beyond any possible knowledge of this domination. Historically effected consciousness is so radically finite that our whole being, effected in the totality of our destiny, inevitably transcends its knowledge of itself. But this is a fundamental insight which is not limited to any specific historical situation; an insight which, however, in the face of modern historical research and of science's methodological ideal of objectivity, meets with particular resistance in the self-understanding of science. (Gadamer, 1989:xxxiv)

Gadamer is here placing emphasis on the fact that people are shaped and moulded by their past experiences, and so are never fully aware of how they have been affected by tradition. However, as a result of reflection individuals become aware of how tradition has affected them and in the process a form of objectification takes place. This is paradoxical in that the more conscious a person is of tradition the more he or she can turn tradition into a source of ideas. A person conscious of tradition is in a sense more 'enlightened' than defenders of the Enlightenment, because a historically effected consciousness is aware of its own historicity. Gadamer takes as an example of a tradition-conscious movement the Romantics, and their relationship to the Enlightenment. Because they rejected a narrowly positivistic understanding of science the Romantic Movement, against their own will, preserved the spirit of the Enlightenment (Weinsheimer, 1985:168). By accepting and appreciating the Enlightenment's historical philosophy (Weinsheimer, 1985:170), the Romantic movement preserved the subjective idea of anticipation – that is, of the idea of 'looking forward' (Gadamer, 1989:273). Gadamer states:

> In contrast to the Enlightenment's faith in perfection, which thinks in terms of complete freedom from 'superstition' and the prejudices of the past, we now find that olden times – the world of myth, unreflective life, not yet analyzed away by consciousness, in a 'society close to nature', the world of Christian chivalry – all these acquire a romantic magic, even a priority over truth. Reversing the Enlightenment's presupposition results in the paradoxical tendency toward restoration – i.e., the tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth. (Gadamer, 1989:273)

The paradox here is that the Romantics, in their obsession with the mediaeval world, retained the utopian moment of the Enlightenment. In looking back they looked forward. The Nineteenth Century's historical sciences were born out of the Romantic movement. Historical study can be considered as 'the last step in the liberation of the mind from the trammels of dogma' and now 'stands on a par with the knowledge of nature achieved by modern science' (Gadamer, 1989:275).

In an attempt to further emphasise the critical role that tradition can play, Gadamer advances the concept of 'transmission' (Pippin, 2002:235, 239). This concept is concerned with 'learning how to grasp and express the past anew' (Gadamer, 1983:49). Transmission entails 'the bringing together [of] the petrified remnants of yesterday' not in an attempt to

restore in a pristine form what existed in the past but as a process by which our present aims interact with the past to which we still belong (Gadamer, 1983:49). For Gadamer tradition is a result of arbitration between the present and the past.

5.3 Habermas's Critical Review of Gadamer's Concept of Tradition

In his early book *Knowledge and Human Interests* – prior to the development of his theory of communicative action – Habermas developed a theory of knowledge tied to human interests. He portrays three types of scientific discipline ('sphere of knowledge'), each ruled by what he terms a 'knowledge-constitutive interest':

Sphere of Knowledge	Knowledge-Constitutive Interest
Empirical-analytical science	Technical cognitive interest
Historical-hermeneutical sciences	Practical cognitive interest
Critical reflection	Emancipation

This early work anticipates aspects of his later theory insofar as it ties together the empirical and the transcendental (Habermas, 1986a:197). As we saw in Section 4.3 universal pragmatics has a similar structure: everyday language (the empirical) and a counterfactually presupposed set of validity claims (the 'transcendental'). The concept of knowledge-constitutive interests are, in Habermas's language, 'quasi-transcendental' (Held, 1980:255). The three knowledge-constitutive interests correspond to three domains of social life: labour (empirical-analytical), language (historical-hermeneutic), and what might be more vaguely described as 'emancipation' (critical reflection). This third domain – critical reflection – is articulated as the emancipatory interest in overcoming authoritarian and dogmatic structures of thought and action (Held, 1980:255). Since this is central to Habermas's critique of Gadamer I will focus on it here. Essentially, it may be stated that critical reflection has the aim of recreating a

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completely uninhibited subjectivity. Habermas states that, 'this interest can only develop to the degree to which repressive force, in the form of the normative exercise of power, presents itself permanently in structures of distorted communication – that is to the extent that domination is institutionalised' (Habermas, 1973b:9). Habermas links the emancipatory interest to critical reflection and argues that critical reflection not only unveils the concealed 'structures of distortion', but dissolves the 'effects of distortion' (Sinclair, 2005:230). Hence Habermas endorses the importance of the emancipatory characteristic of critical reflection as follows:

> The experience of reflection articulates itself substantially in the concept of a self-formative process. Methodologically it leads to a standpoint from which the identity of reason with the will of reason freely arises. In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility. For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a movement of emancipation. Reason is at the same time subject to the interest in reason. We can say that it obeys an emancipatory cognitive interest which aims at the pursuit of reflection. (Habermas, 1982:198)

Habermas asserts that epistemology is only possible as social theory; moreover, critique is viable only in instances where 'reason is at the same time subject to the interest in reason' (Habermas, 1973b:198). In other words, reason that is not tied to human interests – or awareness of human interests – cannot serve the end of emancipation. In his later work this is expressed in the idea of communicative reason, as distinct from strategic reason: in becoming aware that we raise validity claims we also become aware of the emancipatory potential of reason. Habermas further maintains that 'the hypothetical construct which I will call knowledge-constitutive or knowledge-guiding interest is supposed to enable us to understand the systematic (though conditional) embeddedness of discursively produced theoretical knowledge in the practice of a form of life which can only reproduce itself with the aid of potentially true statements' (Habermas, 1973a:180-181). To explain: there is a mutual entanglement of truth and social life. Scientific practices are embedded in social life, but society must be guided by the pursuit of truth.

Habermas is not, of course, concerned exclusively with Gadamer, but his notion of 'critical self-reflection', tied to knowledge-constitutive interests, is central to his critique of Gadamerian hermeneutics. So what exactly is 'critical self-reflection'? Habermas refers to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* by suggesting that it is 'the critical dissolution of subjectively constituted pseudo-objectivity' whereby, through gaining an understanding of the

delusions of 'false consciousness', an individual is able to 'emancipate itself from itself' (Habermas, 1973a:182-183). Critical self-reflection is then the dissolution of historically produced reifications of consciousness, which is precisely what Habermas thinks Gadamer is engaged in through his positive evaluation of tradition, and the prejudices that underlie tradition. The only way that such reifications can be dissolved is through communicative action, although Habermas only gradually formulated a theory that embodied the emancipatory potential of language.

In Habermas's view Gadamer adopts a perspective on tradition and language which places too much weight on empirical agreement, as distinct from 'coming to an understanding' from a standpoint of equality. Furthermore, 'understanding' and 'interpretation' are, Habermas suggests, analytically distinct, but Gadamer fails to explain or even acknowledge this fact (Holub, 1991:46). Subsequently, there is present in Gadamer's work an uncritical 'nostalgia' and the concept of 'understanding' is so hermeneutically rooted that social criticism is impossible (Kaplan, 2003:41). Gadamer, in effect, reifies social life, viewing tradition as an 'objective' context (Habermas, 1986b:313).

The relation that Gadamer posits between understanding and prejudice, authority, and tradition is characterised by the assimilation and preservation of conventional and existing norms: 'Gadamer, if I am correct, is of the opinion that the hermeneutical elucidation of unintelligible or misunderstood expression must refer back to a prior consensus which has been reliably worked out in the dialogue of a convergent tradition.' (Habermas, 1986b:313). With this in mind, it is clear that Habermas links Gadamer with traditional hermeneutics, which saw its task as the avoidance of misunderstanding. Tradition is thus considered to be 'objective for us, in the sense that it cannot be confronted with a claim to truth in principle' (Habermas, 1986b:313). As a result of the account of the inherently prejudiced character of all understanding provided by Gadamer, it is not only impractical to question the consensus around tradition but also pointless (Habermas, 1986b:313). In Habermas' view, Gadamer has 'further used hermeneutical insight into the prejudicial structure of understanding to restrict the quest for enlightenment to the horizon of prevailing convictions' (Habermas, 1986b:316):

> We have good reason to suspect that the background consensus of established traditions and language games can be a consciousness forged of compulsions, a result of pseudo-communication, not only in the pathologically isolated case of disturbed familial systems, but in entire social systems as well. The freedom of movement of a hermeneutical understanding widened into critique, therefore, ought not to be linked to

the free play available within the tradition and prevailing convictions. (Habermas, 1986b:317)

Habermas further argues that 'the objectivity of a "happening" of tradition that is made up of symbolic meaning is not objective enough. Hermeneutics comes up against the walls of the traditional framework from the inside, as it were' (Habermas, 1977:360). In other words, Gadamer cannot simultaneously reject the traditional positivist, objectivist view of human life, and at the same time treat tradition as something that 'exists' (that 'happens'). Of course, Habermas also rejects the positivist conception of society, but he would argue that he is better armed in his confrontation with the objectifying natural sciences. Against tradition-validating hermeneutics Habermas maintains that sociology requires a 'reference system' which will 'no longer leave tradition as such in its relation to other aspects of the complex of social life, thereby enabling us to designate the conditions outside of tradition under which transcendental rules of world-comprehension and of action empirically change' (Habermas, 1977:361). That 'reference system' – which communicative action theory provides – places tradition under criticism. In effect, the 'walls of the traditional framework' referred to above are broken through.

Gadamer does not allow for the possibility that when reflecting upon tradition that 'tradition' might be changed and – this is the crucial point – if it is changed then it does not have the power to affect or determine subjectivity (Habermas, 1977:354). Gadamer seemingly does not acknowledge that the facets of subjectivity which he advances in his argument – i.e. effective-history, language, prejudice and tradition – may lose their power through the process of self-reflection: 'The substantiality of what is historically pre-given does not remain unaffected when it is taken up by reflection. A structure of preunderstanding or prejudgment that has been rendered transparent can no longer function as a prejudice' (Habermas, 1977:358). In effect, Gadamer wants both to argue that tradition can be criticised and critically reconstructed and at the same time maintain that human subjectivity – historically effected consciousness – is dependent on tradition. Either tradition grounds subjectivity or subjectivity grounds tradition.

The 'prior consensus' that Habermas identifies in Gadamer's work operates as an ideal (Habermas, 1986b:313), but it is free-floating and ungrounded. Insofar as human beings have critical capacities for Gadamer, they are just one form of conventional ability among others. This necessarily makes Gadamer a conservative, for whom there is no horizon beyond the fusion of horizons. Nonetheless, Gadamer insists that both reflective recognition (that is,

recognition of authority) and reflective retrieval (that is, retrieval of a particular tradition), can work as critique. Consequently Gadamer rejects Habermas's charge that tradition-contextual embeddedness does not successfully establish the difference between 'counterfactual' (critically reflective, rational) and 'prior' (unreflective) agreement (Rasmussen, 1990:38-45).

However, Habermas insists that the ultimate test of the rationality of a tradition is our capacity to reject it. And this is an option which is not open to Gadamer. If we cannot reject tradition then we have to conclude that its foundation is dogmatic and tradition is a 'cage' from which we cannot escape. Tradition then constitutes a set of pre-given norms and prejudices. Gadamer can only legitimately talk about criticism and the non-coercive nature of tradition and authority if he posits a concept of critical reflection that allows for the possibility that prejudices can fall away (Habermas, 1977:359). Gadamer's notion of reflection 'could only move within the limits of the facticity of tradition. The act of recognition that is mediated through reflection would not at all have altered the fact that tradition as such remains the only ground of the validity of prejudices' (Habermas, 1977:358). For Gadamer – on Habermas's account – objective tradition is the sole basis for a reflective act (Habermas, 1977:359). As argued in Chapter 3, this may be described as a Heideggerian manifestation of the conception of the 'fore-structure' of understanding, which underpins the idea that people are 'thrown' into the world that is already a 'given'.

Moreover, Gadamer is further criticised by Habermas for viewing tradition as 'linguistic' in character[30] (Habermas, 1986b:303). Given the central role language plays in Habermas's own work it is important to grasp the nature of Habermas's criticism. Habermas brings together three different considerations that underlie Gadamer's use of the concept of language. Firstly, all understanding is rooted in tradition. Secondly, all understanding and comprehension has a fundamentally linguistic nature. And thirdly, language comprises tradition (Gadamer, 1989:389; Pannenberg, 1970:123). Thus tradition and language are identified with one another. Habermas argues that 'linguistic tradition' is divorced from any non-linguistic, material interests. The result is that the model of dialogue presented by Gadamer is not adequate to the reality of communication, because it denies the existence of power hierarchies, with the model instead taking the stance that there is only symmetrical or mutual communication (Habermas, 1977:360). This contrasts with Habermas's theory of

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[30] Gadamer considers the overall notion of language to be 'the house of Being and the home of human beings', as per the claims of his teacher Heidegger. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings from 'Being and Time' (1972) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)*, translated and edited by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). p. 238.

communicative rationality which subjects everyday distorted communication to criticism through the counterfactually presupposed validity claims. Critique, on Gadamer's account of communication, can only extend as far as identifying misunderstandings and is therefore unable to clarify or explain power and domination and their respective non-linguistic means (Habermas, 1988:172).

I will conclude Habermas's critique of Gadamer with an extended quotation that summarises the core of that critique, and some further reflections on filial piety. The following quotation usefully summarises the argument which I have presented above:

> Gadamer's prejudice in favor of the legitimacy of prejudices (or prejudgments) validated by tradition is in conflict with the power of reflection, which proves itself in its ability to reject the claim of traditions. Substantiality disintegrates in reflection, because the latter not only confirms but breaks dogmatic forces. Authority and knowledge do not converge. Certainly, knowledge is rooted in actual tradition; it remains bound to contingent conditions. But reflection does not wear itself out on the facticity of traditional norms without leaving a trace. It is condemned to operate after the fact; but, operating in retrospect, it unleashes retroactive power. We are not able to reflect back on internalized norms until we have first learned to follow them blindly through coercion imposed from without. But as reflection recalls that path of authority through which the grammars of language games were learned dogmatically as rules of worldview and action, authority can be stripped of that in it that was mere domination and dissolved in to the less coercive force of insight and rational decision. (Habermas, 1988:170)

With this in mind, Habermas concludes that the hermeneutical approach is fundamentally limited in its capacity to criticise existing power relations and that a framework which transcends tradition is required (Habermas, 1988:170).

With respect to filial piety Habermas's emphasis on critical reflection provides the underpinning for a challenge to paternal authority: there is, he argues, a possibility of a 'universal and unconstrained consensus', grounded in human beings' maturity (*Mündigkeit*) in the sense in which Kant uses the term to denote the ability to think for oneself (Habermas, 1984:147).

The pursuit of individual freedom is a long-cherished objective of individuals in a modern democratic society. The autonomy of the individual is not the only moral basis for rights recognised in the modern Western democratic tradition, but it is probably the most

recognised ground. As we will see in later chapters Habermas derives autonomy from epistemology and this is the most appropriate way to understand how tradition-derived filial piety can be challenged.

If we follow Gadamer's account of rehabilitation of a prejudice embedded in tradition it seems to me that we are unable to project a conception of individual rights grounded in a view of human beings as free and autonomous individuals. The authority of tradition strengthens the power of parents over their children and is incompatible with a free and autonomous relationship between parents and their children.

Chapter 6: Habermas as a Universalist

In the previous chapter, I focused on the differing interpretations of tradition offered by Gadamer and Habermas. Whereas Gadamer rejects the enlightenment project in an effort to emphasise the role of tradition, Habermas sticks to the enlightenment's critique of tradition. Habermas's theory of rationality opens doors for rethinking what 'societal rationalisation' means. His theory of communicative action can be interpreted as a revitalisation of enlightenment reason insofar as the universal conditions of communication can be employed to criticise power relations and to overcome the weaknesses of the strategic rationality model. In this chapter, I discuss Habermas's universalist programme; specifically, his theory of discourse ethics and communicative action. His theory of communicative action is employed to elucidate 'rule systems by means of which competent subjects generate and evaluate valid expressions and performance' (Habermas, 1983:260). The differentiation between Habermas's universalist programme and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics lies in the conviction that universal principles are – or more specifically, a universalisation principle is – the basis of rationality. Habermas's universalisation principle allows the formation of consensus by means of 'universal presuppositions of argumentation' between competent speakers and hearers.

As I stated in the Introduction, one of the concerns of the thesis is to explore the possibility of a normative grounding of political legitimacy. In this chapter, thus, contra Gadamer's subjective relativism[31], I explore how Habermas defends a universalistic standpoint derived largely from the enlightenment project. To that end, it is important to lay out carefully Habermas's formulation and justification of his main philosophical theories: communicative action theory and discourse ethics. In particular, I consider Habermas's claim that the 'principle of universalisation' (U) can be derived from the pragmatic presuppositions of speech and argumentation. This requires an explication of Habermas's pragmatic theory of meaning. In so doing, Habermas attempts to reach beyond the relativistic assumptions of hermeneutics. Habermas seeks to supply general criteria by means of which the individuals can settle disputes.

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[31] For a study of Gadamer's subjective relativism in contrast to Habermasian universalism, see Osman Bilen, *The Historicity of Understanding and the Problem of Relativism in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics,* (Washington, D.C. : The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), pp. 91-119.

6.1 Universalism of Habermas

The universalist idea tends towards the position that there can be only one set of fundamental principles, and that other principles must be secondary and derivative of those fundamental values. The fundamental principles are not concrete norms, but categorical or procedural injunctions. These are implicit in everyday speech (truth, rightness, and truthfulness) (Calhoun, 1995:74). Given that everyday speech yields validity claims Habermas is in a position to claim that his normative theory is built upon an empirical basis:

> The human interest in autonomy and responsibility (*Mündigkeit*) is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus. (Habermas, 1986a:314)

Habermas's theory of communicative action is an endeavour to reformulate and recharge this human interest in freedom or autonomy by unveiling the normative structure of speech. That normative structure is composed of validity claims. The fundamental task of the theory is 'to identify and reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding' (Habermas, 1979a:21). As McCarthy argues:

> The rationale behind this approach is that language cannot be comprehended apart from the understanding that is achieved in it. To put it roughly, understanding is the immanent telos or function of speech. This does not, of course, mean that every actual instance of speech is oriented to reaching understanding. But Habermas regards 'strategic' forms of communication (such as lying, misleading, deceiving, manipulating, and the like) as derivative; since they involve the suspension of certain validity claims (especially truthfulness), they are parasitic on speech oriented to genuine understanding. (McCarthy, 1978b:287)

Deceptive and manipulative speech acts are parasitic upon speech oriented towards reaching understanding (McCarthy, 1978b:287).

This has important implications for filial piety: if we interpret demands based on parental obedience to be manipulative, then such speech-acts are not self-subsistent but parasitic upon non-manipulative speech-acts. This then generates what Habermas terms a 'performative self-contradiction'. If a father demands obedience of his son, then two kinds of relationship are at work: an unequal exercise of power and an implicit claim to equality. The

former is explicit – it forms part of the substantive content of the speech-act – whereas the latter is implicit, but nonetheless primary, meaning that the former is parasitic upon the latter.

Habermasian discourse ethics allows us to clarify the role played by filial piety in East Asian culture. It should first of all be noted that the practice must be discussed in terms of validity and legitimacy; even if we were to follow Gadamer's hermeneutical approach we would still be asking questions about whether reasons can be given to justify the practice. In stipulating the need for obedience and adherence to commands, the father, at least implicitly, provides the child with reasons for compliance with his requests. With this in mind Habermas states that there is a 'performative self-contradiction' apparent in such a situation. The demand for obedience, which is fundamentally built on a patriarchal relationship, implies that the father and son are unequal. However, in the very act of communicating his demands the father must necessarily treat the son as an equal. There is therefore a contradiction between the substance of what is communicated and its form, or to use Austin's terms, between the locutionary and illocutionary. The content (locutionary) implies a power relation of unequals, but the form (illocutionary) implies equality. To resolve the contradiction the content must be brought into line with form. To understand how this might be achieved we need to delve further into Habermas's discourse ethics. However, we should not assume that the application of the universalisation principle will automatically result in the rejection of filial piety. If filial piety can be justified by reference to wider principles of equality – in effect, by justifying it from a higher order principle – then it could be justified. For example, it might be argued that filial piety underpins social solidarity, and such solidarity is necessary in the face of significant socio-economic change. I will argue that such a defence is highly problematic, but nonetheless we should not automatically reject filial piety without subjecting it to a process of assessment in which different positions are set out.

6.2 Communicative and Purposive Rationality

As I have explored in chapter 4, for Habermas the purposive-rational model is inadequate. Rationality and subjective meaning cannot arise from the self-consciousness of each individual, but rather intersubjectivity is always present in action. If we want to understand the social structure which holds society together, it is not sufficient to suppose that the various actors consider each other as means to each other's ends, as claimed by Weber (Habermas, 1984:279-286). Organisation and management of actions are not only established in such instances where the individual actors are linked with each other as opponents, such as in the

context of a competition, where the ultimate aim is to establish individual results (Heath, 2001:241). Rather, competitions in such an instance must be applied within social frameworks essentially created through linguistically mediated interaction, and which are not therefore the end-products of strategic competitions (Johnson, 1991:184-185). There are numerous examples of such social constructs: for example, formal or informal conventions, institutions, laws, norms, and rules (Johnson, 1991:190). In order for such frameworks to be established, the individual actors must have the capacity to determine some level of mutual agreement concerning social reality conditions (Johnson, 1991:187). In order to achieve such an aim, the various individuals must not consider each other to be in opposition, but rather to build a relationship on the concept of partnership, with all parties involved seeking to achieve the same end result (Johnson, 1991:185-187).

With this argument taken into consideration, Habermas introduces communicative action in the context of a distinction between 'strategic' and 'instrumental' actions (see Table 6-1).

Table 6-1. Types of Action[32]

Action orientation / Action situation	Oriented to success	Oriented to reaching understanding
Non-social	Instrumental action	———
Social	Strategic action	Communicative action

Notably, the disparity between these categories is found in the alignment of their action: for instance, whilst communicative action corresponds with the need to reach understanding, purposive-rational action corresponds with success (Habermas, 1984:287). With this in mind, success-orientated actors think primarily in terms of calculation of self-interest (means-ends rationality and individual utility), whereas understanding-orientated actors will consider means-ends rationality as secondary to establishing understanding with other agents (Habermas, 1984:285-286). The distinction between communicative and strategic action

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[32] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 285.

corresponds to Kant's distinction when he set out his 'categorical imperative'; that is, the difference between treating people as a 'means to an ends' as against ends in themselves (White, 1988:45).

Communicative action emphasises the need to secure agreement, or to act with previously established mutual agreement in mind (Johnson, 1991:186). This presupposes that involved individuals must have an agreed view of the situation and they acknowledge claims concerning validity (Habermas, 1984:307). There are three dimensions to this notion of validity:

> In communicative action a speaker selects a comprehensible linguistic expression only in order to come to an understanding with a hearer about something and thereby to make himself understandable. It belongs to the communicative intent of the speaker (a) that he perform a speech act that is *right* in respect to the given normative context, so that between him and the hearer an intersubjective relation will come about which is recognised as legitimate; (b) that he makes a *true* statement (or correct existential presuppositions), so that the hearer will accept and share the knowledge of the speaker; and (c) that he express *truthfully* his beliefs, intentions, feelings, desires, and the like, so that the hearer will give credence to what is said. The fact that the intersubjective commonality of a communicatively achieved agreement exists at the levels of normative accord, shared propositional knowledge, and mutual trust in subjective sincerity can be explained in turn through the functions of achieving understanding in language. (Habermas, 1984:307-308)

Awareness of these three bases of validity amounts to 'communicative competence'. But there is a problem here. Since the validity claims are counterfactually presupposed in everyday speech, is a person who thinks in purely strategic terms 'communicatively competent'? Or does communicative competence entail being conscious that one's speech raises claims to validity, such that those claims become the object of discussion? White suggests that simply by performing speech acts a speaker is showing adherence to the validity claims (White, 1988:40), but at the same time social relations are only conceivable in light of *common commitments* to future agreement (White, 1988:50-51). A commitment implies a high level of consciousness of validity claims. The latter assumption is of importance to Habermas because if he is to tie his theory of communicative action to models of social progress then there must be a process whereby people become aware that they are raising validity claims (Cheal, 1992:364-365).

There is, however, an alternative model of consensus – one that is grounded in tradition. Again, the case of filial piety is illustrative. To say that communicative acts are oriented to success requires explaining 'success'. We might go outside formal reason and judge a society by its ability to maintain social cohesion or generate material goods or defend itself in war or produce artistic, scientific or technical achievements. By any of these criteria East Asian societies can be judged successful, although perhaps less successful than European (or Western) societies. After all, China produced one of the most advanced cultures in the world and yet since the Nineteenth Century has suffered from authoritarian regimes which have retarded its social and economic development. Putting to one side this authoritarian history and taking a long view let us accept for the sake of argument that East Asian cultures have been 'successful' in an everyday sense of success, a Habermasian critic of these cultures has to explain the meaning of success.

Part of the problem with Habermas's theory of communicative action is that it ignores a great part of Anglo-Saxon work on pragmatics. Even if we accept that communication is only possible if speaker and hearer orient themselves to what Habermas terms 'validity claims' it does not follow that these are non-instrumental. Paul Grice, who was perhaps the most important theorist of the pragmatics of language advanced what he termed the 'cooperative principle': 'make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (Grice, 1975:45). The principle can be broken down into four maxims: be truthful; be informative; be relevant; be clear (Grice, 1975:45-46). Habermas avoids the instrumentalist interpretation of pragmatics, but it is clear that for Grice the cooperative principle is not a moral principle but a working assumption of speakers oriented to *instrumental* success. Put simply, if a person wants to get his way then he must (implicitly) satisfy the maxims. A patriarchal figure oriented to success may or may not get his way, but there is certainly no performative self-contradiction at work. If we apply a Gricean rather than a Habermasian approach to communicative action then it would be reasonable to say that East Asian culture – with its Confucian traditions – is successful.

6.3 Universal Pragmatics and Communicative Competence

As discussed in chapter 4, Habermas's linguistic turn is a pragmatic turn, because it focuses 'not on what language *says* but on what language *does*; it is a theory of language *use*' (Finlayson, 2005:31-32). In his agreement with Karl-Otto Apel's analysis, Habermas identifies

linguistic meaning with a pragmatics: language is not a merely an analytic articulation of propositional meaning, as identified with the semantics or syntactics (Finlayson, 2005:31), rather it is to provide 'an explicit description of the rules that a competent speaker must master in order to form grammatical sentences and to utter them in an acceptable way' (Habermas, 1979a:26).

Habermas's universal pragmatics takes an unprecedented approach to the field of pragmatics. For Habermas, unlike the study of language itself such as phonology, semantics, and syntax, the purpose of pragmatics is to study how language is used to communicate in a social context (Heath, 2001:73). Pragmatic studies are normally carried out on natural language in a particular cultural context. Habermas's universal pragmatics is far broader: Habermas asserts that the speaker's capacity to communicate emanates from a pre-theoretical know-how, which entail 'general and unavoidable presuppositions of communication' (Habermas, 1979a:23). Habermas labels this knowledge 'communicative competence' (Habermas, 1979a:29). On Habermas's account, the task of universal pragmatics [33] is to provide a reconstruction of communicative competence (Habermas, 1979a:15-20).

The epistemic context of this pre-theoretical knowledge is assumed to be similar to that of the universal linguistic competence set out in Noam Chomsky's work, except that Chomsky considered such competences as pre-social (Chomsky, 1965:4-6). In his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky makes a distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. But the concern of generative grammar is with the former not the latter (McCarthy, 1978b:274):

> Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener [relationship]….unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance….To study actual linguistic performance, we must consider the interaction of a variety of factors of which the underlying competence of the speaker-hearer is only one. (Chomsky in McCarthy 1965:3-4)

The justification for this partition of tasks is that there is 'a fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete situations)' (Chomsky, 1965:4). In particular, it is considered that

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[33] See Jürgen Habermas, 'What is Universal Pragmatics?', in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), pp. 1-68.

what the speaker-hearer acknowledges concerning the use of language which fundamentally enables him to utilise and understand it – so far as this is limited to phonetic, semantic, and syntactic components – can be formulated within a framework comprising both substantive and formal linguistic universals. On the other hand, consideration of performance essentially requires participation with empirical and extralinguistic aspects of speech (McCarthy, 1978b:274).

Habermas contends that the project of universal pragmatics is dependent on the fact that it not only encompasses phonetic, semantic, and syntactic characteristics of sentences, but embraces pragmatic characteristics of utterances, i.e. the aim of universal pragmatics is to provide a 'rational reconstruction' of communicative competence (McCarthy, 1978b:274):

> [Universal pragmatics] thematizes the elementary units of speech (utterances) in the same attitude as linguistics does the elementary units of language (sentences). The aim of reconstructive linguistic analysis is the explicit description of the rules that a competent speaker must master in order to form grammatical sentences and to utter them in an acceptable way….The assumption is that communicative competence has just as universal a core as linguistic competence. A general theory of speech acts would thus describe exactly that system of rules that adult speakers master insofar as they can satisfy the conditions for a happy employment of sentences in utterances – no matter to which particular language the sentences belong and in which accidental contexts the utterances are embedded. (Habermas, 1979b:26)

What is unclear is whether for Habermas communicative competence is 'innate', in the sense that human beings are 'hard-wired' to seek agreement, or whether communicative competence is part of the structure of language, independently of humans' cognitive competence. Perhaps this problem can be avoided if we say that communicative competence is 'psychologically true', which means that human beings have the capacity to acquire such competence, but acquisition depends on processes of socialisation. To that end he employs Gilbert Ryle's 'know-how'/'know-that' distinction, as an implicit know-how acquired by every competent speaker (Habermas, 1979b:12):

> That acting and speaking subjects know how to achieve, accomplish, perform, and produce a variety of things without being able to give an explicit account of the concepts, rules, criteria, and schemata on which their performances are based. Thus one might produce meaningful statements, sound arguments, good theories, or grammatical sentences simply by drawing on one's implicit knowledge and abilities –

that is, without knowing that one is thereby employing certain operations, applying certain standards, following certain rules. The aim of rational reconstruction is precisely to render explicit, in categorical terms, the structure and elements of such 'practically mastered, pretheoretical' know-how. (McCarthy, 1978b:276)

Therefore, communicative competence may only be achieved through reconstruction, i.e. by providing clarification concerning the required components for speakers' communicative accomplishments (Bernstein, 1995:48). A reconstruction of communicative competence is effective if it is able to provide an explanation concerning the patterns of correct speech practices, and, furthermore, does not presupposes anything that runs counter the insights of speakers (Habermas, 1979a:19).

In defending the categorical nature of communicative competence Habermas does not deny that pragmatics, as the foundation of that competence, is the analysis of the social and cultural usage of language. However, notwithstanding the social – context-dependent – nature of language, he asserts that there are universal elements associated with that context-dependent use (Habermas, 1979a:23). In other words, reconstruction entail separating what is context-dependent and what is universal in a particular speech-act, or extended dialogue. According to Habermas, the most fundamental achievement associated with speech acts is ultimately the interpersonal relationship established between the speaker and hearer (Finlayson, 2005:38), and that is a universal. Communication underpins the capacity to sustain interpersonal relationships, regardless of whether these are impersonal or intimate, uncooperative or supportive (Habermas, 1984:275-279). This capacity of speakers to provide and become involved in such relationships is ignored in purely theories of pragmatics, because those theories focus on highly localised uses of language, and ignore the broader long-term relationships that are sustained through communication. (Habermas, 1979a:35).

For Habermas an acceptable speech act is considered to be one which induces three validity claims:

1) that the statement is made is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are in fact satisfied) (truth);

2) that the speech act is right with respect to existing normative context (or that the normative context that it is supposed to satisfy is itself legitimate) (rightness); and

3) that the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed (sincerity). (Habermas, 1984:99)

Such validity claims may therefore be described as overlapping with the objective, social, and subjective worlds, which run parallel to objective truth, normative rightness, and subjective truthfulness respectively (Outhwaite, 1994:50). Although each of the three claims of validity play a fundamental role in relation to the various different types of utterances, it is nevertheless considered that one of them will play a more critical role in relation to various sentences; this is ultimately dependent on the world within which the content is most directly established (Habermas, 1984:308).

Accordingly, the three different speech acts[34] are made possible by a specific validity standard. So, for example, indicative statements are analysed and determined as being either true or false (Roderick, 1986:90). While on the other hand performative utterances are evaluated in terms of their adherence to the ethical and social norms underpinning the speaker-hearer relationship. And expressive utterances are analysed as being either sincere (or honest), or insincere (or dishonest) (Saiedi, 1987:256). Essentially, the process of devising statements, expressive utterance or performative utterance would not be possible without some level of commitment in relation to the associated validity standards (Heath, 1998:23-24).

Habermas maintains that successful communication is difficult to explain unless we assume that human beings can, in principle, raise and settle validity claims (Cooke, 1998:2-3). Owing to the fact that communication is the fundamental tool for establishing human relationships, speech validity also forms the foundation of interpersonal relationships (Habermas, 1998:53). Accordingly, it may be stated that a successful relationship between the speaker and the hearer is one which is built upon a foundation of mutual commitment to speech validity:

> With their speech acts, speaker and hearer raise validity claims and demand that they
> be recognised. But his recognition need not follow irrationally, since the validity
> claims have a cognitive character and can be checked. I would like, therefore, to
> defend the following thesis: In the final analysis, the speaker can….influence the
> hearer and the vice versa, because speech-act typical commitments are connected with
> cognitively testable validity claims – that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a
> rational basis. (Habermas, 1979a:63)

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[34] Without question, various contextual elements are acknowledged as potentially constraining sentences and their use. There are three key elements which are universal to all situations involving speech: the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer; the third-person relationship between the speaker and the world; and the reflexive relationship between the speakers and his or her own subjective world, comprising a number of different components, such as beliefs, desires and intentions, and the like. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society,* translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. 311-312.

Speech acts can have an impact on the hearer, and thus establish or sustain an interpersonal relation, and the speech acts have such force by virtue of the validity claims they raise (Habermas, 1998:198). Speech acts may be considered as unacceptable and acceptable, true or false, sincere or insincere (Habermas, 1984:305-308).

With this in mind, it is therefore possible to state that there are three spheres associated with universal pragmatics, each of which has the potential to provide the necessary reconstruction required by discourse ethics. And in each of these spheres it is possible for knowledge to be defined as the mastery of pragmatic universals (Meadwell, 1994:723). Moreover, the 'dialogue-constitutive universals' are those which a speaker needs to acknowledge in order to understand how to use language to navigate 'reality', whether that reality is objective (natural world) or intersubjective (social world) (Habermas, 1970b:363). In other words, language in its central cases is about something or someone, and so connecting language to reality requires communicative competence (Habermas, 1979a:29). Although language is central to Habermas's social and political theory he does not argue that reality itself is linguistic. There is an extralinguistic world and the task is to show how we can talk about it. Such an ability to talk about reality cannot be clarified through the use of linguistic competence theory alone, but depends on pragmatic theory: 'It is otherwise with the speaker's ability to communicate; this is susceptible only to pragmatic analysis. By "communicative competence" I understand the ability of a speaker oriented to mutual understanding to embed a well-formed sentence in relations to reality' (Habermas, 1979a:29).

For Habermas communicative competence is one's own capacity to understand others whilst ensuring they are also understood (Olafson, 1990:644). In order to achieve this there must be mutual understanding and even agreement (Habermas, 1984:287-288). By becoming involved in communication, each individual ensures dedication to the situations possessed by ideal speech or speech validity. Notably, the situation is free of force (Roderick, 1986:74), or insofar as there is force it is 'the force of the better argument'. The 'ideal speech situation' is the linguistic correlation to the idea of a free society (Olafson, 1990:645-646). There is more to Habermas's theory than communicative competence, but the ideal speech situation has a utopian potential: it opens our eyes to the possibility of a rational, non-coercive society. The fundamental idea of his universal pragmatics is that speaking it is presupposed that 'what the speaker says is true, is sincerely meant, and [normatively] appropriate' (Mann, 2005:51). And through the reconstruction of the universal pragmatics of language we can envisage the

'possibility of reaching agreement as autonomous and equal partners in discussion' (Outhwaite, 1996:11-12).

As I have suggested, the concept of filial piety presupposes inequality between parents and children in Confucian East Asian societies. In this sense, the relationship can be judged as not merely unjust in an intuitive sense, but irrational and unfair. If we follow Habermas's argument, then the role of communicative competence relies on the consensus between individuals who are committed to reaching understanding. The assumption of this ideal speech situation lies in rationally conceived action among individual participants to reach understanding.

Habermas's model of communicative competence with regard to the example of filial piety seems suggestive, because it conceives of the equal and autonomous intersubjective relationship between two parties – the parents and the children – as primarily based on rational action. Without an actual consensual relationship between the two parties, as Habermas argues, it is likely to become a monological relationship rather than a dialogical one among communicating individuals. But as I suggested earlier, one challenge to Habermas comes from the ambiguity of the concept of 'success', and the possibility – derived from Grice – that a pragmatically successful actor can act instrumentally.

There is, however, a second line of challenge for Habermas, and it dovetails with Gadamer's defence of tradition. Habermas believes that by locating rationality in the intersubjective standpoint of language, rather than the monological subject-object relationship, he has provided an *empirical* basis for his critique of society. Yet the validity-claims, while arguably derived from everyday language use, are nonetheless an *abstraction*. In redeeming the validity claims we have to introduce cultural knowledge. In the case of East Asian filial piety there are three 'moments': (a) the critique of patriarchy – or the uncritical operation of relationships of filial piety – where that critique involves pointing out the performative self-contradictions of the practice; (b) the redemption of the validity claim to normative rightness (or other relevant validity-claims), which unlike the first movement must offer something positive; (c) a reconstructed relationship that is not simply a rejection of filial piety. It is quite possible that at stage (b) a 'defender' of filial piety might turn to the atomism of Western society and maintain that social reproduction depends on a non-individualist relationship of parents to children. Indeed, it may be argued that filial piety is essential to the cultural reproduction of society insofar as it supports family relationships. The onus would be on Habermas to show that the validity-claims have a substantive content, for otherwise he is

offering a socially destructive critique. If he fails in this respect, then a Gadamerian 'fusion of horizons' would be a more credible way of subjecting filial piety to criticism (as distinct from radical critique). A more rounded assessment of Habermas's theory requires an exploration of his discourse ethics.

6.4 Discourse Ethics

Seyla Benhabib argues that Habermas's discourse ethics emerges from modern social contract and autonomy theories in the tradition of Locke, Rousseau, and Kant (Benhabib, 1992:24). The idea that the only valid norms are those that can be assented to under certain circumstances characterised as in some way fair is, according to Benhabib, part of a long tradition that stresses autonomy as the source of legitimacy (Benhabib, 1992:24). More specifically, discourse ethics is Kantian in the sense that it comprises various elements associated with the moral philosophy of Kant, which ultimately 'replaces the Kantian categorical imperative by a procedure of moral argument' (Habermas, 1990c:196-198). In other words, it starts with Kant's notion of practical reason (Baynes, 1992:3). What is more, alongside the idea of universal principles as 'regulative' Habermas also stresses that 'only those norms' which provide agreement with 'all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse' may be viewed as being valid (Habermas, 1990c:197). Therefore, the notion of a 'regulative principle' and the idea of 'universalisation' are common to both Kant's categorical imperative and to Habermas's discourse ethics.

We can extend this further, by showing that discourse ethics has four fundamental characteristics. Firstly, it may be considered as *deontological* owing to the fact that it seeks to examine and describe which elements provide commands and action norms with their binding character (Habermas, 1990c:196). Secondly, it may be considered as *cognitivist* owing to the fact that its character is tightly linked with this fact, as it underlines that moral actions are fundamentally dependent on rational insights, and that moral rightness has the quality of 'truth-analogue'; in other words, it is not considered to be equal to truth but is nevertheless similar (Habermas, 1990c:197). Thirdly, it may be considered as *formalist*, owing to the fact that it does not make any effort to stipulate the substance of moral 'truths' (Habermas, 1990c:197). Moreover, there is a lack of any suggested solution concerning which good should be sought. Rather, it seeks to highlight which values and processes we must adopt in order to achieve morally reliable outcomes (Habermas, 1990c:197). Finally, it may be considered as *universalist* owing to the fact that the concept is articulated in the fact that not

all normative principles are considered to be relative in terms of both time and space (Habermas, 1990c:197-198).

In his essay 'Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification', Habermas starts with a recollection of the conviction that the 'Enlightenment's project of establishing a secularized morality free of metaphysical and religious assumptions has failed' (Habermas, 1990c:43). For Habermas, this breakdown has less to do with the secular or anti-metaphysical nature of enlightenment ethics than with the direction taken by developments in ethical theory following the enlightenment (Habermas, 1970a:65). Habermas wanted to counteract these developments with a theory of validity for ethical norms that subjects those norms to rational argument. He criticises rational choice theory for having led to an unreflective use of instrumental or goal-oriented rationality (Habermas, 1970a:66). Habermas's defence of the consensus theory of normative validity is an attempt to present the meaningfulness of reflective questions with reference to the shaping of our ends, as well as to explain the content of ethical norms by representing how normative validity claims can be justified.

The overall purpose of the discourse ethics is ultimately to restructure the moral perspective, as the general point of view whereby there can be the reasonable and unbiased determination of competing normative claims (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994:52). As previously mentioned, the moral theory as proposed by Habermas is a framework surrounding ethical norms justification, which holds a strong position in the Kantian tradition. As has been further discussed by Apel, the Kantian categorical imperative is influenced by discourse ethics, which subsequently becomes a value of 'universalised reciprocity', demanding that there be the reasoning towards and subsequent validation of norms through agreement surrounding the interests and needs of all involved (Apel, 1990:41).

The most significant difference between Habermas's theory and Kant's theory lies in their respective interpretations of procedure (Baynes, 1992:111). Habermas criticises the non-consensual or 'monological' character of the Kantian justification of ethical principles (Habermas, 1990c:65-68). A valid norm must depend on the principle that 'makes consensus possible [which] ensures that only those norms are accepted as valid that express a general will' (Habermas, 1990c:63). Thus, a valid norm articulates a 'common will' (Habermas, 1990c:67). Only such interests can maintain the normative or compulsory force of ethical norms. The procedure for the justification of normative validity claims is somewhat similar: a norm is acceptable if it would be generally consented to in the ideal speech situation. For Kant,

in contrast, ethical principles must satisfy the universalisability condition specified in the categorical imperative, a condition that can be met without a genuine consensus (Baynes, 1992:111-112). For this reason Habermas describes Kant's theory of normative validity as 'monological' (Habermas, 1990c:65-68).

It is acknowledged by Habermas that Kant's autonomous will stands for a strange concept when compared with the moral relationships of communicating individuals, and that Kant's moral solipsism is merged with the ethical principles through a type of pre-established harmonization concerning the considerations of all rational beings (McCarthy, 1978b:326):

> Kant defines moral action with the principle: 'Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'….Every single subject, in examining his maxims of action for their suitability as principles of a universal legislation, must attribute these maxims to every other subject as equally binding….The moral laws are abstractly universal in the sense that, as they hold as universal for me, they must *eo ipso* be thought of as holding for all rational beings. As a result, interaction under such laws dissolves into the actions of solitary and self-sufficient subjects, each of whom must act as though he were the sole existing consciousness; and yet each subject can at the same time be certain that all his actions under moral laws are necessarily and from the outset in harmony with the moral actions of all possible other subjects. (Habermas, 1973b:150-151)

The overall objective of this analysis is that the universality and rationality of action principles 'cannot be decided monologically within the arena of solitary, reflecting moral consciousness' (McCarthy, 1978b:326). Essentially, whether a norm is universalizable – i.e. having the potential to achieve rational agreement – is something that can only be established 'dialogically in unrestricted and unconstrained discourse' (McCarthy, 1978b:326). According to Habermas, a rational will is closely related to the development of communication processes that could be 'formed and discovered' in producing a common will (Habermas, 1973a:177). And that means that there must be an intersubjective process: you cannot form a common will on your own. And he further argues that 'discursively redeemable norms and generalisable interests[35] have a non-conventional core; they are neither merely empirically found already to exist nor simply posited; rather they are, in a non-contingent way, both formed and discovered. This must be so if there can at all be anything like a rational will' (Habermas, 1973a:177).

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[35] This term can be used interchangeably with 'general interest', 'shared interest', 'common interest', and 'equally good for all'. See Thomas McCarthy, 'Practical Discourse: On the Relation to Politics', edited by Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 70.

Habermas holds the same view as Richard Hare, whereby it is possible to demonstrate that ethical norms, which have 'ought' expressions, raise claims to universal validity, by providing a complete explanation of the meaning of ought (Rehg, 1994:47). Hare argues that substantive universalisation is possible from the language of morality alone: claims are prescriptions, which must necessarily be universalised, by asking each person affected by a prescription whether he or she would assent to the prescription (Hare, 1964:20). Although there are differences in their approach – Hare endorses a form of utilitarianism – Habermas likewise derives moral principles from an analysis of the concept of 'ought', which he argues is implicit in communicatively competent speakers' practices (Habermas, 1990c:64).

Essentially, normative validity claims are normally indirectly posed in daily interaction, most commonly through the utterance of grammatical or directive imperatives (Heath, 2001:189-195). For instance, when asking someone to open a door, the speaker is providing a normative validity claim; it is not considered to be inappropriate to ask someone to carry out a task assuming that such a request is made politely and without causing inconvenience (Finlayson, 2005:32-33). When such utterances are disputed, problematic norms are then raised and made clear, with validity claims subsequently raised (Heath, 2001:169). Should the validity of the norm be disputed, practical discourse is then initiated (Heath, 2001:234).

Notably, the discursive process suggested by Habermas concerning the raising and settling of normative validity is similar to the analysis presented by Hare, although Habermas stresses the need to reflect upon needs and interests (Rehg, 1994:35, 59). For Hare, we simply take preferences as given and then universalise them, whereas for Habermas the universalisation process acts on and changes desires. On Hare's account any action's effects which are considered to be relevant to an individual's requirements or interests may be taken into account when justifying any decision[36] (Hare, 1964:68-69).

From the standpoint of Habermas, the evidence provided in order to justify the norm includes a variety of results and impacts which would ultimately occur if all individuals were to follow such norms (Habermas, 1990c:65). Moreover, the results of such a process must be critically analysed (Rehg, 1994:53-55), and this again is a departure from the monological perspective of Kant and Hare's attempt to combine Kantian universalism with utilitarianism. For Kant and Hare there seems to be a single act of calculation, whereas for Habermas there is

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[36] I acknowledge comments made by Dr. Paul Graham in which he points out the affinities and differences between Habermas and Hare. A big difference between the two is that for Hare, desires do count. Hare's 'universal prescriptivism' entails: (1) The claim that 'ought-language' is prescriptive (similar to Habermas); (2) 'Ought-language' is universal in character (Kantian – again, similar to Habermas); and (3) We 'go the rounds' of all those who will be affected by our actions – this means adding up their desires (not Habermasian).

a continuous dialogue. One result of this is that we never achieve a fully legitimate society, because the universalisation principle is regulative and not substantive. Where Habermas agrees with Hare against Kant is that substantive principles – for example, the rights accorded to individuals in a legal system – will be general rather than universal. This is because human beings are not capable of the fine judgements that are required by the universalisation process (Habermas, 1990c:63).

In contrast to Kant, who holds that reason and inclination are two contradictory concepts, communicative rationality provides a framework in which participants must consider the needs and interests of all individuals in order to agree on what are 'generalisable needs' and 'generalisable interests'. Despite the fact that both interests and needs are subjective, it is nevertheless recognised that they can be generalised and shared through discussion and interaction. Coming to an agreement to what needs and interests will be generalised amounts to the formation of a common will. Accordingly, will formation – which cannot be disconnected from interests and needs – is an outcome of communication[37]. Idiosyncratic interests and needs cannot be generalised. Accordingly, an ethical norm which is considered to be universally valid – meaning that it has been subjected to the universalisation principle and that itself is universalisable – must ultimately stem from interests and needs that can be generalised. Importantly, unanimous understanding, comprehension, knowledge and consensus can be achieved through mutual role-taking in relation to communication (Kaplan, 2003:117).

Habermas clearly rejects egoism: the notion that one can generalise from one's own needs and interests. But he also rejects the 'golden rule' – 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' – because that rule involves no discursive will-formation. Ultimately, such interests and experiences must undergo reflective criticism and subsequently made intersubjective or otherwise 'transcended' (Habermas, 1990c:67-68). Through discourse, individual desires are subjected to criticism, and accordingly understood, explicated, and agreed upon by those who share the same world. Some individual wants must be considered to be unacceptable (Heath, 2001:231). The consensus theory of normative rightness implies that anti-social interests cannot be placed within the category of generalisable interests; some such

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[37] Discursive will-formation, which creates generalisable interests, forms the 'bridge principle' between the understanding and clarification surrounding need and the universalisation (U) value: 'This bridging principle, which makes consensus possible, ensures that only those norms are accepted as valid that express a general will. As Kant noted time and again, moral norms must be suitable for expression as "universal law"', Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Matt.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 63.

interests are conceptually incoherent and thus incomprehensible (Heath, 2001:233-234), and any cooperative enterprise will reject them straightaway (Habermas, 1990c:66). Other claims to universalisation may be more difficult to reject, but a process of discursive will-formation will be capable, once it has achieved a level of sophistication, of ruling out the less obviously partisan interests. For example, the demand that the vote be restricted to a particular ethnic minority is a clearly 'un-generalisable' interest, but the holding of an election at a time that disadvantages a particular group is less obviously 'un-generalisable'. A long-term process of discourse and discursive will-formation should be capable of weeding out the second case as well as the first. However, this example may be problematic, because we come up against the challenge of cultural context.

The overall process of discursive will-formation, whereby individuals seek to achieve comprehension and consensus regarding generalisable needs and interests is not applicable to value preferences considered culturally specific. Rather, cultural values can be considered as 'at best candidates for embodiment in norms that are designed to express a general interest' (Habermas, 1990c:104). Accordingly, there must be a distinction between those questions which are 'evaluative' and those which are 'moral'. Importantly, only the latter are built upon a foundation of generalisable interests; the former, on the other hand, are built purely upon those values and traditions which are cultural or historical [38] (Habermas, 1990c:108). Importantly, therefore, moral questions are only viewed as being universally obligatory through discursive will-formation, which subsequently establishes whether or not such values are able to explain, define and normalise generalisable needs. With this in mind, it should be acknowledged that there is a close link between particular interests and needs and the forms of life which assign significance and value to specific traditions and cultures. Accordingly, these must be viewed as 'ethical-existential' questions, which 'are of a far more pressing concern for us', and 'may well be of greater concern to us than the question of justice' (Habermas, 1993:151). Regrettably, answers cannot be provided to these questions in such a way that all

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[38] Habermas distinguishes a meta-ethical discourse built on the difference between the right and the good conforming to the issues surrounding a moral question of justice and an ethical question of self-understanding: 'Moral questions can in principle be decided rationally, i.e., in terms of justice or the generalizability of interests. Evaluative questions present themselves at the most general level as issues of the good life (or of self-realization); they are accessible to rational discussion only within the unproblematic horizon of a concrete historical form of life or the conduct of an individual life', Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Matt.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 108.

individuals' needs and interests are catered to; rather, the answers are provided in relation to specific settings, perspectives and cultures (see Chapter 7 for more detail).

Essentially, Habermas endorses a form of ethical cognitivism (Heath, 2001:219), meaning that ethical norms can be either true or false (Heath, 2001:170). However, for Habermas, ethical norms are not true or false, but rather valid or invalid (Martin, 2009:81, 87). Normative validity claims are separate from theoretical truth claims, owing to the fact that the former concern normative statements, that is, 'the normative reality of what is considered to be intersubjectively recognised as a legitimate interpersonal relationship', and the latter descriptive statements, which concern 'the external reality of what is' stated as being an already apparent 'state of affairs' (Habermas, 1979a:28).

Importantly, it is stated that not all norms are universal in nature, nor do they all stem from universal or generalisable interests. This is because not all norms which appear in the case of daily social interactions are considered to be ethical norms (Rehg, 1994:102-103). While the majority of social norms do comprise an element of ethical content, it nevertheless remains that not all social norms may be considered to be ethical norms (Sitton, 2003:136-138). Habermas further defines non-ethical social norms by outlining the key differences in terms of their processes. With ethical norms we are concerned to establish whether or not it is applicable in a universal sense (Heath, 2001:239). Moreover, a validity claim for a non-ethical social norm would be justified following the agreement of a group of people defined by shared interests or characteristics (Habermas, 1990c:103-105). This means that ethical theory based on the universalisation principle needs to be able to establish universal agreement, apart from society and culture memberships (Habermas, 1990c:104). Habermas therefore accords particular cultural values only a marginal role in relation to ethical norms (Habermas, 1990c:104). Against Habermas it might be argued that the expression and understanding of non-universal – culturally specific – needs, desires and values are fundamental in cultural life and self-actualisation. These are the values which provide substance when seeking to gain an understanding of the 'good life' as opposed to 'just' life in general in the context of our own cultures (Benhabib, 1986: 317-18). Here we come up against Gadamer's challenge: the validity claims can only be settled by recourse to cultural norms, such that we say either that the cultural norms can be fully 'linguistified' – meaning that they can subject to discursive analysis – or there is an element that resist analysis in terms of validity claims. These are 'prejudices'. Gadamer argues that this is the point beyond which reason cannot penetrate. Habermas has to demonstrate that he is wrong.

6.5 Principle of Universalisation

The attempt to devise a cognitivist theory ultimately depends on showing that a rational consensus is possible, where that consensus substitutes for Kant's categorical imperative, which ultimately guarantees that 'only those norms [which] are [considered to be] accepted as valid express a general will' (Habermas, 1990c:63). As has been recognised by Kant, moral norms must be viewed as appropriate for the expression of 'universal law' (Habermas, 1990c:63). Various prerequisites need to be ensured before any norm can be considered genuine and acceptable:

> (U) *All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation). (Habermas, 1990c:65)

According to Habermas, what makes (U) stand apart from other formulations of a universalisability test is that all individuals need to consider each other's perspectives (Habermas, 1990c:66), not simply in monological form, but through open discourse. Each individual must be free to communicate his or her standpoint. In such an instance, the on-going argument within the group will illustrate whether the norm under discussion harms some interests more than others, or whether intersubjective recognition can be accorded to it because it communicates a genuinely neutral and common interest.

The argument posed by Habermas in support of the consensual (non-monological) universalisation principle shows that a significant amount of its strength is derived from the work produced by Karl-Otto Apel in relation to the theory of transcendental pragmatics (Finlayson, 2005:31). Essentially, from the standpoint of Habermas, communicative competence and its underlying pragmatic rules, as well as the rules governing validity claims and their implementation, are simply norms associated with communicative rationality, as well as practical rationality (McCarthy, 1978b:320-321). And he attempts to steer away from the transcendental claims made by Apel, instead opting to defend the generalisations of universal pragmatics as being generalisations of a contingent universal nature (Baynes, 1992:103). Importantly, generalisation in relation to our speech acts are contingent upon empirical validation and falsification (Habermas, 1990c:79-80). As a means of further supporting his argument, Habermas appeals to the notion of performative contradiction [39] (Habermas,

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[39] Although Habermas attributes the notion of 'performative contradiction' to Apel, the concept is derived from G.E. Moore's notion of 'pragmatic contradiction'.

1990c:88), a concept which we have already discussed. Kaplan accurately describes the validation of Habermas's discourse ethics as follows:

> The justification of discourse ethics is based on the argument from 'performative contradiction' whereby a speaker who disagrees with universalism relies on the very discursive practice he supposedly wishes to challenge. The performance of communication contradicts the content of communication. Given the impossibility of contesting universalism without presupposing it, the transcendental-pragmatic rules of argumentation [have] universal validity. (Kaplan, 2003:116)

Essentially, the results would ultimately highlight similarities to a transcendental argument, even though Habermas goes to great lengths to stress that his critical assumptions are empirical in nature (Habermas, 1990c:98). The idea of a performative contradiction – or performative self-contradiction – is intended to show that any sane person must necessarily raise validity claims when he or she addresses another. Habermas accepts that one could just keep talking while simultaneously denying the validity claims. But no society could survive on this basis. (This brings us back to the issue of success. Habermas seems to be implying that a society simply could not function if its members insisted on rejecting the force of validity claims. Yet many 'highly distorted' societies reproduce themselves biologically and materially and so the onus is on Habermas to clarify what constitutes success).

Consequently, it is argued by Habermas that the principle of universalisation derives from the 'pragmatic universals' and 'presuppositions' associated with communication. There are three standard pragmatic universals:

1-1. Every subject with competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.

1-2. a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.

b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.

c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.[40]

1-3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1.1) and (1.2). (Habermas, 1990c:89)

Importantly, anyone who successfully acknowledges the rules associated with discourse – i.e. anyone who 'seriously tries to discursively redeem normative claims to validity'– is subsequently obliged to acknowledge the principle of universalisation (Habermas, 1990c:92-

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[40] Habermas borrows all the pragmatic rules mentioned in Discourse Ethics from Robert Alexy, 'A Theory of Practical Discourse' is in *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, edited by Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmayr (Cambridge, Matt.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 150-190.

93), the content of which equates to the following rule: 'a contested norm cannot meet with the consent of the participants in a practical discourse unless (U) holds, that is, unless all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual' (Habermas, 1990c:93). If this is a result of the rules associated with discourse, the fundamental principle associated with discourse ethics itself is therefore implied: (D) 'Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in practical discourse' (Habermas, 1990c:93).

It (D) is intended to establish and validate the general idea associated with discourse ethics; it provides a general overview of the core content of the theory. On the other hand, however, it is considered that (U) has a more 'active' stance as a decree of argumentation (Abizadeh, 2005:199). This suggests that, in order to adhere to the understandings and vision associated with the discourse ethics, the discursive participants must ensure adherence to the rule when considering and debating the validity of norms (Habermas, 1990c:93).

However, the universal validity associated with discourse ethics remains incomplete: should it be fully justified with consideration to argumentative practice, we then understand that the opportunity for this type of practice varies in relation to different types of human society. This interaction type has possibly been refined in our own scientific civilization (Rasmussen, 1990:58-59). Furthermore, according to Habermas, discourse ethics states that each genuine and verified norm must satisfy the principle of universalisation. It would mean that filial piety to be valid must pass a universalisation test. Presumably, this does not mean that every person in the world should recognise the practice as valid, but only those affected by it. But if it is only true for a portion of humanity then this implies that there are cultural practices which have relative validity. So filial piety is valid for East Asians but not Europeans. A better interpretation would be that any number of different cultural practices are compatible with the universalisable validity claims. Yet this will only work if we say they are 'different but not incompatible': if filial piety is incompatible with family ties based on equality we cannot then say that these two cultural forms are equally valid. Habermas recognises this to a degree but the element of argumentation is, he argues, common to all cultures:

> This is why there is no form of sociocultural life that is not at least implicitly geared to maintaining communicative action by means of argument, be the actual form of argumentation ever so rudimentary and the institutionalization of discursive consensus building ever so inchoate. (Habermas, 1990c:100)

What is lacking in the analysis set out above is the notion of a developmental ethic. We need to be able to explain how a moral community evolves and how it is 'reconstructed' through the application of the universalisation principle. It is here that the relationship between what Hegel terms *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* is important.

Chapter 7: Morality and Ethics in the Views of Habermas and Gadamer

The aim of this chapter is to clarify the advantages associated with Habermas's discourse ethics compared with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Habermas, one of the strongest defenders of moral universalism, introduces a systematic distinction between ethics and morality. Ethics – as he uses the term – applies to members of a distinctive group or community.[41] There are goods, values, and responsibilities which ultimately pertain to us as members of such a group. Morality – or the moral point of view – has, for Habermas, a universal reach. Morality is concerned with issues of justice which fundamentally concern all human beings.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics neglects the distinction between ethics and morality because it focuses on the descriptive aspect of human understanding, rather than considering the normative grounding of the social and political world. In this chapter, the focus is on how Habermas employs Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-moral development theory. There are a number of reasons why Kohlberg is important for Habermas. First, one of the aims of Habermas's research programme is to reconstruct moral theory on an empirical basis, and Kohlberg's moral development theory seems to provide an empirical confirmation of his discourse theory of ethics. Second, in his explication of the moral point of view based on the principle of universalisation, Habermas is concerned with the underlying principles of morality that transcend the contextual and historical ethical life. There is a third reason why I am discussing Kohlberg: his theory of moral development provides a challenge to the practice of filial piety, and thus his work is a bridge between Habermas's discourse ethics and the question of the normative grounding of political authority in East Asian societies. The values that underpin filial piety may be described as an example of *Sittlichkeit*, which from a Habermasian perspective must be engaged with from the standpoint of morality (*Moralität*). Fourth, we need to be able to apply Habermas's theory to concrete manifestations of culture, and Kohlberg provides this, but he does so in a way that makes manifest a problematic aspect of Habermas's discourse ethics, namely, its teleological nature. Discourse ethics can transcend cultural differences, but only if we adopted a pluralistic approach, which recognises that there are different forms of moral reasoning. These four points, while distinct, are closely related for all are concerned with the distinction between immanence and transcendence: Kohlberg's

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[41] The distinction corresponds to that which Hegel makes between *Sittlichkeit* (ethics) and *Moralität* (morality). Habermas does not follow Hegel in how he relates them.

theory is a modern attempt to bridge the gap between immanence and transcendence through the idea that there are moral structures implicit in everyday morality (*Sittlichkeit*), but he does so in a way makes Eastern culture appear morally inferior.

7.1 Ethical Theory of Habermas and Gadamer

The core of communicative action theory rests on the idea that intersubjectively rational communication amongst interlocutors can be reached through consensual agreement. In Habermas's view, the universal principles of rationality lie in the mutual recognition of communicative competence. The idea of communicative competence entails universal presuppositions of participation in communication, which ultimately provide for undistorted communication amongst speakers (Kisiel, 1978:179). These presuppositions, once they are made explicit, allow us imagine an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1990c:88, 204).

As has been seen in the previous chapter, Habermas presents his theory of discourse ethics as being fundamentally based on Kantian formalism (Rehg, 1994:31), although without the alleged 'monism' of Kant's moral theory. As observed in Chapter 6, discourse ethics proposes that there are four essential characteristics of communicative competence, all of which are Kantian in orientation: deontological, formalist, cognitivist, and universalist (Habermas, 1990c:196-197). The task for Habermas is to offer a justificatory yardstick for the 'moral point of view' based on impartiality (Baynes, 1992:108-109). In other words, Habermas adopts a form of the Kantian categorical imperative in order to support his moral theory (Habermas, 1990c:196-198). With particular emphasis placed on the principle of universalisation, he defends the consensus theory of normative validity (Bernstein, 1995:181).

In a nutshell, Habermas offers a discursively based version of the categorical imperative; agents are rationally required to universalise their needs and wants through a process of reaching agreement with all those who would be affected by any proposed maxim. The key difference from Kant is that this is a genuinely intersubjective – dialogical – process, and not something that can be undertaken by agents outside of an on-going discourse. A corollary of this is that discursive will formation is an empirical process, with the universal element, which is derived from the validity claims implicit in everyday language, acting as a regulative component.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics focuses on the temporality of human existence such that the main purpose of his philosophical inquiry is not to justify norms but rather to understand the historicity of our understanding of the

world. In other words, the point of departure of his philosophical hermeneutics lies in the revival of the ontological theory of understanding; put simply Gadamer is concerned with what exists, rather than with how something is justified. Certainly, there is a normative – and critical – dimension to his work, but this is secondary to the existential component. As he argues: '[my] real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing' (Gadamer, 1989:xxviii). Hence, his philosophical hermeneutics does not provide a justification of universal norms. Gadamer never offers a theory of ethics or morality in any of his writings (Kelly, 1988:370). Consequently, he cannot provide a normative grounding for political authority, nor can he fundamentally criticise cultural-political practices such as filial piety.

There is absent in Gadamer's work a regulative ideal. Various critics[42] including Habermas, criticise him on precisely these grounds (Apel, 1994c:38). These critics would accept that he has made a contribution to our hermeneutic understanding of texts and practices, but ultimately what is at stake is a political issue, namely, that hermeneutics becomes all-encompassing; it determines the validity of practice even though Gadamer eschews normative issues (Betti, 1990:187; Hirsch, 1967:147). His linguistic turn, philosophical hermeneutics, is merely grounded in ontological-existential meaning, and thus fails to provide any prescriptive criterion or standard.

For Habermas, the three validity claims – objective truth, subjective truthfulness, and normative rightness – go some way to explaining aspects of the social life of the modern world, which is different from the 'magical-mythical' undifferentiated worldviews of the pre-modern world. In other words, for Habermas, modernity entails differentiation. Specifically, the modern world is characterised by the differentiation of three worlds – objective, subjective, and intersubjective – each of which corresponds to the three validity claims of objective truth, subjective truthfulness, and normative rightness (Habermas, 1984:305-308). Gadamer, in contrast, projects an undifferentiated social world, and this has implications for filial piety and

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[42] Some critics argue that Gadamer fails to provide a regulative ideal or a normative criterion in relation to the understanding of textual interpretation, such that Gadamerian hermeneutics ultimately leads to a subjective relativistic position. See Karl-Otto Apel, 'Regulative ideas or Sense-Event?: An Attempt to Determine the Logos of Hermeneutics', in *The Question of Hermeneutics: Essays in Honor of Joseph J. Kockelmans*, edited by T. Stapleton (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), pp.37-60, Karl-Otto Apel, *Selected Essays, Vol. 1. Toward a Transcendental Semiotics,* edited by E. Mendieta, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), Emilio Betti, 'Hermeneutics as the Methodology of the *Geisteswissenshaften*', in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, edited by G. Ormiston and A. Schrift, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 159-197, Jürgen Habermas, (1988) *On the Logic of The Social Sciences,* translated by S. W. Nicholson and J. A. Stark, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

its role in underpinning political authority in East Asian culture. In a differentiated world we would make a distinction between family life and social life, and between different forms of obedience – familial, social, political – such that each form of obedience has a distinct normative basis. Furthermore, an individual will find himself in multiple worlds so that being 'modern' entails the capacity to adopt different roles. It is important to distinguish pluralism and differentiation. Gadamer assumes the world is plural – there are different 'horizons' – but he still holds onto the idea that there is a single social world and the 'fusing' of the horizons is the means by which we cement that world. His ontologisation of language is illustrative of this fusion. Whereas for Habermas language is central it nonetheless functions only as regulative idea – or, more specifically, the counterfactually presupposed validity claims are regulative – for Gadamer language is 'being'. Language is ontological. The result is that Gadamer cannot recognise the power relations that underlie language; he cannot identify the strategic uses of language. To a degree Gadamer can articulate the validity claims of objective truth and subjective truthfulness, but his philosophical hermeneutics fails to provide a standard for, or test of, normative rightness.

Certainly, like Habermas, Gadamer conceives of dialogue as an effective means of reaching understanding. However, the two thinkers differ on their understanding of what it means to reach an understanding. Gadamer argues that the role of dialogue is the most important element in his research scheme, which culminates in reaching an understanding between conversational participants (Gadamer, 1981:166). And he argues that there are two fundamental types of dialogue: a dialogue between the author and the reader of a text, where what is at issue is the grasping of a subject matter (*Sache*), and a conversation which takes place with other persons through intersubjective communication (Bernstein, 1983:162). The latter comes closest to Habermas's normative ideal, but because it, like the understanding of a text, is based on a fusion of horizons it fails to provide the practical regulative ideal which can orient our practical and political lives (Bernstein, 1983:163). Here we see an example of an undifferentiated world: whereas for Habermas there is a distinction between 'worlds' – the objective world and the intersubjective world, each raising distinct validity claims, for Gadamer the methods of understanding are identical in both cases. Reaching an understanding of a subject matter (*Sache*) is identical to reaching a normative understanding. Applied to filial piety this has interesting implications: we can fuse horizons in understanding the history of the practice by, for example, reading the texts of Confucius and other writers, but for Habermas that is separate from seeking to justify the practice as it operates today. In his excessive

emphasis on the elucidation of ontological understanding of the world, Gadamer never provides the criteria for determining the validity of a norm.

If we follow Gadamer's research scheme as a disclosure of the descriptive use of 'is', then it will be clear that the exercise of filial piety in Confucian East Asian societies does not propose as a normative rule a relationship between parent and child based on equality and reciprocity (Keul, 2002:258). Only by shifting from 'is' (ontological) to 'ought' (normative) do we open up the possibility of confronting the power relations that underpin filial piety. As McCarthy notes, the power of language lies in a *practical* exercise of a speech situation of what ought to be (McCarthy, 1978:282). This observation should not be misunderstood. It is not that equality is being assumed and Gadamer's hermeneutics is found wanting because it cannot articulate such equality. But rather the argument is about language as necessarily practical (i.e. pragmatic). If we limit language use to the explication of the ontological then we do not do justice to language itself. This goes back to the observation that demands for obedience expressed in the filially pious relationship is a performative contradiction, because the father is simultaneously treating his son or daughter as a both a subordinate and as an equal.

Whereas Gadamer emphasises the descriptive understanding of human existence without providing a regulative ideal of normative theory, Habermas seeks to provide a justificatory norm. For Gadamer the notion of 'historically-effected consciousness' describes a situation in which human beings cannot triumph over their own historical finitude, with the consequence that the hermeneutical stance is unable to overcome an ethics shaped by a particular tradition. In his theory of discourse ethics, Habermas suggests a procedural theory which is able to present a universal principle guaranteeing universal moral standards. In contrast, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics implicitly refutes the possibility of such a procedural theory (Kelly, 1988:370). Whereas the ethical theory of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is insufficient to deal with the problems of legitimising and justifying universal norms Habermas attempts to reach beyond the relativistic implications of hermeneutics by arguing for a theory of rationality which is not limited to, or contained by, a specific tradition. The objective of his ethical theory is to present a universal procedure (Rasmussen, 1990:63) for establishing an ethical standard, and not merely a meta-ethical one: 'A philosophical ethics not restricted to meta-ethical statements is possible today only if we can construct general presuppositions of communication and procedures for justifying norms and values' (Habermas, 1979a:97).

According to Habermas, the general presuppositions of communication are grounded in the 'always already' daily rational communication, which is fundamentally oriented towards reaching understanding (Habermas, 1990c:163, McCarthy, 1978:325). The discursively redeemed discourse shapes a procedure for justifying normative validity claims, encompassing all three aspects of truth, truthfulness, and moral rightness, as established by communicative action (Johnson, 1991:184).

As discussed in Chapter 6, Habermas suggests a basic principle of universalisation in order to generate concrete moral norms:

> (U) *All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation). (Habermas, 1990c:65)

Habermas goes on to argue that when the principle of universalisation is grounded in the presuppositions of rational communication, such a principle assumes a basic principle of '(D) Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse' (Habermas, 1990c:66). Therefore, it is argued by Dews that these two principles comprise the core of Habermas's conceptions of morality and ethical theory:

> I prefer a relatively narrow concept of morality. Morality refers to practical questions which can be decided with reasons – to conflicts of action which can be resolved through consensus. Only those questions are moral in a strict sense which can be answered in a meaningful way from the Kantian standpoint of universalization – of what all could wish for. At the same time, I prefer a weak concept of moral theory….it should justify the moral point of view, and nothing more. (Dews, 1986:170-171)

For Habermas, discursive rationality aims to create a rationally motivated agreement (Bernstein, 1990:64). Essentially, he seeks to show how trans-cultural ethical norms can be justified in a cultural context. In so doing he echoes – without repeating – Hegel's attempt to reconcile *Sittlichkeit* and *Moralität*. As we will see in the rest of the chapter Kohlberg's empirical moral theory plays a crucial role in this task. One important issue is whether a theory of individual moral development presupposes a theory of social development. Hegel was dismissive of Confucius, arguing that he offered merely a popular morality[43] – or, put

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[43] For a brief discussion of Hegel's reception of Confucius, see Young Kun Kim, 'Hegel's Criticism of Chinese Philosophy', *Philosophy East and West*, 28, no. 2 (1978), pp. 173-180.

another way, he was a populariser of everyday morality (*Sittlichkeit*). Although he accepted that the Chinese were capable of abstract thought – taking mathematics as his example – he argued that Confucius was not a speculative thinker (Kim, 1978:175). The immanence of Confucian culture meant that its moral practices – including filial piety – can be only a 'moment' in the development of *Geist*. There are difficulties with this teleological approach and I will suggest a way of viewing filial piety that avoids it, but is nonetheless consistent with Habermas's discourse ethics.

7.2 Kohlberg's 'Stages' of Moral Development

To understand why Kohlberg is important to Habermas we need to consider how Habermas conceives of the role of the philosopher. In his view, the philosopher is not an usher (*Platzanweiser*) and judge, but is a 'stand-in (*Platzhalter*)' for mediating 'empirical theories with strong universalistic claims' (Habermas, 1990c:15). Habermas claims that the core of his philosophical research interests lies in the collaborative synthesis between philosophy and science (Habermas, 1990c:16), and Kohlberg's moral development theory is employed as part of his attempt to reconstruct social theory as a 'universalistic science' (Kellner, 1992:278). In other words, one of the basic aims of his research programme is to provide a 'cooperative social science' between theoretical knowledge and the empirical analysis of social reality. In order to reconstruct the justificatory basis of his theory of discourse ethics, he draws strongly on Kohlberg's psychological moral development theory, as well as the 'reconstruction of moral intuitions' of philosophy (Habermas, 1990c:33).

Habermas identifies his moral theory – discourse ethics – with Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology. He argues that the universalistic claims of the discourse ethics are closely related with Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Rasmussen, 1993:571). Such stages are levels of learning, which taken together provide an empirical description of 'discursive will formation' and which are also 'reflective form[s] of communicative action' (Habermas, 1990c:66, 201). In short, the two key aspects of Kohlberg's theory are, first, that the key source of morality is moral reasoning and people become moral by acquiring increasingly complex structures of moral reasoning (Krebs, 2005:2). The main influence on his work was Piaget, who was a child psychologist concerned primarily with cognitive development. Piaget's idea that cognition is acquired through 'stages' is adopted by Kohlberg. Whereas Piaget focused mainly on cognitive development, with some reference to moral reasoning as a form of cognition, Kohlberg was almost exclusively concerned with moral

development. His research was based on semi-structured interviews with children in different age groups (normally, around 10, 13, and 16). The children were presented with a series of dilemmas and asked their responses to what happened. The best known dilemma is that of 'Heinz Steals the Drug':

> In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $1,000, which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: 'No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it'. So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg, 1963:19)

The responses of the children were then mapped on to six stages (and three levels) of sequential moral development. Set out in the table below are the stages, with *sample* responses to the Heinz dilemma. It is important to stress that categorization is not based on approval or disapproval of Heinz's action,[44] but rather the kind of reasoning the research subject – i.e. the children – give:

Level 1: Pre-conventional morality	Stage 1: Punishment-obedience orientation Sample response: No – Heinz will go to prison.
	Stage 2: Instrumental relativist orientation Sample response: Yes – Heinz will be happier.
Level 2: Conventional morality	Stage 3: Good Boy-Nice Girl orientation Sample response: Yes – Heinz wants to be a good husband.
	Stage 4: Law and order orientation Sample response: No – it is illegal to take it.
Level 3: Post-conventional morality	Stage 5: Social contract orientation Sample response: (a) Yes – human rights take priority over law. Sample response: (b) No – chemist has right to a fair return.
	Stage 6: Universal ethical principle orientation Sample response: Yes: (a) prior to (b). Sample response: No – others need the drug as badly – all lives count equally.

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[44] Nor is there agreement at all stages. Note that different sample responses are given at stages 5 and 6. Kohlberg is interested in the *type* of reasoning the children provide, and not straightforwardly what they say.

In addition to Piaget – who was clearly the main influence on him – Kohlberg was influenced in the development of his cognitive theory of morality by both George Herbert Mead and John Rawls, although the latter was also influenced by Kohlberg. In his agreement with Kantian ethics – which is grounded in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* – Kohlberg asserts that the role of 'Kant and modern natural-law theory' is concerned with sharpening and providing the 'nature of moral judgement' noted by Mead (Habermas, 1990c:119), and '[the] analyses point to the features of a "moral point of view", suggesting truly moral reasoning involves features such as impartiality, universalisability, reversibility and prescriptivity' (Kohlberg, 1982:524, Kohlberg, 1981:190-191). For Habermas, on the other hand, the central importance of Kohlberg's theory lies predominantly in the empirical analysis of the developmental stages from infancy to adolescence to adulthood (Habermas, 1990c:117). As suggested above in the table to the Heinz example, Kohlberg maintains that there are three primary levels of moral development: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels. Each of three levels is divided into two phases and thus Kohlberg's moral development stages comprises six stages (Kohlberg, 1981:409-410). It is important to elaborate on these levels and stages.

The preconventional level can be divided into two stages. At Stage 1, the child learns 'punishment and obedience' (Kohlberg, 1981:409). At this level, the child is subject to cultural rules and authority in order to avoid rule-breaking and punishment (Kohlberg, 1981:409; Habermas, 1990c:123). So the child responds to the fear of punishment – 'Heinz will go to prison'. Stage 2 is known as 'the stage of individual instrumental purpose and exchange' (Kohlberg, 1981:409), which is characterised by the fact that, as individuals, we develop increasing awareness of the notion that we can only pursue our own interests if we simultaneously acknowledge the interest of others and their drive to pursue their own interests (Lerner, 2001:393). This is not reciprocity or impartiality, but a purely instrumental process of accounting for others' interests. In thinking about the above example the child puts him- or herself in the position of Heinz and considers what will make Heinz happy. This is not impartiality because the child does not try to think what would make each person affected by Heinz's action happy. The focus is entirely on Heinz.

The conventional level stresses roles and 'community'. Stage 3 is described by Kohlberg as 'the stage of mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and conformity' (Kohlberg, 1981:410). It is characterised by the giving of consideration to the interests of others, remaining loyal and committed to one's roles, and also satisfying the expectations

defined by one's immediate surroundings and reference groups (Lerner, 2001:393-394). Ultimately, we consider that there is a fundamental need to be viewed by ourselves and others in a positive light: we treat people in the ways in which we ourselves would like to be treated (Habermas, 1990c:123). But this still stops a long way short of impartiality, because thinking about others is tied to roles and not to an abstract conception of human agency. So in the example, the child thinks that Heinz wants to be – or ought to be – a good husband. The role occupation is extended at stage 4, which Kohlberg argues is 'the stage of social system and conscience maintenance' (Kohlberg, 1981:410). Throughout this stage moral agents develop a 'law and order' perspective. Notably, the loyalty witnessed during Stage 3 is transferred from those closest to us (husband/wife, parent/child, friend/friend) to society as a much larger and anonymous entity (Lerner, 2001:394). We opt to do what is considered to be right in the eyes of the law (Habermas, 1990c:124). Nonetheless, our community or society still does not encompass all human beings.

The postconventional level is ultimately defined by the fact that moral decisions are made by reference to superior principles, values and rights and these must be agreed upon by all. Stage 5 is described by Kohlberg as being 'the stage of prior rights and social contract or utility' (Kohlberg, 1981:411), with the emphasis on a natural rights approach (Habermas, 1990c:124). We are able to acknowledge that there are principles that transcend our particular society or culture (Lerner, 2001:394). Finally, Stage 6 requires that universal principles be followed by all individuals (Garz, 2009:44-45). This, Kohlberg states, is 'the stage of universal ethical principles' (Kohlberg, 1981:412), with values comprising justice, equality and respect. Accordingly, this stage requires the logical consideration of principles which can be assented to and followed by all who will be affected by them (Habermas, 1990c:124-125).

Some reflection on the idea of a convention would be helpful in distinguishing levels 2 and 3 and also stages 5 and 6 within the post-conventional level. The three levels refer to the ability to understand and criticize a convention. A 'convention' is a relatively concrete rule, which is widely respected, and guides human behaviour. Typically, a convention or set of conventions constitute a particular society or culture, so we might talk about the 'conventions of British society' in contrast to the 'conventions of Korean society'. However, conventions can be supra-national: if the human rights set out in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights are widely respected and guide human action then they will become conventions. Pre-conventional thinkers have no conception of a convention. Post-conventional thinkers possess the ability to employ universal concepts which bring into question conventions. This marks the

distinction between levels 1 and 2 on the one side and level 3 on the other, but it does make stage 5 ambiguous. Human rights could be conventional or post-conventional.

In the Heinz example the difference between stages 5 and 6 is significant. At both stages different – and conflicting – sample responses are provided. At stage 5 there is a conflict between 'human rights' and the idea of 'fair return', whereas at stage 6 human rights are taken to be prior to a 'fair return', but that is now in conflict with a highly abstract idea of universality: 'all lives count equally'. This suggests that when we get to stage 6 we view our reasoning at stage 5 as still conventional. This has considerable significance for the debate between Habermas and Gadamer and the role that filial piety plays in East Asian culture. However, before discussing these issues I want to raise some problems with Kohlberg's theory, drawing (briefly) on the feminist perspective of Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1993) and (more extensively) on the evolutionary perspective of Dennis Krebs (Krebs, 2005)[45]. Gilligan is an important critic of Kohlberg, who brings out the notion that moral reasoning can take different forms. Her work is concerned with sex (or gender) differences whereas I am concerned with cultural differences. In essence I pick up her distinction between 'abstract' (male) and 'situated' (female) forms of reasoning but apply it to culture. My discussion of Krebs is more extended because he develops the idea of pluralism. The motivation for all of this discussion is to criticise Habermas in order to defend him: I want to retain what is valuable in Habermas, but abandon what I see as the unacceptable teleological aspects of his work. But this also means defending the universalist aspects of Habermas against feminist (and communitarian) critics. Krebs is a more useful source than Gilligan because he does argue that human beings are capable of universalist reasoning, but that such reasoning exists side by side with more particularist motivations.

7.3 Critical Perspectives on Kohlberg

I have outlined the levels and stages in Kohlberg's theory, but there are a number of general points about the structure of the theory that are important to note. First, as I argued earlier reasoning is what matters (Krebs, 2005:2). There can be disagreement over what we should do, but it is the underlying structures of mind (or cognition) that interest Kohlberg. Second, the stages are qualitatively different. Moving up the stages involves a major disruption to existing thinking and a fundamental reconstruction of moral reasoning, such that the differences

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[45] Dennis Krebs, 'An Evolutionary Reconceptualization of Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development', pre-publication draft of an essay which appeared in R. Burgess and K. MacDonald (eds.), *Evolutionary Perspectives on Human Development* (CA.: Sage, 2005).

between stages are not matters of degree. However, human beings may well display elements of different levels, but these elements will be in tension (Krebs, 2005:3). Third, the stages are hierarchically ordered. This may be an obvious point, but a higher stage is superior to a lower stage. A less obvious point is that a higher stage appears to preserve elements of a lower stage. For example, agents begin to think in relativistic terms at stage 2. Stages 3 and 4 appear to entail a rejection of relativism, and yet it apparently resurfaces at stage 5. In fact, stage 2 involves egoism ('I do what I want'), whereas stage 5 recognizes that each person must live his or her own life and each life is special to that person. Fourth, you cannot jump stages. This follows from the previous point – each stage involves a critique of the previous one, but also an incorporation of that earlier stage. Fifth, the responses of an individual will show consistency over different moral dilemmas (Krebs, 2005:3). Sixth, dissatisfaction forces a person to a new, higher stage. What forces a person to move up a stage is experience. For example, a stage 4 thinker emphasizes law, but when law is on the side of the selfish druggist and appears to result in the death of Heinz's wife the stage 4 thinker is troubled – he cannot incorporate his sense of the injustice of the druggist's behaviour into his conceptual framework (respect for law). And because he is rational he cannot simply make an exception to the law – but rather he has to apply a principle that allows – justifies – Heinz's theft. He can only do this by moving up a stage. Seventh, and of particular interest for this thesis, reasoning is culturally universal. Eight, reasoning does not guarantee action: a person can know what he ought to do but fail to do it.

I want now to consider two critiques of Kohlberg. The first is an influential one by Carol Gilligan, which maintains that there are gender differences in moral reasoning. While my thesis is not concerned primarily with feminist thought her arguments about 'abstraction' and 'concretion' are of relevance. Gilligan was a research assistant at Harvard for Kohlberg and became concerned that boys and girls responded in quite different ways to the Heinz example. In her book *In a Different Voice* she discusses two eleven year olds – Jake and Amy – and their reactions to Heinz's dilemma. Jake sees it as a conflict of rights while Amy is concerned about the damage that might be done to relationships by Jake's actions (Gilligan, 1993:26). What is more, Jake responds with enthusiasm to the dilemma, but Amy is unhappy: she wants more context before she commits herself (Gilligan, 1993:28-30). Gilligan's conclusion is that women begin with relationships and see moral choice as potentially breaking a relationship, while men start with the isolated self and regard morality as the means by which we connect with others (Gilligan, 1993:29). Men value abstraction and women value

concretion. Kohlberg's stages theory of morality models 'masculinist' morality rather than 'feminist' morality.

Without necessarily endorsing the gender distinction I would argue that it is the distinction between abstraction and concretion that is relevant to Habermas and Kohlberg. Do Habermas's universal validity claims and Kohlberg's moral stages provide only a partial picture of moral reasoning? If so, could Gadamer's hermeneutic perspective have greater validity as a description of our moral sense? And how should we view East Asian culture – is it a culture of abstraction or concretion, or an interplay of both? I reserve discussion of the last issue until the next section, but want to pursue here the critique of Kohlberg in terms of the distinction between the abstract and the concrete.

Krebs provides a useful evolutionary perspective on Kohlberg. Krebs and colleagues, like Gilligan, carried out experiments to test Kohlberg's claims. Noting that many of the experiments were carried out in an academic setting they tried to widen the range of experimental settings (e.g. they interviewed people in bars) and move away from the more unrealistic dilemmas to more concrete ones that people might confront in everyday life, such as whether to drink and drive (Krebs, 2005:4). While finding some support for Kohlberg's claims they also discovered that people make 'lower stage' moral decisions in more realistic scenarios. The setting and the experimenter also affected moral judgment: a business student gave 'lower level' responses to a Professor of Business than a Professor of Philosophy (Krebs, 2005:5). The key point is that moral development did not involve the replacement of earlier stages of moral development by more sophisticated ones, but rather there was an expansion of the range of possible ways of reasoning. Certainly, people could reason at an abstract – 'impartial' – level, but their willingness to do so was both dependent on the nature of the dilemma and of the context.

Krebs argues that people use moral reasoning not to set out an ideal but to influence other people. Although he does not discuss Habermas this goes to the heart of the idea of 'success' in discourse: is success in communication the 'coming to an understanding' with another person or the getting that person to do what you want him to do? The speech act is more likely to be successful if you can persuade the other person that you are trying to reach an understanding, or be impartial. Therefore, the language of morality can be manipulative. Krebs notes that a standard feature of Kohlberg's experimental approach is to probe the subject as to why he responded in the way he did (Krebs, 2005:7). Indeed, this is the main point of the experiment: as argued earlier people who are at the same stage can disagree about

what to do but nonetheless use the same structures of reasoning. But if moral reasoning is actually manipulative then those who are more competent at giving the 'right' answers – stage 5 or stage 6 responses – are not necessarily the most morally advanced.

From Krebs's biological-evolutionary perspective moral reasoning is used to influence other people and to guide one's own behaviour (Krebs, 2005:14). Without endorsing the evolutionary perspective it is useful to see how Krebs interprets Kohlberg's stages. From Krebs's text we can construct a table of the stages (based on the one used for the Heinz example, but note that Krebs does not accept the language of 'stages'):

Level 1: Pre-conventional morality	'Stage' 1: Punishment-obedience orientation Relatively powerful members of society will communicate the threat of punishment to get compliance from weaker members of society.
	'Stage' 2: Instrumental relativist orientation Relatively equal members of society will seek to uphold mutually beneficial agreements.
Level 2: Conventional morality	'Stage' 3: Good Boy-Nice Girl orientation Friends and relatives will protect their shared interests (in the case of relatives these include biological interests).
	'Stage' 4: Law and order orientation Those with a vested interest in social order will stress 'law and order'.
Level 3: Post-conventional morality	'Stage' 5: Social contract orientation 'In general, the benefits implicitly promised to those who conform to high-stage moral judgments are more general and delayed than the benefits implicitly promised to those who conform to low-stage moral judgments. Therefore, in general, the "if" conditions invoked to activate higher-stage moral behavior are more tenuous than the "if" conditions invoked to activate lower-stage moral behavior'. (Krebs, 2005:16-17)
	'Stage' 6: Universal ethical principle orientation See stage 5 comment.

If we accept this evolutionary perspective then we may have to weaken some of the strong claims made by Kohlberg.[46] Specifically, we might have to reject the claim that morally sophisticated agents leave the lower stages behind and always reason consistently at a higher stage. Habermas may therefore have made a mistake in tying his theory too closely to Kohlberg's work. But even Krebs accepts that people are capable of abstract reasoning and this may be sufficient to support Habermas's principle of universalisation and a Habermasian critique of filial piety.

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[46] It should be made clear that Habermas rejects completely any biological or biological-evolutionary basis to society. In using Krebs I am not necessarily endorsing his biological approach, but simply arguing that reasoning is context-dependent. His empirical work supports this claim, but his further theory, which seeks to explain context-dependence does not have to be endorsed.

7.4 Morality, Ethical Life, and Filial Piety

After having reviewed and considered Kohlberg's developmental stages of moral judgement, and critical perspectives on the stages theory, we can consider the practice of filial piety, focusing on two questions: is it compatible with Kohlberg's moral development theory? If Kohlberg is wrong, and Krebs is right, where would that leave a Habermasian critique of filial piety? I will discuss these two questions together.

We need, first, to reflect on the stages in Kohlberg's theory. Stage 1 concerns heteronomous morality, which sees the individual following the correct path in order to avert negative consequences. Stage 2 assumes that an individual follows rules in order to achieve his or her interests. Stage 3 entails living in accordance with the expectations of oneself and those people close to you. Stage 4 revolves around living in adherence to rules and laws, and also showing consideration for 'society'. At stage 5 the individual acknowledges the difference between context-dependent and context-independent values, as well as various rights, such as those of liberty and life. And finally at stage 6 the moral agent is capable of universalising moral principles (Dawson & Gabrielian, 2003:196). In essence Kohlberg stresses the importance of rationality and logic in the formation of moral agency. From this perspective filial piety as a moral practice is not judged well: it entails the immature moral judgements of stage 3 (Roetz, 1993:66).

If we accept Kohlberg's model of moral development then we have two possibilities. Either the filial piety that is expected of children is not sincere: children do not reason that they must show piety, but they do fear the social consequences of appearing to be impious. Kohlberg is concerned with how people really think and not their outward conformity, and so it is quite possible that there are many stage 5 (and 6) thinkers in an apparently conformist society. The alternative explanation is that in a culture marked by filial piety people – that means, adult offspring – really do reason at stage 3 and not any higher. If this is the case then either we conclude that Kohlberg's theory is not universally applicable or that it has to be supplemented by a theory of social evolution, in which some societies are more morally advanced than others.

If we endorse Krebs's view of the 'stages' as not really stages but context-dependent forms of moral reasoning then we have a better basis on which to criticise filial piety. What we say is that filial piety is a mix of stage 1 reasoning on the side of the father – because he has the power – and stage 3 reasoning by the (adult) children. If we further maintain that filial piety underpins the relationships between ruler and subject then it might also lead to stage 4

thinking. The difficulty with the straight Kohlbergian position is that it would be highly corrosive of East Asian culture. If filial piety engages stage 3 thinking (at best) then it necessarily has no place in a fully morally developed society. To see why this is so we need to contrast family relations in Eastern and Western societies, using Habermas's perspective.

A distinction can be drawn between pre-reflective and reflective parental authority. Following Kohlberg, Habermas argues that moral development in children progresses through a series of distinct stages, with each later stage incorporating, but critically sublating, an earlier phase. For very young children, a relationship of relatively unquestioning obedience is necessary to step to a later – more critical – stage (Habermas, 1987b:174-175, Kohlberg, 1981:409-410). This liberal, Western conception of moral development contrasts sharply with East Asian filial piety in two ways. First, it is a critical – dialectical – process of reconstructing the basis of authority, such that external authority (the parent) becomes internalised in the child's developing moral psychology, who eventually becomes an autonomous agent. Second, there is a discontinuity between the private authority of the intimate, family sphere and public – or political – authority. Both Kohlberg and Habermas identify modernity with differentiation, and the moral development trajectory is, among other things, a progression from the simple to the complex. In this regard Habermas and Kohlberg echo Hegel's (and Weber's) dismissal of Chinese (for which we can also read East Asian, more broadly) moral thought as lacking abstraction and Chinese people as mere subjects. As Kim argues:

> Hegel contends that in China morality is not a matter of individual conscience and choice but an affair of state. Since the emperor is regarded as the son of heaven, laws declared by him appear to the people as inflexible and indeterminate as the laws of nature. Furthermore, lacking the sense of morality, which is based on the inner self (*Innerlichkeit*), the Chinese people are the abject servants of the despotic emperor. (Kim, 1978:178)

In other words, they are victims of stage 1 thinking by the emperor and they themselves are capable of little more than stage 4 thinking. And this is echoed by Weber's comment on Confucian culture: '…in terms of natural law, no sphere of personal liberty was sanctioned. The very word "liberty" was foreign to the language. This can readily be explained from the nature of the patrimonial state.' (Weber, 1951:147)

While my aim is to defend Habermas I do not endorse this picture of East Asian culture. And indeed Habermas goes a step beyond Kohlberg in arguing that not only individuals, but also societies, undergo a moral learning process, which entails advancing to

increasing complexity. Greater social interaction see individuals exchanging thoughts and ideas and such communication gives life to morality (Voegelin, 2000:47), which fundamentally embodies a universal parallel to what all individuals recognise as being reasonable (Heath, 1995:86). Such a negative and patronising view of non-Western societies is unnecessary for Habermas's project. All that he needs to show is that alongside particularist forms of thinking – stages 1-4 in Kohlberg's scheme – higher level stages are possible and can be used to challenge power relations. Habermas should free himself from the teleological conception of history and see 'morality' (*Moralität*) as a possibility for all societies. Kohlberg is a useful source of conceptualisation in this regard, but only so long as his theory is also freed from teleology. In the last section I will consider the extent to which Habermas succeeds in this task.

7.5 The Moral Point of View

Habermas's moral point of view is largely premised on Kantian deontological moral theory, but he nonetheless draws on Hegel's distinction between 'morality' (*Moralität*) and 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*) (Habermas 1990:201), which Hegel developed partly in the context of his critique of Kant as offering a merely 'formal' conception of morality. For Habermas, moral universalism – or in Hegelian language *Moralität* – applies to all human beings at all times and in all places (Rasmussen, 1990:58). On the other hand, the concept of ethical life takes into account the particular and contextual ethical values that are grounded in the concrete forms of cultural life (Benhabib, 1986:317-318). Rasmussen explains the distinction in this way:

> Habermas's concern to separate questions of justification from those of context, reflecting his belief that moral procedures should be context-independent, while questions of ethical life are context-dependent. If the price of this move is to restrict the conception of morality to a relatively narrow realm, its advantage is to separate moral procedure from the realm of concrete historico-cultural experience. (Rasmussen, 1993:572)

By identifying with the Hegelian critique of Kant's alleged procedural formalism, Habermas intends to defend his theory of discourse ethics against neo-Hegelian and neo-Aristotelian critics (Habermas, 1990c:210), who would maintain that the validity claims underlying the universalisation principle provide no guidance on how to behave in specific contexts. In an interview with Torben Hviid Nielson he explains why the distinction between *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* is important:

> If we do not want to settle questions concerning the normative regulation of our everyday coexistence by open or covert force – by coercion, influence, or the power of the stronger interest – but by the unforced conviction of a rationally motivated agreement, then we must concentrate on those questions that are amenable to impartial judgment. We can't expect to find a generally binding answer when we ask what is good for me or for us or for them; instead, we must ask what is equally good for all. This 'moral point of view' throws a sharp, but narrow, spotlight that picks out from the mass of evaluative question practical conflicts that can be resolved by appeal to a generalizable interest; in other words, questions of justice. (Habermas, 1993:151)

This explains the importance of *Moralität*. But can such an 'abstract' moral universalism, as the last sentence of the quotation implies, be embedded in everyday life? I would argue that this task is made easier if we narrow the ambitions of discourse ethics down to that of a critical perspective rather than the much more ambitious attempt to reconstruct social and political relations on the basis of something approximating to an ideal speech situation. If we follow Krebs and maintain that people reason in a context-dependent way then what matters is that the scope of stage 5/6 reasoning is expanded. We place in question practices such as filial piety, but we do not seek to radically remake cultures. Habermas does seem to be arguing this when he claims that ethical life can be integrated with morality (Habermas, 1993:121) on the grounds that the ethic is based on the procedures of argumentation:

> There is only one reason why discourse ethics which presumes to derive the substance of universalistic morality from the general presuppositions of argumentation is a more exacting type of communication, going beyond any particular form of life. Discourse generalizes, abstracts, and stretches the presuppositions of context-bound communicative actions by extending their range to include competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life. (Habermas, 1990c:202)

Furthermore, Habermas states that 'going beyond Kant, discourse ethics extends the deontological concept of justice by including in it those structural aspects of the good life that can be distinguished from the concrete totality of specific forms of life' (Habermas, 1990c:203). In other words, the process of 'abstraction' need not be so radical as to undermine the necessary solidarity developed even in the context of what Habermas terms 'distorted' communication. Applied to East Asian culture this means that the achievements of East Asian can be preserved, and that Eastern culture will not necessarily end up as a homogeneous

'carbon copy' of the West as a result of the exercise of communicative reason. And nor does it presuppose the superiority of the West.

However, Habermas does not so easily avoid the charge that his discourse ethics is 'formalistic' in the manner of Kant's moral theory. Benhabib argues that Kohlberg's theory, despite its apparent empirical character, does not get Habermas off the hook, because Kohlberg commits the naturalistic fallacy by deriving 'ought' from 'is' (Benhabib, 1990:338-339). In other words, we either interpret Kohlberg as explaining how people think or else we accord the stages in his theory a categorical power and say that people are motivated because there exists a structure of reason that transcends individuals' empirical psychology (and Krebs has, in any case, challenged the empirical validity of many of Kohlberg's claims). What is more, 'the formal structure of postconventional moral reasoning allows a number of substantive moral interpretations, and these interpretations always take place by presupposing a hermeneutic horizon' (Benhabib, 1990:339). Accordingly, she argues that discourse ethics does not offer us a way of resolving the conflicts of substantive ethical life because those conflict situations are not derived from the abstract universalisation principle, but rather from the concrete level of conflict and resolution of the concrete ethical life (Benhabib, 1986:321).

According to Habermas, however, morality can facilitate the transcendence of contextual and particular cultural values by representing the universal structure of proceduralism (Rasmussen, 1990:58). In other words, for Habermas, the term 'universalism' equates to the 'discursive procedures implicit in processes of universalisation which characterise argumentation' (Rasmussen, 1990:60), which can establish normative validity. Furthermore, Habermas distinguishes 'moral questions', which are the subject of rational deliberation in a universalisation procedure and 'evaluative questions', which signify the issues of the good life (Habermas, 1993:152). Importantly, the questions of the good life, which are embedded in particular forms of ethical life can be 'complemented by universal insights' (Rasmussen, 1990:58) owing to the fact that ethical life can, and must, be sustained through a structure of argumentation. In effect, ethical life is continually nourished through processes of deliberation. Indeed, it might be that the correct discursive approach to filial piety is not simply to reject it, but to ask whether, despite its obviously coercive characteristics, it serves a particular good; if it can be shown to be in this sense 'good', then the task would be to preserve what is good in it, whilst overcoming its authoritarian aspects. In the end, we might well have to reject filial piety, but we begin where we are, with concrete ethical practices and work from there. We do not start from a kind of moral *tabula rasa*. This is what Habermas

means when he argues that 'the concrete ethical life of a naively habituated lifeworld is characterised by the fusion of moral and evaluative issues' (Habermas, 1990c:178). In other words, in Habermas's view, ethical life is a historically contextual form of the good life, but one that is parasitic upon morality (Habermas, 1990c:178).

Rasmussen claims that Habermas's discourse ethics evade the criticisms of neo-Hegelian or neo-Aristotelian critiques:

> If one relies simply on forms of life embedded in particular cultures to justify progressive modes of enlightenment, i.e., the course of human freedom, one finds oneself in the peculiar situation of being without standards with which to criticize those very forms when they are corrupted. The appeal to *Moralität* enables one to cite forms of universality which transcend particular cultures. From this point of view, neo-Aristotelian thought is always in the bind of particularity, unable to develop standards for critique of those very life forms which exist within a particular culture. Hence, appeal to a universalism represented both in the structure of argumentation and complemented by universal insights taken from the developments of reconstructive science (the theory of moral development) overcomes the dilemmas of an ethics based on cultural analysis alone. (Rasmussen, 1990:58)

As has already been seen in Chapter 2, the concept of filial piety has initially served as a social ethic in order to sustain the hierarchical family relationships. More importantly, the practice extends to the political sphere owing to the fact that the basic foundation for one's moral capacity is to be found in the family and there is an undifferentiated extension to the political sphere (Hamilton, 1990:98). In other words, there is no sharp role differentiation between child and citizen, and both have authoritarian foundations. In short, filial piety has been implemented as an ideological weapon in an attempt to inculcate the broader political virtue into the minds of the people. Thus, the concept of filial piety has served as a social ethic grounded in the substantive practice of the ethical life of Confucian East Asia societies. Stated positively, we might say that the practice of filial piety can be understood as the generalisable interests of a particular communal entity – Confucian East Asian culture.

However, given the difficulties with accepting this the taken-for-granted ethical value – namely that the practice is incompatible individual rights and human equality and these are counterfactually presupposed in communicative action – then a critical reconstruction of ethical life through the application of U (the universal principle) should be reconsidered (Habermas, 1990c:175). It is also worth noting that 'we can change perspective and move

from observation to judgment by considering whether the reasons for which they have chosen their maxims are also good reasons for us' (Habermas, 1993:173). The 'they' in this quotation refers to all participants in a particular culture – in this case all those in East Asian culture who take for granted filial piety and associated practices. Essentially, the everyday practice of filial piety denotes a mode of concrete ethical life which fundamentally binds participants' way of thinking to a tradition; however, such 'binding' is not the result of a discursive procedure that provides a rational grounding to social and political authority.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

'If one must philosophize, then one must philosophize; and if one must not philosophize, then one must philosophize; in any case, therefore, one must philosophize. For if one must, then, given that Philosophy exists, we are in every way obliged to philosophize. And if one must not, in this case too we are obliged to inquire how it is possible for there to be no philosophy; and in inquiring we philosophize, for inquiry is the cause of Philosophy'[47] – Aristotle.

I have explored the debate between Habermas and Gadamer. The two scholars come from different traditions in German (and Western) thought – Habermas from the critical-theoretical tradition, and Gadamer from 'philosophical hermeneutics'. More specifically, as Mendelson argues, the core of the Habermas-Gadamer debate is the opposition 'between reason on the one hand and prejudice and authority on the other' (Mendelson, 1979:58). Whilst Gadamer acknowledges prejudice and authority as the unavoidable human condition given the finitude of human existence, Habermas criticises Gadamer's ontological-existential position by demanding an exercise of reason – critical reflection. Upon such critical reflection, according to Habermas, false prejudice and illegitimate authority can be overcome.

Habermas does defend a form of hermeneutics, but it is what Ricoeur terms a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' as against a 'hermeneutics of faith' (Ricoeur, 1981:6). The hermeneutics of faith reflects the aim of restoring or recollecting meaning. It is the hermeneutics of obedience, of listening and of harmonisation (Ricoeur, 1970:27-28). It aspires to defend the integrity of its object, and thereby remove the apparent internal contradictions with the help of the maxim: believe in order to understand, and understand in order to believe (Ricoeur, 1981:6, 34). In other words, the hermeneutics of faith does not attempt to question the foundations of the tradition which is the subject of interpretation, but rather aims to

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[47] Aristotle, *Protrepticus: A Reconstruction,* edited by Anton-Hermann Chroust (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), pp. 48-49.

continue and defend it without changing its course; the pre-understandings offered by the tradition are, for the most part, taken for granted (Ricoeur, 1970:26-32).

The hermeneutics of suspicion, on the other hand, assumes from the very beginning a methodological attitude of distrust towards the objects of interpretation. 'Suspicious interpretation' is a critical undertaking aiming to reveal the hidden presuppositions conditioning the possibility of our understanding the object of interpretation, the final aim of which is to expose the false consciousness preventing us from conceiving the correct nature of things[48] (Ricoeur, 1970:32-36). The purpose of the critical interpreter is to reveal the hidden pre-understandings, which are the forces that condition us 'behind our backs' (Ricoeur, 1970:33). The critical hermeneutics of suspicion attempts to demystify the seeming truths that deform our possibilities of conceiving the structure and function of the object (Ricoeur, 1981:6-8, 34).

Gadamer advances a hermeneutics of faith, and this is clear in that his starting point is Heidegger's ontological understanding of the human condition. This ontology stresses human finitude and historicity, and takes these features of the human condition to be all-encompassing and universal. This ontological stance, as against the notion of interpretive understanding as a set of procedures peculiar and restricted to the humanities, is central to Gadamer's project: the authentic claim of hermeneutics is philosophical (Gadamer, 1989:xxviii), and the concerns of hermeneutics are different from epistemological or methodological ones.

The task of hermeneutics, according to Gadamer, is no longer to disclose the methods of 'objective' understanding, as claimed by the 'classical' hermeneutic scholars, such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Rather, Gadamer connects hermeneutics with the modes of experience, which reach beyond scientific methodology. In other words, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics seeks the conditions for hermeneutic understanding on the basis of human experience. In contrast to the objective understanding which underpins the scientific-methodological stance, Gadamer identifies different disciplines, such as art, history, and philosophy, all of which are capable of formulating truth-claims. Methodological approaches

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[48] In Ricoeur's account, three 'masters of suspicion' are mentioned: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. All three claim that consciousness is unreliable; false consciousness can distort human capacities in such a fundamental way that we are forced to question consciousness itself. They all start with a suspicion towards the apparently self-evident truths of a consciousness that claims to be perfectly transparent to itself. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, translated and edited by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). p. 6, Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 32-34.

to both natural and human phenomena are, according to Gadamer, rooted in history; they accept certain historical assumptions concerning what is to be studied and how it is to be approached.

On Gadamer's account, human beings cannot overcome the situated position in which they find themselves. Following Heidegger, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics primarily deals with the ontological conditions of human existence. As has been seen in the preceding chapters, Gadamer has advanced his core concepts, such as prejudice, tradition, fusion of horizons, and historically-effected consciousness, to make sense of our existence as finite beings. Understanding is rooted in prejudice, and our interpretation of the world is conditioned by – as Gadamer puts it – 'effective history' or by the past. In his view, the demanding force of the past, or 'effective history', involves all aspects of human life (Warnke, 1987:3). Hence, individuals are immersed in a tradition from which they cannot escape. Thus, for Gadamer, objective truth is reliant on tradition, and, against the Enlightenment, no methodology can fully transcend tradition. Tradition is an on-going process of the fusion of horizon of the present and of the past.

Gadamer constantly challenges the Enlightenment's 'prejudice against prejudice' (Gadamer, 1989:272). It follows that tradition is a necessary precondition of both intellectual and social authority (Piercey, 2004:261). Human beings are thrown into a world constantly formed by tradition (Bernstein, 2002:25). We might go as far as to say that not only does the ontological condition of humans as finite beings explain the importance of tradition but that tradition is itself ontology. Certainly, we create tradition – it is the product of history and can change – but if we accept a Heideggerian ontology, as against a Platonic ontology, then our existential condition is one of finitude and of being 'thrown into the world'. Consequently, tradition must necessarily be ontology. To attempt to break out of tradition is, therefore, a logical impossibility.

Indeed, to emphasise this Heideggerian historicist ontology, Gadamer makes clear his rejection of Descartes' cogito and with it the Cartesian task of seeking an objective understanding of reality. The core of Gadamer's research scheme fundamentally depends on the disclosure of the possibility of the ontological-existential structures of understanding, exemplified by hermeneutical experience. However, he can be criticised for engaging in a sentimental nostalgia for past traditions and antiquity; he has always insisted that we cannot help but approach past history and traditions from the horizon of our present. We never escape from our own linguistic horizon. In Gadamer's view, it is an illusion to consider that we can

bracket or suspend all our current prejudices. The fundamental imperative of philosophical hermeneutics is to articulate and evaluate the claim to truth that traditions make upon us – to seek a fusion of horizons in which we expand and deepen our own horizon.

Habermas criticises Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a giving up the Enlightenment project. In particular, he accuses Gadamer of advancing an uncritical attitude towards tradition and failing to understand that the Enlightenment was not simply a 'prejudice against prejudice' (Piercey, 2004:261). The Enlightenment contains within itself a reflexivity that permits us to both maintain but also challenge tradition. Habermas accepts that we live and operate within a tradition, but that language is the means by which we challenge and reconstruct it. This reflective power is lost on Gadamer, who essentially allows tradition per se always to win out, with the political consequence that emancipation is rendered impossible (Habermas, 1988:170). On Habermas's account, Gadamer's position is merely the appropriation of the norms and conventions of the status quo.

To a great extent, the fundamental difference between Habermas and Gadamer turns on their differing attitudes towards the Enlightenment project. Gadamer's negative perspective on the Enlightenment is based on his ontology that must necessarily see the Enlightenment as just another tradition whereas Habermas takes a reflexive position. But paradoxically there is a critical element to Gadamer's position, which comes close to being 'more enlightened than the Enlightenment': if the Enlightenment is simply 'prejudice against prejudice', then a hermeneutic perspective is better able to reveal its true nature. Indeed, philosophical hermeneutics aims to revitalise the distinctive character of philosophy against the prejudicial stance of Enlightenment-inspired natural science. Essentially, Gadamer is concerned to unearth *Dasein* (Being-in-the-world) in order to get a better understanding the world. Hermeneutics focuses on what 'is' rather than what 'ought to be', but it expands the scope of 'is' beyond the subject-object relationship of natural science. Unlike Gadamer's negative attitude towards the Enlightenment project, Habermas intends to resuscitate the *raison d'etre* of reason as a critical tool. As a strong defender of Enlightenment, and also as a rationalist, he insists that reason has the ability to overcome social problems.

One of the fundamental principles common to both Gadamer and Habermas is the acknowledgement of the activity of communication as a mechanism for social coordination and social reproduction (McCarthy, 1978:190). They both argue that language is central to human life, and it is not merely of instrumental value but is the means by which human beings achieve understanding. But although they are in agreement that language is an important tool

for resolving disputes – both practical and epistemic – between individuals, they differ in regard to the issue of *how* the agreement between interlocutors is achieved. Whilst Gadamer presents his philosophical hermeneutics as the formulation of ontological understanding of human existence, Habermas advances the idea of an ideal speech situation based on rationally motivated mutual understanding.

Gadamer sees dialogue as a way of reaching an agreement between partners, but is an agreement that essentially conserves rather than challenges tradition. He has no methodology regarding successful communication; there is no conception of language as a regulative ideal that stands over against tradition and can be utilised to critique it. Habermas, on the other hand, sets out what is required for a successful speech act such that dialogical partners are oriented to achieving an understanding that does not simply reproduce power relations. This is where the universal validity claims are so important: in speaking a person raises one or more of the validity claims and necessarily treats his or her interlocutor as an equal.

By focusing on the possibility of a 'universal and unconstrained consensus' – and with it the ideas of autonomy and maturity (*Mündigkeit*) (Habermas, 1984:147) – Habermas insists that we should adhere to the rationalistic inspiration of the Enlightenment by reconstructing the universal conditions which must be presupposed in communication. Like Gadamer he rejects the Cartesian cogito and the Kantian subject-object relationship, but he holds on to the idea of autonomy by maintaining that communicating subjects are in an inter-subjective relationship. This allows him to embrace tradition insofar as it is part of lived experience, but also for subjects to distance themselves from it. They do this distancing together in a dialogical manner, rather than monologically, as per Descartes and Kant. To this extent he can posit an 'ideal speech situation' based on the 'universal presuppositions of argumentation' (Habermas, 1990c:88, 204).

The primary focus of my thesis has been the explication of the Habermas-Gadamer debate against the background of East Asian culture and specifically the practice of filial piety. Without a methodology for assessing valid speech and normative rules for regulating speech, we are incapable of reaching a judgement concerning the legitimacy of personal – and, importantly, *political* – relations grounded on filial piety. Although this is not a thesis about filial piety, the practice nevertheless powerfully illustrates the difference between Habermas and Gadamer: without criteria for assessing valid and invalid speech, any kind of power relationship – however oppressive – can be subsumed under 'filial piety'.

As has been maintained throughout the thesis, the concept of filial piety presupposes the authoritarian inequality between parents and children, or to be more precise, between a father and his children. In this sense, the unequal authoritarian relationship between parents and children in Confucian East Asian culture can be judged as not merely unjust in an intuitive sense, but also irrational and unfair. If we follow Habermas's argument there is a performative contradiction between the communication entailed in sustaining filial piety and the necessary presuppositions of language. A father may command his son on the basis of reasons deriving from filial piety, but in so acting he is also treating his son as an equal. Habermas's model of communicative competence with regard to the example of filial piety seems suggestive, simply because it posits equality between autonomous agents – parents and children.

However, Habermas must also reconcile ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) with morality (*Moralität*). In Habermas's scheme the latter takes the form of a universalisation principle (U). The strength of Gadamer's hermeneutics is that he does not abstract from our culturally embodied relationships. The critical element of his hermeneutics is that we have to bring together – 'fuse' – different horizons. That means that we can never be entirely uncritical towards practices such as filial piety, but neither can we entirely overcome them. This is because filial piety is part of a wider cultural practice, such that if you pull away at one element the entire house falls down, or, put in non-metaphorical terms, the tradition loses its coherence. We can expand our practices but we cannot deconstruct them.

The weakness of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that it does not provide universal norms or a regulative idea against which we can challenge filial piety. This is because it is focused only on the exploration of the 'is' of human existence, i.e., the ethical value of ethical life. In other words, the strengths and weaknesses of Habermas's and Gadamer's approaches mirror one another. Put simply, Habermas is in danger of abstracting away too much whereas Gadamer is rooted in ethical life but thereby lacks a critical perspective. Indeed, I have drawn parallels between Confucius and Gadamer in that both advance a philosophy of immanence as against a philosophy of transcendence. But immanence carries political implications in terms of individual freedom: without transcendence we cannot separate ourselves from the nexus of power relations. Gadamer's 'prejudice' is the wall we come up against: they are the taken-for-granted value judgements of individuals which can never be fully eliminated.

However, it is not enough to challenge Gadamer. While personally I cannot accept the power relations inherent in filial piety any philosophical challenge to the practice must be

grounded in a methodology. That is why I have focused on two competing methodologies: philosophical hermeneutics and critical theory. I have acknowledged that there is a critical component to hermeneutics and this is contained in the idea of a fusion of horizons. And I have also recognised that there are problems with Habermas's approach. But in the end I have come down in favour of Habermas. What is appealing about Habermas's approach is that he reconstructs Enlightenment rationality on the basis of something that is empirical: language. What is more, he offers a way of connecting language to morality through Kohlberg's stages theory of moral development.

In Chapter 7 I raised some problems with Kohlberg. Specifically, I argued that there was a conflict between abstraction and concretion, and relatedly between 'is' and 'ought'. The first conflict was explored in the work of Gilligan, and also, separately, in Krebs. The second conflict is discussed by Benhabib. Through empirical studies Krebs reveals that individuals do not move up the stages in the sense that they leave the earlier stages behind, but rather they expand their repertoire of moral responses and capacities. Although there is an evolutionary dimension to Krebs's argument that I do not necessarily endorse, and certainly which Habermas does not accept, nonetheless Krebs provides a useful way of applying Habermas to East Asian culture.

There is in Western thought a slightly derogatory attitude to East Asian culture. Hegel only grudgingly accepted that the Chinese were capable of abstract thought and dismissed Confucius as a popular thinker. Although Weber was not a moral philosopher and did not formally treat the West – or more specifically the Puritan-inspired Occident – as better than the East he did nonetheless see the East as despotic and the Chinese as untrustworthy. We see the same attitude in Marx's characterisations of 'Oriental despotism'. If we follow these lines of argument then we come to one of two conclusions: either the East is retarded in relation to the West, or else there are no universal values. Essentially, Gadamer adopts the second view, for although there is a fusion of horizons we can never transcend our particular cultures.

Habermas, on the other hand, is a universalist. It is difficult, however, to avoid the conclusion that in his view the West is superior. Although he avoids the strong teleology of Hegel his embrace of Kohlberg's stages theory of morality implies a developmental theory not only for individuals but also for society. Against this view, I argue that the validity claims that underpin all languages and which are expressed in stages 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's moral theory exist as possibilities in all societies, and that the extent to which 'lower stage' reasoning is used depends on the particular culture in which we live. It is reasonable to argue that there is

more lower stage reasoning in East Asian culture, but if we accept the research of Krebs and his colleagues then there is lower stage reasoning also in the West (where they undertook most of their research).

The reconstruction of social and political authority in East Asian culture will depend on the gradual recognition of the universal validity claims of language. Over time the authoritarian practices of filial piety must give way to new types of thinking and new types of relationship. However, this will be evolution and not revolution. Unless we rather arrogantly assume that people in the West are morally superior to people in the East we have to recognise that universalist and non-universalist forms of thinking exist side by side, and the task is to reconcile these conflicting forms of interaction. A Gadamerian respect for tradition should be rejected but equally a simplistic reading of Habermas should also be abandoned. Although Habermas is guilty in places of an implicit superiority of the West there are aspects of his work that suggest a more complex view of society. He acknowledges that there are instrumental and non-instrumental forms of reason and these have to co-exist. The task is to master instrumental processes. Although I have not discussed the development of capitalism in East Asia – it is beyond the scope of this thesis and of my competence – it is interesting that East Asian capitalism is often characterised as 'Prussian': liberal economics without political liberalism. What happens over the next decades in China will be a test for whether you can have one without the other. But we need to avoid seeing culture as either one thing or another. Liberal freedoms may develop in a haphazard way alongside capitalism and people may display some 'advanced' forms of thinking – in Kohlberg's sense – at the same time as quite 'primitive' (low level) thinking.

At the beginning of this thesis I suggested that Confucian East Asian society may be the result of an interaction between certain evolved capacities and historical-cultural traits. Certainly, one of the dividing lines between East and West is that the former is 'collectivist' and the West is 'individualist'. Weber offered an explanation in terms of the power of the extended family in Chinese culture as against the clear rejection of 'blood' in post-Puritan European societies (which includes the United States). Obviously, any genetic or cultural-genetic explanation of the difference is incompatible with Habermas and critical theory, and as I said in the introduction I do not embrace such an explanation (which means that I remain agnostic on this). Certainly, a genetic explanation would offer a powerful explanation for the role of filial piety in Confucian culture. But equally to suggest that blood ties play no role in Western culture would be a hard position to sustain. The point is that we should not

exaggerate the differences between Eastern and Western culture, and rather than follow Hegel, Weber, and Marx in seeing a binary distinction between individualism and collectivism we should recognise that these phenomena exist in both cultures, even if they are present to different degrees.

Although I have rejected Gadamer's approach there is one final point to make in his favour. If we accept that different stages of moral thinking exist alongside one another and this is the case in all cultures, then reconciling the different levels may indeed involve a kind of hermeneutic fusion of horizons. In reconstructing filial piety we come to understand its origins and its positive aspects by bringing to bear the horizons of the past and the present. But against Gadamer there can be no 'compromise' between the authoritarianism of filial piety and the liberalism of individual rights. Respect for parents is a value in all cultures and so the 'distorted' practice of filial piety – and its extension into the political sphere in terms of the relationship between rulers and ruled – has to be cleansed of its authoritarian practices and its positive aspects acknowledged. To do so requires the capacity to stand back from the practice and we do this through the medium of language.

Glossary of Chinese Characters and Books

Analects (論語)
Chün-tzu (true gentleman, 君子)
Dao (Way ,道)
Li (propriety, 禮)
Ren (humanity, 仁)
Sangkang (Three Bonds, 三綱)
Shi (Scholors, interior officers, 士)
Three Bonds (三綱)
Xiao (filial piety, 孝)
XiaoJing (The Classic of Filial Piety, 孝經)
Zhong (loyalty, 忠)

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