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A Gadamerian Approach to Science and Religion Historiographies

Reinterpreting Essentialism, Anachronism, and Complexity in
Recent Science and Religion Historiographies through the
Thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer

by

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



2022

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Esgrid Esteban Sikahall Urizar

April 21, 2022

Abstract

This thesis explores three historiographical categories used in recent science and religion research: essentialism, anachronism, and complexity. It observes that these categories are historico-methodological tools that are deployed by historians to point at problems implicit in “science and religion” rhetoric. The three categories under investigation are notions deployed in the historiographical literature to observe that science and religion discourses tend to be misleading if they do not consider the historical nature of “science” and “religion.” This thesis agrees with the historians and in agreement with them argues that the way they are using the notions of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity is nonetheless problematic. The goal of this thesis in exploring these three notions is to show that historians use them in a problematic way and that despite these notions being used in a problematic way they still refer to issues that need addressing. These notions raise questions of history, temporality, rhetoric, and language, and by delving into these questions the historiographies that employ the notions of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity gain further relevance. Works such as John Hedley Brooke’s *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1991) and Peter Harrison’s *The Territories of Science and Religion* (2015) constitute the soil of this thesis. They are key parts of recent revisionist historiographical attempts to challenge and subvert many of the misleading historical myths and narratives about science and religion that to this day still play important roles in scientific, political, philosophical, theological, ethical, and cultural debates. What motivated the planting of this thesis in such a soil is the thought of German philosopher and philologist Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002): our main methodological conversation partner. This thesis stems from wrestling with his work and is “a hermeneutical approach” to science and religion historiographies in reference to him.

An implication of a hermeneutical approach is that historiographical works are engaged in this thesis by attending to their form and content. This thesis shows that the ways in which historians are telling their histories can hinder attempts at changing current science and religion rhetoric. In the context of science and religion historiographies, problems with science and religion rhetoric emerge in perceived tensions between the present and the past. On the one hand, there are contemporary issues that seem to relate to “science” and “religion,” and on the other, past realities that are seen now as having to do with science and religion. This thesis finds that the categories of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity are used in science and religion historiographies to deal partly with the tensions that give birth to science and religion rhetoric. Also, this thesis finds that the three categories feed a critical hermeneutic implicit in

such historiographies. By conversing with Gadamer's thought, this thesis unpacks the categories under investigation. These categories are usually deployed in science and religion historical scholarship as negations: *anti-essentialism*, *rejection* of anachronism, and complexity as *against* historical narratives of harmony or conflict between science and religion. Gadamer's work helps us see why the methodological use of these categories in a negative register does not rid us of essences, anachronism, or meta-narratives of harmony or conflict; historiographies proceeding mainly in the negative register become vehicles of what they negate precisely through the means of critique.

The thesis proceeds by: bringing into the open the critical hermeneutical habit common to these historiographies (Part One); observing some of the blind spots and assumptions of such a habit at the same time as its insights are integrated and re-interpreted (Part Two); and showing scholarship already building on some of these insights, practicing what could be called a "post-critical" hermeneutics (Part Three). A post-critical hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of tradition, called in the end of this thesis a hermeneutics of transmission. A hermeneutics of transmission does not eschew critique, but it includes critique in a wider panorama in order to integrate the observations from historiography without being parasitic on what they critique. This thesis concludes in its final chapter by displaying the hermeneutics of transmission at work, showcasing scholarship conscious of the limitations of an overall critical approach. By acknowledging the limits of critique, such scholarship moves in new and relevant directions, suggesting constructive possibilities for science and religion scholarship.

Lay Summary

This thesis explores three categories—essentialism, complexity, and anachronism—that are used as justification for certain ways of telling history in recent science and religion histories. Essentialism stands for the idea that notions have “essences”: that notions have associated meanings that stay the same throughout history. To be an essentialist is to think that notions have an essence that does not change over time, and therefore one can “apply” a notion anachronistically to any historical time. Complexity, a term taken from John Hedley Brooke’s *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1991), is a *critique* of historical narratives of harmony or conflict between science and religion. Complexity is primarily an anti-narrative, defined by what it negates, just like essentialism is something to be negated or avoided, since notions do change their meaning over time. Finally, anachronism is a characteristic of our speech about the past. Our speech about history is always in hindsight, and therefore the historians are always weary of being anachronistic—of imposing present notions on past times and cultures that may not have used these notions to understand what they were doing. In short, essentialism, complexity, and anachronism, constitute *negations*. The three terms are used to speak about things to be *avoided* or *critiqued*. This thesis shows that the way historians are using these categories—as ways of framing how they tell their histories—may undermine their goal to set the historical record straight. The method of critique backfires: it does not help the historian—or anybody using their histories—battle misleading historical myths about science and religion.

The work of German philosopher and philologist Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is engaged in this thesis to show why critique backfires, and, more importantly, to re-interpret the notions in a way that is positive, but not without negation or critique. We call this way of proceeding a hermeneutic of transmission, meaning that it is a way of understanding that is mindful of extending our cultural arms from past to future, not without critique but not primarily in a critical manner. A hermeneutic of “passing the baton,” we could say. Such hermeneutics involves, among other things, observing that the very move of passing the baton is multi-layered, just like the histories the historians write. The layers include questions about the common good, about what is most real, and about our participation in these.

The thesis concludes by discussing scholarship that is becoming aware, to varying degrees, of the limitations of the method of critique, and is therefore charting new ways forward in science and religion scholarship, mindful of passing the baton in word and deed.

Acknowledgements

It is a testimony to the sense that communities foster that one of their own was able to immerse himself in the life of the mind and not lose his rootedness. This work is a further testimony of this sense within which one is rooted and without which one might end as closest to an uprooted mind as is possible—an abstraction whose contact with everyday reality is almost lost.

What embraces me as I conclude is gratitude. I am grateful to all that have been around me, affecting this work directly. I am grateful to Professor Mark Harris, my first supervisor, whose steady tendency towards clarifying what I felt was clear made this thesis a lot less unclear. What kind of patience one has to have to endure the kind of unmethodical approach that dominates me, I do not know. I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Dr Michael Fuller. I always felt his enthusiasm for my work, even when the direction was less than clear and I could not make it any clearer.

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I thank the University of Edinburgh for giving me the opportunity to pursue doctoral studies in a place like New College. I benefited immensely, especially as an international student, from the Principal’s Career Development Scholarship.

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programming, data wrangling, and data visualisation, allowing me to gain experience and earn financial support after finishing my time with Jack Barber Ltd.

My roots: my spirit, body, and soul have taken shape through my genealogy. I give thanks to my parents, Juana Vilma Urizar Pérez de Sikahall and Alan Esgrid Sikahall Salamanca. I am because you made me who I am. You, standing with the ones before you, instilled in me the direction of my being, and in receiving all that I am that has come from you—both good and ill—I understood the fundamental truth in Gadamer’s own thought: to have “critical distance” from one’s own roots involves recognising and accepting their *enabling* power over us, in its full extent. All sense of superiority and non-involvement dies away in doing so, giving way to gratitude, mourning, sacrifice, hope, truth, and new insight. To the other branch in this genealogy, I also give thanks. Pamela Cristina Sikahall Urizar, who perhaps does not know exactly what this thesis is about, but who sees a future for it. I have always felt that you understand why the depth of things calls for my attention.

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Esgrid Esteban Sikahall Urizar
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What is an historical fact? It is obvious that an historical fact is not, in the first place, merely something that really happened, but rather, something that really happened in such a way that it has a special signification for an historical question, an historical context.

—Hans-Georg Gadamer¹

History is not negated because it is “false,” but rather because it still remains effective in the present, yet still without being able to be a present which is authentically taken on.

—Martin Heidegger²

“Hermeneutic” philosophy, as I envision it, does not understand itself as an “absolute” position but as a path of experiencing.

—Hans-Georg Gadamer³

Introduction

Recent historiographical work on science and religion has problematised the very notion of a “science and religion” discourse. The historiographical work critiques “science and religion” as an entity—be it as a dialogue between two disciplines, as a discourse, as an academic field, as a relationship between two bodies of knowledge, as a historical entity, or as any kind of amalgamation involving “science” and “religion” together—in order to emphasise the complex historical contingencies involved. Introducing Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, this thesis argues that the recent historiographical moves can actually undermine what they seek to establish: a way of speaking about science and religion that is historically informed, guided by the rich insights of historiographical work. The historiographical critique foregrounds three methodological moves: essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. Therefore the argument of the thesis is that current historiographical work tends to undermine itself when it critiques “science and religion” discourses through these moves. These moves do not resolve the science and religion discourse problem but are themselves, as they tend to be used, part of the problem. The thesis proposes a different lens to read the historiographical work, mindful of—but not confined by—the critical approach that the historiographical work tends to have. As a way of reconceiving the historiographical works on science and religion the thesis proposes a “hermeneutics of transmission.” According to a hermeneutics of transmission, what can encourage us in the field to move beyond the issues critiqued relentlessly in the historiographical literature is not more critique, but something like “passing

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer and James Risser, “Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences,” *Research in Phenomenology* 9 (1979): 76.

² See Michael Baur’s translation (with an introduction), “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation by Martin Heidegger,” *Man and World* 25 (1992): 360.

³ “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 36.

the baton.” Critique cannot carry the message without being embedded in a wider process of transmission which enables critique and makes it possible. This thesis concludes by highlighting the opportunities opened by new approaches in contemporary scholarship within and without the science and religion field. Alongside the historiographical work explored in the thesis—if read in the spirit of a hermeneutics of transmission—such scholarship can catalyse new ways forward in science and religion discourses.

The goal of this introduction is, therefore, to prepare the reader for the way this thesis argues its case. Part One of the thesis introduces the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism and points to the problems that arise when they are used as building blocks of historical narratives. This introduction, in general terms, focuses on the rhetorical spaces of historiography—on the ways that the historiographies craft the discourse on science and religion. The categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism are, on this view of the historiographies, forms of discourse, tools for crafting a particular kind of rhetoric. But before being able to see the relevance of this focus, one has to appreciate the realm within which “discourse” itself happens, and here we are in the realm of language.

But even before elaborating on the suggestion of language, however, there is something that must be clarified. This thesis, by focusing on what could be called the hermeneutical and rhetorical domains of “science and religion,” is not in any straightforward way about the task of how to relate science and religion (or science and theology). I am not necessarily against this task or against the idea of a “relation” between science (or sciences) and religion (or religions). But I am aware that in my current geographical and cultural intellectual context (Europe, and perhaps more widely, “the West”) phrases like “science and religion” or “science and theology” evoke conceptions of “science” and “religion” (or “theology”) as disciplines more than they evoke rhetorical modes of discourse. Perhaps one may think of university departments or educational institutions where one can study such “disciplines.” If one is more nuanced about these terms one might say “sciences” and “religions.” The sciences are clearly not a “thing” but still a collection of “things” (of disciplines), and religions are, well, whatever “religions” are, and “theology” would be a form of reflection on whatever beliefs and practices a particular “religion” might have.

The phrase “science and religion” (or “science and theology”) refers, under a “disciplinary” view, to a *dialogue* or at least an attempt of communication between said disciplines, which results invariably in a kind of “relation” between religion (or “religions”) or theology (or “theologies”) and science (or “the sciences”). Amongst the very limited engagements between so-called continental philosophy and science and religion, Kenneth

Reynhout's book *Interdisciplinary Interpretation: Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Theology and Science* (2013) is one that fits squarely in the "science and religion dialogue" genre. It uses Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to answer what he calls the "interdisciplinary question" between theology and the natural sciences.⁴ Reynhout uses Ricoeur's work in order to provide a philosophical schema for theological engagement with the natural sciences. In this sense Reynhout's work is in the same playing field as "critical realism,"⁵ mediating between the languages of theology (or religion) and the sciences.

This thesis is only peripherally interested in looking at "science and religion" from this "disciplinary" mode of conceiving "science" and "religion." This thesis is an exercise in recognising that I come indeed from a different mode of cultural existence, belonging to lands far away from western soils and far from the predominant Anglo-Saxon culture that tends to dominate science and religion discourses, but that at the same time I am entering into this cultural space of questioning and debate, adopting the vocabulary, and therefore belonging to the messiness one cannot escape as soon as one speaks about an issue.

By participating in the science and religion discourse—even if it does not answer the "interdisciplinary question" as Reynhout does—this thesis looks at "science and religion" from a hermeneutical angle. It focuses on how "science and religion" is rhetorically constructed—in actual discourse—through historiographical means. And why focus on these historiographical means? My answer is that historiography makes the story; it narrates the past to the present in view of a future; it claims to "set the record straight." Historiographical works have done and continue to do what seems to me to be the most thorough work in shaking the "foundations" of the whole science and religion dialogue. But by studying Gadamer's thought it became increasingly obvious to me that the way these historiographical works have been attempting a re-configuration of the scholarly debates on science and religion has propagated the very issues these works critique. The interest of this thesis is, therefore, to provide a way of appropriating this historiographical work, facilitating the integration of this work in order to promote more correspondingly thoughtful conversations about science and religion.

The argument is that to "transcend" simplistic historical narratives or problematic contemporary categories, one must embed the critique of such narratives or categories in positive approaches that do not necessarily "go beyond" the narratives or categories but that

⁴ Kenneth Reynhout, *Interdisciplinary Interpretation: Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Theology and Science* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), xii.

⁵ Robert John Russell, "Ian Barbour's Methodological Breakthrough: Creating the 'Bridge' Between Science and Theology," *Theology and Science* 15, no. 1 (2017): 28-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2016.1265224>. Critical realism is the "bridge" Russell refers to in the title.

accept them as part of our language. To accept a word as part of language is partly to emphasise in this context that historiographical critiques can only have traction if these critiques recognise the essential connective thread that is our language. The chapters of Part Two of the thesis seek to make this evident. That is to say, Part Two points out that what essentialism, anachronism, and complexity miss is that in criticising historical narratives or categories that have shifted their meaning throughout history one has to recognise that one assumes—by virtue of using words that connect past and present—“essential” knowledge of whatever one is speaking of, and that this knowledge is a precondition for all critique. By essential knowledge I do not mean an explicit and fixed articulation of whatever one is talking about, unaffected by time or context. Instead, I mean a tacit, inarticulate *bodily* knowledge which supports and underpins articulated speech. Eugene Gendlin calls it the “felt sense”: a bodily knowing which tacitly gives rise to our logical and linguistic reasoning and knowing but cannot be reduced to explicit reasoning or speech.⁶ This knowledge comes to presence in speech from our bodies. Therefore, to critique the category of “religion” for example, even if only to discourage its use, assumes bodily knowing of what it means. Any critique arises from some bodily experience and it is this expanding cluster of experience that contributes to the essence of the word’s meaning. Words or categories therefore have essences that are as varied as their contexts and times of use, and they continue to develop depending on the changes of discourse throughout history, context, and the speakers. Insofar as essentialism, complexity, and anachronism are deployed in a “critical” mode that does not recognise that language connects the meanings of all historical periods in a “now” that is available also through language, the historiographical work that uses these categories increasingly becomes a victim of its own critical register.

Part One of the thesis involves, as has been said, opening up the issues embedded in the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. Part Two, as I also mentioned, involves showing that insofar as these categories misconstrue the nature of language, our knowing, and our experience, the scholarship attached to these categories will need to re-place itself in wider processes of transmission that are “post-critical,” that is, in processes that follow the preliminary critical step. Part Three concludes the thesis. It shows how the multi-layered nature of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics—as the angle used to approach the historiographical works of science and religion—helps us to rethink how to engage with work

⁶ See Gendlin’s use of the term in a commentary on Heidegger’s notion of *Befindlichkeit* in “*Befindlichkeit: Heidegger and the Philosophy of Psychology*” in *Saying What We Mean: Implicit Precision and the Responsive Order, Selected Works by Eugene T. Gendlin*, ed. Edward S. Casey and Donata M. Schoeller (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 194-224. Speaking involves knowledge that our bodies have; the essence of words lies on our shared bodily experience.

outwith “science and religion,” especially since much of this work is moving beyond critique. Observing that in various scholarly domains there are attempts to outgrow critique—without denying critique—along the lines of what I am calling a hermeneutics of transmission serves the purpose of opening the doors to a renovation of the science and religion discourses, including new historiographical approaches. A hermeneutics of transmission is a post-critical move since it is not predominantly critique (although it includes critique). It aims at shifting our attention from a negation of categories or narratives to the processes and means that continuously bring these categories and narratives to our attention in the present.

At this stage it is worth discussing the notions of transmission and tradition in more detail since they are central to the thesis’ orientation. By intertwining history, reality, and language, the notions of transmission and tradition can provide some clarity. This thesis uses the notion of *tradition* as the basis for what it calls transmission. The word “tradition” is used in the thesis as an experiential reality. Tradition is a process we are involved in; it is something that people do and something that happens to people. It is the action of receiving and passing on; it is an experience that constitutes our personal knowing (to echo Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge*). As an experience, tradition involves both the explicit and the implicit. By me having written the words you are reading, in the language that I have written them, an entire world has been assumed by both the writer and the reader. This world is implicit, and it cannot be made totally explicit by words or by articulation, even though it makes possible our articulations and explicit descriptions. This “world” is not only made of ideas but includes the concrete reality both the writer and the reader participate in: their experience, their history, their embodied surroundings, everything that could be inscribed in the word “real.” All this “reality” is implicit; it is before—it precedes—any act of reception by an agent but has its “existence” in being received and passed on—in being *transmitted*—in us living and experiencing. Gadamer’s hermeneutics are a hermeneutics of tradition because philosophical hermeneutics makes us aware of this process of transmission that tradition is, a process in which we are all involved regardless of our wills and conscious acting. Also, philosophical hermeneutics—as a practice—aims at shaping us, the ones who aim at understanding, into mindful participants in the back-and-forth of the process of tradition. The emphasis on *transmission* rather than on tradition in the thesis is practical: the notion of tradition does not seem to emphasise immediately a sense of an activity or a process, as opposed to the notion of transmission.

When the thesis proposes a hermeneutics of transmission, it is proposing a new way of conceiving the whole field of science and religion (using the historiographies of science and

religion as a test case) and a new way of “doing” or of “carrying forward” the science and religion field. By focusing on the historiographies of science and religion of Peter Harrison and John Hedley Brooke as entry points, and specifically on how these histories are told, the thesis shows that the very ways of narrating and the ways of speaking in order to persuade—the way histories inhabit the rhetorical space—are not only already embedded in various layers of thought and discourse (ethics, politics, theology, metaphysics, etc..), but that histories which are constructed to primarily undermine other histories cannot help but be parasitic on what they seek to undermine.

Instead of a critical approach we could approach the historians’ work in the spirit of a hermeneutics of transmission; we could aim instead at re-forming the narrative spaces, re-filling the expressions of what is experientially concrete that is being referred to by the various subject-matters that are being studied and critiqued. What is it—as an experienced reality—that one refers to when talking about “science” or “religion”? And what experiences move the posing of the question of the “relationship between science and religion”? By asking these questions one is participating in the hermeneutics of transmission because one is not only not taking for granted the categories “science,” “religion,” “nature,” “God,” etc., nor not taking for granted *the question* of the “relationship between science and religion,” but one is also—and primarily—opening space for new questions and new conversations.

Renewing the spaces of discourse—the rhetorical spaces—and opening new conversations will probably include most of the words that have been critiqued, but what gives meaning to the new ways in which these words will be used is the experiential concreteness from which these articulations come from. In other words, the fact that words or categories lack an “essence” does not amount to a relativisation of meaning, as it might seem when the historians critique their own historically-effected concepts (to use Gadamer’s language). Also, however, the experiential concreteness I am referring to, does not amount to “objectivity,” in the sense that it is not an opposition to “subjectivity.” This experiential concreteness is what Polanyi called personal knowledge, or what Gendlin called the felt sense: the knowing implicit in our bodies that gives rise to all articulation. This personal knowledge, this felt sense, is grounded in our bodily experience. It is not mere “feeling” but a sense that is felt—tacitly and not fully articulated—commonly discernible by bodily beings. It allows us to communicate—by means of our shared bodily experience—through infinitely diverse forms of articulations. Hence the centrality of language: the medium of our articulation in fact communicates our common experiences to others in our common living. A hermeneutics of transmission is thus a way of bringing us back into our experiential reality—a call to speak again from the felt

sense, especially as scholars—and from this place of our felt sense re-fill again our language so that we can ask anew and converse from fresh perspectives.

Structure of the Work

So much for the introduction and the intent of this thesis. Let us turn now to a summary of the chapters in a programmatic way in order to see how this thesis is structured. This thesis is divided into seven chapters, chapters one and two being Part One, chapters three to five being Part Two, and chapters six and seven being Part Three.

Part One sets the stage of the thesis by giving a general context of the use of the historiographical categories of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity. Chapter one begins in conversation with Josh Reeves' *Against Methodology in Science and Religion* (2019) and from there it explores the relevant works of Peter Harrison and John Hedley Brooke to give an overall sense of how these categories have acquired their currency in science and religion historiographical discourses. Chapter two then focuses on Harrison's *Territories of Science and Religion* and Brooke's *Science and Religion*. It shows that the way the historiographical categories of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity are being deployed undermines, to a significant extent, these historians' goals. Moving away from simplistic deployments of the notions of "science" and "religion" and from unidimensional teleological narratives of harmony or conflict between science and religion may be desirable goals. But the way to attain them is beyond the negations of the historians. These goals need to be seen as parts of projects that exceed the boundaries of the academic discipline of history.

Part Two introduces Gadamer's thought (chapter three), and through his thought reinterprets the notion of complexity (chapter four) and the notions of essentialism and anachronism (chapter five). Chapter three highlights three facets of Gadamer's thought: an ethical, political, and practical side through his reading of Plato and Aristotle; a metaphysical and theological side through his approach to Kant and Hegel; and the relevance of history, phenomenology, and finite temporal existence through Dilthey's, Husserl's, and Heidegger's influence in his thought. For the interested reader, an Appendix has been provided with an overview of Gadamer's life and collected works. Chapter four interprets the notion of complexity beyond a critical register by delving into Gadamer's analysis of *prejudice*, *authority*, and *tradition*. Critique tends to want to move beyond all prejudice and therefore to reject "authority." Gadamer sees this move precisely as "prejudiced": from where does critique perform its judgements? Critique, just like any hermeneutic, looks from a particular

perspective, which means that prejudices or prejudgements constitute the very possibility of looking from this or that perspective. The chapter proposes then a hermeneutics of tradition from which complexity may recover a more productive, “post-critical,” meaning. Chapter five delves into Gadamer’s analysis of the temporality of language and experience in order to show that the categories of essentialism and anachronism can be seen less as problems of “time” or “history” and more as problems of rhetoric and discourse. By focusing on rhetoric and discourse, whatever these categories refer to comes into view, mindful of the fact that in speaking and experiencing one already assumes essential knowledge and is always speaking anachronistically. The overall point of the chapter is to further the hermeneutics of tradition and, again, integrate the insights of the problems of essentialism and anachronism within constructive modes of proceeding.

Finally, Part Three concludes the thesis. Chapter six describes some challenges to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics by Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, and Emilio Betti. The chapter then uses these challenges to show that a hermeneutical understanding of the historiographical categories under investigation (and indeed of “history” in general) shows that the territories of “history”—and hence of these categories—are wider than mere “history.” Political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological threads interconnect to form “historical” categories, thus all methodological debates are also political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological. Chapter seven takes the awareness of the multi-layered nature of historico-methodological debates from chapter six and the proposal of a hermeneutics of tradition in Part Two and concludes the thesis by engaging with scholarship which is already in some form practicing this hermeneutics of tradition, dubbed in this chapter a hermeneutics of *transmission*.

A hermeneutics of transmission seeks to evoke a spirit of appreciation of what has come before, including scholarship from which the debates begin—it is a creative spirit which includes wrestling with and critiquing what is received, but is ultimately focused on involvement and creativity and with passing the baton, sharing with others in word and deed for others to do the same. This thesis therefore concludes by providing the science and religion community a lens through which it can appreciate and use the historiographical work in science and religion, mindful of the ways in which this work can undermine itself. This thesis gives value to the historiographical work, learns from it, and propels its insights forward, beyond the critical frame within which it tends to operate.

Part One

Essentialism, Anachronism, and Complexity as Historiographical Categories

1: Essentialism, Complexity, and Anachronism as Historiographical and Methodological Problems in “Science and Religion” Rhetoric

1.0: Introduction

This chapter sets the broad context of this thesis. It raises some of the current historiographical and methodological themes that this thesis takes as its starting point and which it seeks to analyse. As a starting point I focus on the three historiographical categories of *essentialism*, *complexity*, and *anachronism*. As this thesis responds to what it takes to be a representative picture of how “science and religion” discourses have tended to operate, this thesis consists of an attempt to understand how “science and religion” as an entity comes to be through historiographical and methodological means. The main focus is the historiographical trends amplified by historians such as John Hedley Brooke and Peter Harrison, but since their work seeks to inform the discussions, and it engages in the discussions through critique, their work is not taken in this thesis only as “historical” but also as “methodological.” “Methodological” here means that their work is an active participant in the creation and transformation of “science and religion” rhetoric, not just useful to inform the discourses but co-creative of and implicated in them and hence not external but internal to them. I begin the discussion through Josh Reeves’ *Against Methodology in Science and Religion* (2019) because he analyses methodological and historiographical works to make a methodological point regarding the rejection of essentialism, the first of the categories.

By noting the rejection of *essentialism* of both “science” and “religion,” the *complex* or messy nature of history as curtailing any straightforward historical narrative of conflict or harmony, and the avoidance of historical *anachronism*, this chapter elucidates the broad horizons of these three aspects aiming to explore further in the next chapters how to include these horizons in further scholarship.

1.1: Essentialism and the Historical Contingency of “Science” and “Religion”

Essentialism could be described as the idea that concepts or categories have a distinct “essence,” so that they would constitute a “natural kind,” a fixed *unchangeable* something. Importantly here is the idea of *essential unchangeability* of concepts: the meaning of concepts is deemed to be historically—that is *temporally*—stable. “By ‘tree,’ *of course*”—says the essentialist—“we mean the same thing today that we meant yesterday, and the day before yesterday. When I read ‘tree’ in the Scriptures, for example, *clearly* this means precisely what

I think of as a tree. Why would it not be so?” “Well”—replies the scholar—“we could discuss the word for ‘tree’ in ancient Hebrew and in *koine* Greek, and perhaps see remarkable parallels, but, *crucially*, see remarkable differences. Even ‘tree’ is not the same in all languages, never mind historically *even in the same language*.” The scholar—the anti-essentialist—then notes that words have and do change their meaning throughout history. This happens to such an extent that it becomes evident (thinks the scholar) that they do not have an “essence,” an immutable nature which makes these categories or concepts be what they are regardless of when they are uttered (and regardless, we could add, of who utters them, where and in what language). When we speak them today, they do not refer to the same “thing” they would have referred to in the past. *Anti-essentialism* then rejects the idea that the same words, at different historical moments, mean the same thing. Present words cannot be back projected into the past *anachronistically* without distorting the past significantly, and without creating unnecessary problems for the present. In other words, essentialism ignores the fact that *historical distance matters conceptually*, and that means, temporal distance matters *linguistically* and *rhetorically*.

This thesis agrees with the scholar to a significant extent, but when the scholarly spirit begins to overwhelm the ordinary (but thoughtful) speaker, some questions begin to emerge. To focus the discussion this chapter begins by engaging Josh Reeves’ *Against Methodology in Science and Religion* (2019) and discuss also Peter Harrison’s work, especially *The Territories of Science and Religion* (2015) and John Hedley Brooke’s now classic *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1991) in the following sections and in the next chapter with more detail. Reeves’ book and (and a subsequent symposium on it) could be seen as the immediate context of this thesis,⁷ although calls for much needed refreshment in the field have been around for over a decade,⁸ and revisionist histories have been attempting to challenge forms of “science and religion” discourses since the 1930s.⁹ The symposium on Reeves’ book

⁷ See the section “Reeves’s *Against Methodology in Science and Religion*” in *Zygon* 55, no. 3 (September 2020): 773-836, including responses from Paul Allen, J. B. Stump, Peter N. Jordan, Jaime Wright and Victoria Lorrimer (in that order), and also Reeves’ rebuttal.

⁸ Michael Burdett, “Assessing the Field of Science and Religion: Advice from the Next Generation,” *Zygon* 52, no. 3 (September 2017): 760, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12352> and Nathan J. Hallanger, “Science and Serious Theology: Two Paths for Science and Religion’s Future?,” *Zygon* 45, no. 1 (March 2010): 173, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2010.01064.x> both say that the field is at a “crossroads”; John J. Carvalho IV, “A Biologist’s Perspective on the Future of the Science-Religion Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century,” *Zygon* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00908.x> says that the field is in need of expansion; Taede Smedes, “Beyond Barbour or Back to Basics? The Future of Science-and-Religion and The Quest for Unity,” *Zygon* 43, no.1 (March 2008): 236, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00910.x> says that the field is in a midlife crisis.

⁹ John Hedley Brooke, “Historians,” in *The Warfare between Science and Religion: The Idea That Wouldn’t Die*, ed. Jeff Hardin, Ronald L. Numbers, and Ronald A. Binzley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 258-9.

brought to the fore the suggestion that the “academic study of science and religion today might do well to reengage philosophy through thinkers from the Continental tradition,” among which Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Cassirer, and “more recently, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas have devoted considerable attention to science.”¹⁰ An explicit mention of Gadamer midway writing the thesis confirmed that he was a good conversation partner and such mention also voiced a sentiment that I shared, suggesting the usefulness of sets of questions and philosophical styles—from the so-called Continental tradition—that are absent in current science and religion research.

Let us now turn to Josh Reeves’ book, explore his critique of some methodological approaches in science and religion research, and build upon his critique and suggestions for further research.

1.1.0: Against Methodology in Science and Religion: Josh Reeves

Josh Reeves says in the final chapter of *Against Methodology* that the science and religion field should move away from essentialism, one of the main catalysts for methodological debates. Focusing on “science,” Reeves says: “Too much of the methodological work produced by scholars of science and religion depend upon the wholesale assessment of science that motivated philosophers of science in the last century.”¹¹ Since heavy methodological debates in the philosophy of science have waned due to the unwieldy complexity of what science is, Reeves argues that new kinds of questions might emerge if scholars are mindful of the complexity of science and religion:

While newer is not necessarily better, it should be concerning that debates within science and religion are not at least showing awareness of developments within the history and philosophy of science. Progress in the field of science and religion requires the asking of new questions, rather than the answering of old questions in better ways.¹²

Reeves’ book is grounded on the latest work in the history of science. The historians, just like the philosophers, have also been moving away from an essentialist conception of science. The new questions that may arise, it could be said, need to be aware of essentialism for historical and philosophical reasons in order to be articulated.

¹⁰ J. B. Stump, “Science and Other Common Nouns: Further Implications of Anti-Essentialism,” *Zygon* 55, no.3 (September 2020): 785, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12622>.

¹¹ Josh Reeves, *Against Methodology in Science and Religion: Recent Debates on Rationality and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2019), 126.

¹² Reeves, *Against Methodology in Science and Religion*, 126.

There is a deep truth in what Reeves says and historians and philosophers of science can help scholars see it, although, as Reeves' himself notes, it is dubious to accept without qualification that there are no plausible generalities or "patterns" adequate to talk about "science," for example.¹³ One might add that scholars should also continue to pay attention to ongoing "wholesale" assessments of science, despite its unfashionableness according to Reeves.¹⁴ Perhaps the practical suggestion would be that scholars would proceed by being less confident that "science" and "religion" are such and such so that comparing them methodologically does not become the all-encompassing and overarching default procedure. Reeves says: "Once we realize there is no common essence that unites what we group together under the categories of *science* and *religion*, then we will not feel the same impulse to solve the problem of how they fit together."¹⁵ Methodological attempts to "relate" science and religion in one way or another seem to be predicated on the assumption of essentialism.

Reeves' title, *Against Methodology*, suggests that his proposal might be moving us beyond methodological approaches altogether. Reeves, however, is not wholesale "against methodology" but against what he calls the "credibility strategy" in methodological discussions. This strategy gives rise to methodological compare-contrast between science and religion (often standing for natural sciences and Christian theology), seeking to conclude that whatever makes science "science," is also to be found in theology (thus making theology intellectually justifiable). The credibility strategy, which Reeves sees as underlying the work of Nancey Murphy, Alister McGrath, and Wenzel van Huyssteen, is to "seek some essential characteristic of valid science that would explain its success, and then look to show why theology might display that same characteristic." This "essential characteristic" is what constitutes "science": methodological rigour (Murphy), rationality (Van Huyssteen), or its realist stance towards what it investigates (McGrath). "The goal is to make theology scientific, rational, or some other label to justify its place in the modern academy," says Reeves.¹⁶

¹³ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 128.

¹⁴ See the work of Paul Hoyningen-Huene, especially his *Systematicity: The Nature of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Hoyningen-Huene even gives a "demarcation criterion" from his systematicity theory (199-207). Also Michael Strevens' work, especially *Depth: An Account of Scientific Explanation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), gives a "wholesale" theory of explanation, a *kairitic* theory in his terms, a theory that focuses on difference-making within any causal order (see esp. Part II. The Kairitic Account of Explanation, 67-216).

¹⁵ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 128 (author's italics).

¹⁶ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 123. A theological and philosophical critique of such "credibility strategies," because at base they effectively make "the secular" or "secular reason" the default or neutral metaphysical vision of reality is John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 1-6. Milbank's critique shows that much of modern intellectual discourse (including much of modern theology) works on assumptions that cannot sustain it, namely an assumed neutral secularity that does not recognise theological discourse (while attempting to appropriate it).

The strategy of finding a common genus to theology and science to show their parity is questioned indirectly, but fundamentally, by anti-essentialism. Reeves (and the historians and philosophers) would say something like: “there is no ‘thing’ called ‘science,’ there is no aspect or set of characteristics that makes science ‘science’ (either now or historically).” Reeves’ recommendation of anti-essentialism to methodological discussions of religion and science warns thus: “do not try to make theology credible by pursuing a ‘science’ that never was.” But how to proceed? Are there any alternatives that are mindful of the “essentialist” assumptions in methodological approaches? Reeves gives science and religion scholars three ways forward, which will be discussed in turn.

1.1.0.0: Reeves’ First Way Forward: Historians of the Present

Reeves concludes his book by recommending three ways in which science and religion scholars may fruitfully engage, all mindful of the problem of essentialism. He says first that science and religion scholars could become “historians of the present,” acting as pressure gauges, describing contemporary controversies (as opposed to the historians who write about past controversies), and facilitating debates between competing groups through their awareness of the history of science and religion.¹⁷ Reeves thinks this way forward is the least viable. A descriptive approach sidesteps specific questions of how to reconcile this or that scientific view with a given religious notion. Moreover, most religion and science training programmes are connected to theological facilities so presumably such facilities would not be open to or be unable to foster “descriptionist” training. In contrast, Jamie Wright and Victoria Lorrimar have a hopeful and positive view of this descriptionist way forward. A descriptionist approach underscores personal experience—what it is like to do science and religion “on the ground”—and the role of the imagination.¹⁸ Wright and Lorrimar seem to highlight something that Reeves does not consider in his book (and which he discusses briefly in his response to their comments on his book).¹⁹ Imagination, body, emotion, affect, and reason mingle together in our personal experience to participate in the practices called science or religion. It is from personal knowledge that third-person “methodological” descriptions arise. Personal knowledge—more

¹⁷ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 129-31.

¹⁸ Jaime Wright, “Making Space for the Methodological Mosaic: The Future of the Field of Science-and-Religion,” *Zygon* 55, no. 3 (September 2020): 808-10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12623>; Victoria Lorrimar, “Science and Religion: Moving Beyond the Credibility Strategy,” *Zygon* 55, no.3 (September 2020): 818-22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12629>.

¹⁹ Josh Reeves, “Methodology in Science and Religion: A Reply to Critics,” *Zygon* 55, no. 3 (September 2020): 833-5, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12630>.

than methodological reflection—reflects what happens in actual practice.²⁰ Also, theological facilities do not need to require confessional strictures, or at least in my experience studying in Europe (UK) this is not the case.

1.1.0.1: Reeves' Second Way Forward: Involvement in Specific Research Programs

Reeves' second way forward embeds science and religion scholars in "research programs." Scholars could focus on specific scientific and religious concepts rather than on the "relation between science and religion."²¹ A recent project of the University of St Andrews called "science-engaged theology" would fit in this category. This approach engages science as a central source for theological reflection and focuses on theological "puzzles," prioritising "empirical data" as a key component to articulate a specific answer to a theological question.²² These approaches are important, especially if theologians want to speak meaningfully about realities that in their context are seen as primarily or authoritatively described through scientific discourse. The issue of context is of particular importance. Science and religion discussions, especially in Anglo-Saxon "science and religion" rhetoric, are embedded in a residual *cultural scientism*, as Taede Smedes points out (see below for Smedes' critique). This complicates the "flow" of possible engagement, because even when the direction of engagement may seem to be going both ways, it may go bidirectionally in an inclined plane where "science" is at the top and "religion" at the bottom. Smedes' critique is apposite because it shows that culturally there is no way of doing "science-engaged theology" without challenging cultural scientism's metaphysical and theological defaults.²³ Mere cultural gravity forces theologians or other scholars to engage (however badly and hence science-engaged theology projects are important) with "science" as if culturally and metaphysically neutral. For scientists or other scholars, however, to engage with "theology" or "religion" (if at all desired for constructive, not polemical, reasons) a steep slope must be climbed, and it has been climbed mostly by scientists

²⁰ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). The following chapters further engage Polanyi's work.

²¹ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 131-3.

²² See "What is Science-Engaged Theology (SET)?," New Visions in Theological Anthropology (NViTA), University of St Andrews, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://set.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/about/what-is-science-engaged-theology/>. See also John Perry and Joanna Leidenhag, "What is Science-Engaged Theology?," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (April 2021): 247-53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12681>.

²³ Carmody Grey, "A Theologian's Perspective on Science-Engaged Theology," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (April 2021): 489, <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12695>, voices a similar observation: "does Science-Engaged Theology make itself a hostage to the very circumstances which prompted Harrison to undertake his critique?" In using the terms "science," "religion," and "theology" one *is already playing the game* one is claiming to overcome. "The project then reproduces the problem Harrison identifies: the essentialisation of 'religion' and 'science'" (491). "Harrison" here is a reference to Harrison's *Territories*.

or scholars who already belong to a theological tradition. For example, scientist-theologians may tend to view theology as if “theology” were the kind of “science” they practiced (as Smedes points out in Peacocke and Polkinghorne), still under the influence of cultural scientism. Addressing this cultural scientism an approach called “theology-engaged science” has been proposed, using anti-essentialist cues from recent historiographical works, Harrison’s *Territories* in particular. Such an approach seeks to “continually destabilize modernity’s disciplinary boundaries, highlighting the ways in which scientific theories are already engaged in metaphysical and theological debates and that scientific inquiry can be a form of spiritual devotion.”²⁴ This chapter explores Smedes’ work below to see why theology-engaged science may be incompatible with some “science and religion” discourses. Challenging cultural scientism may involve challenging certain forms of “science and religion” discourses. “Science-engaged theology,” it could be suggested, cannot happen without “theology-engaged science” (even though both still speak of “science,” “religion,” and “theology”).²⁵

1.1.0.2: Reeves’ Third Way Forward: Reforming the Categories

The third way forward according to Reeves is an anti-essentialist engagement with “science” and “religion” as categories that still play a definitive role in the social and cultural imaginary.²⁶ It involves reforming the categories instead of abandoning them, which could be the case when focused on specific scientific and theological questions.²⁷ Any way forward must partake in this third way. One cannot speak insightfully without an understanding of what the categories mean in common usage in the present and when used to talk about the past, especially if the categories were not there at all or were used in radically different ways.

Having discussed Reeves’ critique of some methodological tendencies and his ways forward, this chapter discusses a debate between Taede Smedes and Ian Barbour. This debate, especially due to Smedes’ critique of Barbour, displays much of Reeves’ concerns and suggestions in what could be seen as an anti-essentialist approach. Through Smedes’ and Reeves’ insights, this chapter then analyses the categories of complexity and anachronism.

²⁴ Leidenhag and Perry, “What is Science-Engaged Theology?,” 247.

²⁵ Again, concurring with Grey, “A Theologian’s Perspective on Science-Engaged Theology,” 490: “But the categories used” in Science-Engaged Theology and Theology-Engaged Science, “presuppose the very terms that Harrison problematises.”

²⁶ Charles Taylor, “What Is a ‘Social Imaginary’?,” chap. 2 in *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23-5.

²⁷ Reeves, *Against Methodology*, 133-6.

1.1.1: Against Methodology Before Reeves: Taede Smedes Challenges Ian Barbour

The work of Dutch scholar Taede Smedes is a valuable and largely unheeded precedent in religion and science discussions that could be framed as a warning against the essentialist approaches of methodological discussions, and a model of historically attuned scholarship. Smedes' debate with Barbour in 2007-2008 could be read as noting that method-comparing and model-building approaches (à la Barbour) are "essentialist." These approaches are not neutral. They assume an entire cultural disposition which Smedes calls cultural scientism, a cultural heritage from the European Enlightenment which eventually helped convert natural knowledge to "science" (with the primacy of physical science). Smedes notes that a methodological preoccupation already includes a view of what "science" is and how to think about it, and also an "epistemology," what even counts as knowledge and how knowing might (and should) happen.²⁸ Smedes' observations—which go back to observing something similar regarding both John Polkinghorne's and Arthur Peacocke's work in 2004²⁹—mean that we have to go "back to basics." Accounting for how deeply contextual and cultural these issues are invites us to ask again what "science" and "religion" mean, who is using these terms, where, why, and in what context. Smedes' suggestions call for abandoning the assumption of knowing what "science" and "religion" mean in order to be able to see the problems correctly—to ask new questions (Reeves), or to ask *the right* questions (Smedes).³⁰ Smedes then may be read as already treading Reeves' ways forward (more than ten years prior to Reeves' book).

Smedes' debate with Barbour shows that challenging cultural scientism is tantamount to challenging the foundations of much of the "science and religion" superstructure. Smedes

²⁸ Smedes started this line of argument in "Social and Ideological Roots of 'Science and Religion': A Social-Historical Exploration of a Recent Phenomenon," *Theology and Science* 5, no. 2 (2007): 185-201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700701387826>. He voices his unease with neglected fundamental issues in the field (especially in Anglo-Saxon discussions) in his editorial, "Religion and Science: Finding the Right Questions," *Zygon* 42, no. 3 (September 2007): 595-8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2007.00853.x>. Here he reminds scholars of an unacknowledged cultural scientism in Polkinghorne's and Peacocke's work, inherited from European Enlightenment culture, an observation he made in *Chaos, Complexity, and God: Divine Action and Scientism* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004). The first paper noted is an example of non-essentialist work that is helpful to understand not only the "relation between religion and science" but *why* there seems to be a need to ask certain questions, including religion-science ones. The pursuit of the *why* does not ignore the issues nor get trapped by them but seeks a wider picture to address fundamental problems and not only their symptoms. Smedes' awareness of his European context helps remind western scholars that they also have a contingent historical and cultural context from which their thought originates. See the Smedes-Barbour debate: Smedes, "Beyond Barbour or Back to Basics? The Future of Science-And-Religion and the Quest for Unity"; Ian Barbour, "Taking Science Seriously without Scientism: A Response to Taede Smedes," *Zygon* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 259-69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00911.x>; Taede Smedes, "Taking Theology and Science Seriously without Category Mistakes: A Response to Ian Barbour," *Zygon* 43, no. 1 (March 2008): 271-6, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9744.2008.00912.x>

²⁹ See Smedes, *Chaos, Complexity, and God*.

³⁰ Smedes, "Religion and Science: Finding the Right Questions," 598.

might be seen as suggesting that there is no view from nowhere when one asks questions; to ask a question already speaks of both myself and what I aim to know. Not just the answers but *the questions* are ways of getting at or missing the point. To challenge Barbour's approach (the way Smedes did) is suspicious within a form of modernity that does not recognise itself as contextual and contingent. Another way of voicing Smedes' critique of cultural scientism is that cultural scientism does not consider itself as theological. What could be called "theological theology"³¹ that opens the experience of "mystagogy"³² is not in the purview of cultural scientism. Meta-narratives (and experiences in general) that position cultural scientism's style of modernity exist—within cultural scientism—only as add-ons to what is "empirically" (that is *really*) real.

1.1.1.0: Ian Barbour, Methodology, and Cultural Scientism

Barbour's widely known (and critiqued) typologies are a methodological vehicle to articulate the position he advocated—an integrative theology of nature.³³ It is "integrative" (to echo his fourth category of integration) because it claims to take science and what it tells us about nature or about "reality" seriously, and then it theologises "nature" (as revealed by science) through an appropriately-adapted metaphysic, which in his case is an adapted process metaphysic.³⁴ Barbour's work has been so successful that most scholars work implicitly under his shadow. Scholars might even read with Barbourean lenses, asking subliminally, "but what is the relationship like?" Scholars may even assume that given that Barbour created the "bridge" between religion and science³⁵—the "family resemblance" (as Sander Klaasse calls it) called critical realism³⁶—they now just need to cross it as much as possible.³⁷ Or perhaps we cannot but mould ourselves or at least adjust to having to converse with "methodology" as an

³¹ Echoing John Webster's title, *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 28 October 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). Jon Sobrino (see below) also uses the phrase.

³² Jon Sobrino, "Espiritualidad y teología" [Spirituality and Theology], in *Liberación con espíritu: Apuntes para una nueva espiritualidad* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1985), 89, says that: "a theological theology must be mystagogy, an introduction into the reality of God as he is, transcendent, unmanipulable mystery, and a near, good, and saving Father" (my translation).

³³ See Ian Barbour, "God and Nature," chap. 13 in *Issues in Science and Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 452-63; *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 100-3, 312-32.

³⁴ See Barbour, "Parallels of Theology and Science," chap. 5, esp. 125-30 and "God and Nature," chap. 13, esp. 439-51 both in *Issues in Science and Religion*; "Process Thought," chap. 11 in *Religion and Science*, 284-292.

³⁵ Barbour, *Religion and Science*, 168-9.

³⁶ See Sander Klaasse, "Beyond the Dichotomy: A Critical Examination of Critical Realism" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2018), 5-6, 19-4, <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/36171>.

³⁷ Exploring the opportunities and fruit that Barbour's "critical realism" provides, see Robert John Russell, "Ian Barbour's Methodological Breakthrough: Creating the 'Bridge' Between Science and Theology," *Theology and Science* 15, no. 1 (2017): 28-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2016.1265224>.

obligatory (if awkward) primary conversation partner, and to have to suggest an alternative “method” or “model” for the “relation” to even begin thinking about anything that might inhabit a perceived connection between “science” and “religion.” The point here is not that there is no place for talk of “relation,” but that it has been almost totally equated with analytic, methodological comparisons in the Barbourian post-positivist register which leaves untouched cultural, historical, metaphysical, and theological issues, as Smedes points out.

A key point of Smedes’ interrogation of Barbour is to acknowledge the cultural context in order to *ask* the right questions, before assuming that “science” and “religion” are in principle definable and comparable entities. Questions about the “relation between religion and science,” as they were (and are) posed, make sense *historically* and *culturally*. This tells us that the question of the “relation” of religion and science is historically and culturally contingent.³⁸ The question itself is also not an “essence.” Without acknowledging this, studying surrounding issues might remain confined to finding better and more complex models, methodologies, etc.³⁹ Recognising the contingent nature of “relating religion and science,” as historians are doing with “science” and “religion,” sets “science and religion” students on a better footing because it allows students to ask questions about what these words are trying to get at and how whatever they are about is played out in reality. Western or Anglo-Saxon scholarship may still feel that an “essential” question is “how do we relate religion and science?” (although *scientists* are seeing the limitations of posing the question in those terms).⁴⁰ Even to ask the same question

³⁸ See Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 194.

³⁹ See Willem B. Drees, *Religion, Science and Naturalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Mikael Stenmark, *How to Relate Science and Religion: A Multidimensional Model* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004); Ted Peters, “Science and Religion: Ten Models of War, Truce and Partnership,” *Theology and Science* 16, no. 1 (2018): 11-53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2017.1402163>. Of the myriad of methodologies and models that keep coming, a “re-emergence”—taking what Ted Peters calls the “two languages” model (Barbour’s *independence*) to its literal extreme—is Amy H. Lee’s proposal of religion and science as different languages that can be understood through bilingualism: science and religion are two languages, spoken by the same person, with at times different purposes and translation difficulties, but nevertheless “in” the same person, so they are harmonious. See Amy H. Lee, “Science and Religion as Languages: Understanding the Science-Religion Relationship Using Metaphors, Analogies and Models,” *Zygon* 54, no. 4 (December 2019): 880-908, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12569>. Despite its essentialism it has a pragmatic simplicity for pedagogical value. In a western context Lee’s proposal would be useful to teach children and young people about “religion and science” for it relates to their own experience if bilingual. Its limitation is considering “religion” and “science” as cultural universals, propagating the idea of “religions” (plural) and similarly with “science,” ignoring the cultural assumptions within both.

⁴⁰ British physicists like Andrew Steane and Tom McLeish object in different ways with the very posing of the question in such terms. See Andrew Steane, *Faithful to Science: The Role of Science in Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-5; Tom McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), vii, 4, and 166-212; “The Science-and-Religion Delusion: Towards a Theology of Science,” in *Knowing Creation: Perspectives from Theology, Philosophy and Science*, ed. Andrew B. Torrance and Thomas H. McCall, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 305-6; “Beyond Barbour: A Theology of Science from Ancient and Modern Thinkers,” in *Science and Religion in Education*, ed. Berry Billingsley, Keith Chappell and J. Reiss (Cham: Springer, 2019), 33, 41-4.

more thoughtfully—never mind asking other questions—needs a higher cultural, historical, metaphysical, theological, and disciplinary self-awareness.⁴¹

If there are “lessons” to be gained from essentialising “science,” “religion,” or “science and religion,” they are not to do with making more sophisticated typologies, taxonomies, or ways of “relating” religion, theology, or science. Thinking about “relating” religion and science can leave wider cultural, historical, metaphysical, epistemological, and theological questions untouched, whilst at the same time assuring the relation-seeker that they are taking seriously whatever “science” and “religion” (or “theology”) mean.

1.1.1.1: David Bentley Hart and a Culture’s Interweaved Metaphysics

The notion of a culture’s interweaved metaphysics is worth underscoring. “Relating” science, religion, and theology can—but does not *need* to—leave wider cultural, historical, metaphysical, epistemological, and theological questions untouched. When talking about “modern science” and “theology”—which is what “science and religion” tends to stand for—David Bentley Hart says that it is at the cultural level where the appropriate questioning may arise. By acknowledging that “science,” even more than “theology,” is an abstraction, Hart notes that whenever anyone speaks of “modern science” they are referring to “a distinct culture, with all historical, linguistic, and conceptual conditionality that this entails.” Cultures incubate, “even if only tacitly and tenuously, certain metaphysical presuppositions: what, for instance, constitutes reason; what the limits of knowledge are; what questions ought to be asked; which methods of inquiry should be presumed to reflect reality and which should be regarded only as useful fictions.”⁴²

Hart argues that it is at the level of culture that conflicts may arise between scientific and theological thought, because it is not what can be demonstrated but what is *presupposed* that tends to determine whatever knowledge is thought to have been discovered. Before talking about any “consonance” (in Hart’s case)—or about any “relation” more generally—between theology and the sciences “we must make sure that we know what territories these cultures

⁴¹ An example of asking the same questions more thoughtfully is Dirk Evers, “‘Good Fences Make Good Neighbours’: Why the Differences of Science, Religion and Theology Must Not Be Blurred,” in *Our Common Cosmos: Exploring the Future of Theology, Human Culture and Space Sciences*, ed. Zoë Lehmann Imfeld and Andreas Losch (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 21-35. Evers largely sticks to Gould’s NOMA, and to Alfred N. Whitehead, “Religion and Science,” *Atlantic Monthly* 136, no. 8 (1925): 200-7, found also online <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1925/08/religion-and-science/304220/>, accessed March 27, 2022. Evers’ distinction between theology, religion, and science recognises the impossibility of definition of these terms (asking again “what is ‘science?’” “what is ‘theology?’”) and their contingency to western culture.

⁴² David Bentley Hart, “Where the Consonance Really Lies,” chap. 8 in *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 124.

properly encompass, and whether there are still any to which both at once might be able to lay some legitimate claim. Otherwise we are likely to careen across boundaries we do not even know exist.”⁴³ Hart’s comments are clearly not essentialist, but he recognises that one cannot just say “there is no ‘thing’ called ‘science’ or ‘theology’” without attempting to discover in one’s own thought and present reality (which includes history) what one is talking about. Beginning by assuming that we know what “science” or “religion” are; that what is reasonable is evident; that the limits of knowledge are obvious; that the appropriate ways of knowing are such and such; that to be human is clearly understood in these ways of knowing; and that the articulation of these ways of knowing are epitomised by certain methodologies or methods, is to construct a forlorn “dialogue.” Without puzzling about these assumptions one may never recognise that “modern science” constitutes a culture, feeding the cultural scientism Smedes mentions. Not questioning these cultural assumptions is to never come close to questioning the covert metaphysics, that is, the “common sense” that makes certain approaches seem reasonable, appropriate, and even necessary.

From Hart’s approach we can see that “essentialism” cannot be identified (and rejected) without having some “essential” knowledge of what is being identified to begin with. By going to the cultural and metaphysical level from the beginning, Hart shows that one can critique one’s own cultural assumptions in order to positively suggest this or that. It is doubtful whether one can decry that there is no such “thing” as “X” without having implicitly an “essential” idea of what “X” is that leads or at least plays into one’s enquiry. Whilst attempting to say something about how words configure what one says and thinks, one cannot at the same time use these words and say that they mean *nothing* specifically. There is substantially more to a rejection of essentialism than the suggestion that these entities are not enduring entities or “essences” that cannot be then used indiscriminately to describe “obvious” features of reality, now or in the past. Essential knowledge does not assume the kind of “essence” which essentialism criticises; it is not knowledge of a fixed and unchangeable meaning of words which then can be crassly back projected historically to contexts that did not operate under whatever realm of meaning the words evoke in the present. This essential knowledge lies in our experience and is expressed in our language, as the thesis’ introduction pointed out. Our very expressions in language assume and convey, by our words mediating between different contexts and historical times, shared experiences between the past and the present. This shared experience, tacitly assumed

⁴³ Hart, “Where the Consonance Really Lies,” 124.

every time we speak, is the knowledge our language gives us and it underpins historiographical work.

This thesis will say more about the attempt to reject essentialism in the following chapters, but now it moves to explore the category of complexity and how complexity has taken a central place in historiographical discussions. The following section highlights how complexity involves noting dimensions that are always present. Having mentioned the cultural and metaphysical dimensions, complexity helps to highlight the dimensions of politics, power, and ethics.

1.2: Historical Complexity and the Richness of History

A related historiographical category that has been deployed specifically *against* a variety of historical narratives is what Ronald L. Numbers called the “complexity thesis,” referring to Brooke’s *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*.⁴⁴ Complexity, however, was not meant to be understood as “a thesis.” Brooke says that it is a critical stance directed against unidimensional progressive historical narratives. In a recent afterword for a volume with the subtitle *An Exploration of Conflict and the Complexity Principle*, he says that he has many times “insisted that complexity is a historical reality, not a thesis, and that instead of being placed alongside other theses, its primary role is to function as critique.”⁴⁵ These remarks are consistent with his classic book. There he notes that the work “should be read as a historically based commentary rather than as a conventional historical narrative,” and that it seeks “to assist in the creation of critical perspectives, not to describe a continuous series of seemingly decisive transformations.” To follow him into what was to be instantiated as a truism, he notes that “the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion in the past that general theses are difficult to sustain. The real lesson turns out to be the complexity.”⁴⁶ In the postscript he notes that his aim “has been to reveal something of the complexity of the relationship between science and religion as they have interacted in

⁴⁴ John Hedley Brooke, “Afterword: The Instantiation of Historical Complexity,” in *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion: An Exploration of Conflict and the Complexity Principle*, ed. Bernard Lightman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 235. Brooke refers us to Numbers’ review of Brooke’s book in 1992 in a journal called *Metascience*, which is still active, but I have not been able to find volume 1 which contains the review.

⁴⁵ Brooke, “Afterword: The Instantiation of Historical Complexity,” 235. For an approach that takes complexity as a methodological principle or model see Robert M. Geraci, “A Hydra-Logical Approach: Acknowledging Complexity in the Study of Religion, Science, And Technology,” *Zygon* 55, no. 4 (December 2020): 948-70.

⁴⁶ John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*, Canto Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

the past.” Popular universal narratives, either of war or peace (conflict or harmony) will not do. He goes on to say:

There is no such thing as the relationship between science and religion. It is what different individuals and communities have made of it in a plethora of different contexts. Not only has the problematic interface between them shifted over time, but there is also a high degree of artificiality in abstracting the science and the religion of earlier centuries to see how they were related.⁴⁷

There is a double anti-essentialism here, and it is mentioned by Brooke a few times in his book, highlighting what “complexity” says as a description of the nature of history. After noting how Thomas Burnet in his *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684) was able to agree with Augustine’s warning on invoking the authority of Scripture in debates about the natural world, and yet invoke it nonetheless, Brooke asks: how is it possible that Augustine looked inconsistent for a later generation? How is it that for contemporary observers Burnet also looks inconsistent? A partial response is Brooke’s form of anti-essentialism:

Part of the answer is that the domains of science and religion were separated by different boundaries in Augustine’s day from those in Burnet’s day, and in Burnet’s day from our own. Precisely because the boundaries have shifted with time, it would be artificial to ask about the relationship between “science” and “religion” as if modern definitions of their provenance had some timeless validity.⁴⁸

Brooke’s anti-essentialism recognises that modern ways of understanding are not timeless or “essential,” so there is a non-negligible artificiality in talk of “religion” and “science” in relation to other times besides the present. And to emphasise, his anti-essentialism is doubled—it is one of *terms* and of *narratives*. The artificiality of these terms and narratives is highlighted even more, not only because of the time-bound nature of these concepts and narratives, but because they reflect actual human concerns and contexts. Because “religion” and “science” are both “rooted in human concerns and human endeavor, it would be a profound mistake to treat them as if they were entities in themselves—as if they could be completely abstracted from the social contexts in which those concerns and endeavors took their distinctive forms.”⁴⁹ Brooke even criticises his own metaphor of “changing boundaries” (as in the quote above about Burnet and Augustine) precisely because it is not only a matter of different “boundaries” but (one could say) of factors that do not see “boundaries,” like social and political factors.

⁴⁷ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 438.

⁴⁸ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 10-11; also 56-7, 62.

⁴⁹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 11.

1.2.0: Complexity and the Political Dimension

The political dimension is worth bringing to the fore. Brooke notes that alleged battles between religion and science, “may turn out to be between rival scientific interests, or conversely between rival theological factions.” Furthermore, issues of “political power, social prestige, and intellectual authority have repeatedly been at stake,” and “the histories written by protagonists have reflected their own preoccupations.”⁵⁰ In relation to the Galileo affair and in relation to Darwin’s grandfather’s evolutionary musings after the French Revolution, Brooke states:

The existence of a political dimension to many of the debates in which scientific and religious interests were involved means that to abstract both the “science” and the “religion” and then try to establish their mutual relationship can be highly artificial. Indeed, it is tempting to say that we should be more concerned with the use to which scientific and religious ideas have been put in different societies than with some notional relationship between them.⁵¹

The political dimension knows no “scientific” or “religious” boundaries. In the volume mentioned above containing an afterword by Brooke, Miguel de Asúa even argues that if the notion of complexity is to be applied properly—or to use Brooke’s language, if it is to be understood adequately as a historical reality—it is on the political and not on the intellectual plane that we should focus.⁵² De Asúa says this in the context of Catholic Argentina, where, as is the case in Iberian America (as he points out), the notion of *laicismo* (roughly, “the secular state”) mediates and perhaps determines any putative “relation” between religion and science. Brooke is not sure about the “black-and-white” suggestion of de Asúa with respect to placing the complexity in the political *rather than* in the intellectual plane, but still Brooke says that the suggestion is “stimulating.”⁵³ Brooke perhaps is simply unwilling to concede that there are no intellectual complexities. There is a false antithesis—Brooke argues in reference to apologetically construed revisionist histories—when suggesting that conflict “was over political rather than intellectual matters.”⁵⁴ Coming from Guatemala, an overwhelmingly “religious” (in western terms) country, I understand why de Asúa focuses on the political in Latin American contexts. De Asúa shows a stronger awareness of what Catholicism as “religion” involves in (historically) “Catholic” nations, where it is evident, even after the

⁵⁰ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 6.

⁵¹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 13.

⁵² Miguel de Asúa, “Three Centuries of Scientific Culture and Catholicism in Argentina: A Case Study of Long-Term Trends,” in Lightman, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*, 49.

⁵³ Brooke, “Afterword: The Instantiation of Historical Complexity,” 240.

⁵⁴ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 66.

advent of *laicismo* that “religion” is always political and not solely or primarily “intellectual.” The idea of *laicismo* is, among other things, a way of creating a separated sphere from the clergy—separating “institutional” church from not-church. Such boundary-setting was then applied to “religions” (note the plural), creating a fantastical non-religious “politics.” This new “politics” is now implicitly in tension—and always prone to clashing with—“religion,” whose place it now partially occupies.⁵⁵ One thing is clear, however, namely that it is heuristically important to pay attention to how the intellectual belongs in the deep commitments of peoples (that is *ethos* or *morals*),⁵⁶ institutions (*politics*), and *power*.⁵⁷ My own background of colonial Catholic Latin America underscores this point: the territories of religion and politics are not only profoundly intertwined⁵⁸ but in western discussions in particular they are also historically and culturally shaped by a Christendom-shaped heritage.⁵⁹ The language of “science” and “religion,” insofar as it is intertwined, echoes the complex ancestry of *scientia* and *religio* through the historico-cultural register of western Christian culture.⁶⁰ As Tom Holland puts it in the context of terms like “religion,” “atheist,” “secular”:

“Religion”, “secular”, “atheist”: none of these are neutral. All, though they derive from the classical past, come freighted with the legacy of Christendom. Fail to appreciate

⁵⁵ See Roberto Blancarte, “Laicidad y laicismo en América Latina” [Secularity and Secularism in Latin America], *Estudios Sociológicos* 26, no. 76 (2008): 160-2. <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=59826106>.

⁵⁶ From a sociological angle, John H. Evans argues in *Morals Not Knowledge: Recasting the Contemporary U.S. Conflict Between Religion and Science* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018) that in the US it is morals, not knowledge, that facilitates “religion vs. science” narratives. My partial agreement with him is in the “morals” part, but as it will be clear in this thesis, *ethos* (that is “morals”) in my view (following Gadamer who follows Aristotle here), *includes* knowledge. A moral disagreement is a mismatch of *moral* knowledge.

⁵⁷ Peter Harrison, “‘Science’ and ‘Religion’: Constructing the Boundaries,” chap. 2 in *Science and Religion: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Thomas Dixon, Geoffrey Cantor, and Stephen Pumfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40, referring to John Bowker, notes that “the issue between science and religion is less to do with propositions than with power”; *Territories of Science and Religion*, 4, 175. Silvio O. Funtowicz and Jerome R. Ravetz, “Science for the Post-Normal Age,” *Futures* 25, no. 7 (September 1993): 739-55, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(93\)90022-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(93)90022-L), are also recognising the political element inherent in science. In chapter seven I engage with their work in more detail.

⁵⁸ David Martin, *Religion and Power: No Logos without Myths* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 1, argues that we must analyse both “religion and politics in the same conceptual frame.” We must reject “the supposed contrast between rational politics and irrational religion,” attending to “the underlying dynamics of power, solidarity and violence exercised against the Other *whether the dominant ideology is Christianity, nationalism or Communism*” (3-4, author’s italics).

⁵⁹ Specifically, following David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 2, religion is Christianity, “its characteristic ethos, institutions and beliefs [...], as variously incorporated in Protestant, Sectarian, Catholic and Orthodox forms, [assuming] certain very broad continuities with its own past and a common identifiable core of which different versions remain nevertheless recognizable variants.”

⁶⁰ Attempting to remind western Christians that they also have a culture, and that this should be recognised to have an actual encounter with other cultures and traditions (within and without their own borders), is Vince L. Bantu, *A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient’s Christianity’s Global Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), esp. chap.1, 9-71. Bantu articulates the forming of a western Christian ethico-theological-political vision, so that both western achievements and its atrocities are framed under a Christian Graeco-Roman umbrella. The implications Bantu is after are the communication of the Christian Gospel, but his observations are apposite for western scholarship to recognise itself as also culturally contingent.

this, and the risk is always of anachronism. The West, increasingly empty though the pews may be, remains firmly moored to its Christian past.⁶¹

Terms that tend to be connected—in however complex and at times incoherent ways—with science or religion, like the secular, secularism, secularisation, humanism, atheism, agnosticism, theism, etc., may be interpreted as manifestations of western Christianity’s effective history. They are an internal dynamics of (western) Christian culture.

1.2.1: Complexity and the Cultural Dimension

De Asúa, again focusing on Argentinean soil, notes also that the case of Catholic countries should be considered on their own terms, especially as the whole narrative of “conflict” crafted by historians of science from the works of Draper and White is a product of English-speaking societies.⁶² Generalisation, the “application” to other cultures, by asking the question “what do they think about the interaction between ‘science’ and ‘religion’?” is already to have skewed the whole reality to fit the Anglo-American mould. Appropriate contextualisation is necessary: the Catholic (French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese) influences and how they differ from the Anglo-Saxon ones; the pre-Hispanic and continuously developing indigenous cultures (given my own awareness of things in a country like Guatemala); the relatively isolated nature of such an immense region’s territories from each other and from the wider world; and the struggles with access to education and investment in research—these and other factors need to be considered.⁶³ Contextualisation or “inclusion” here means to *attend closely* to the current reality, culture, and traditions—which includes but is not exhausted by “history”—in the very articulating of the questions.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little Brown, 2019), xxv. See esp. Augustine’s epoch-shifting refashioning of the terms *religio*, *religions*, *saecularia*, and *saeculum* (159-60); Gregory VII’s deployment of the terms *religio* and *saeculum* in his *reformatio* campaigns (206-30, esp. 214-5); the way Luther reacted and refashioned Gregory’s *reformatio* impulse and in so doing reapplied *religio* to all peoples in opposition to earthly ruling (307-8); and the analogous “secular” (and by implication Christian) roots of the French *laïcité*, the *laicus* (411, 505-7). *Secularism*, although related to the secular, is not to be equated with the secular (or with secularisation). Talal Asad describes secularism as a “political doctrine” that is interdependent with “the secular” although it is the secular that conceptually precedes the political doctrine. See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1-17.

⁶² Miguel de Asúa, “The ‘Conflict Thesis’ and Positivist History of Science: A View from the Periphery,” *Zygon* 53, no. 4 (December 2018):1131-48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12467>.

⁶³ See Ignacio Silva, “Science and Religion in Latin America: Developments and Prospects,” *Zygon* 50, no. 2 (June 2015): 480-4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12176>.

⁶⁴ Ignacio Silva’s wide-ranging edited volume, *Latin American Perspectives on Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2016), begins with the default question of “how to relate religion and science” and he even structures the volume following Barbour’s mode of arguing, namely *methodology* first (Part I). Part I is followed by Historical Issues (Part II) and finally Contemporary Issues (Part III). The “relation between religion and science” frame structures the volume. This frame does not minimise the value of the volume, but it shows that what we do

Devoting some space to the importance of these cultural, geographical, ethnic, and linguistic contexts serves to highlight how “complexity” can orient us not only to the historically messy nature of “relations” between “science” and “religion” but also to cultural spaces and concrete realities that do not arrange themselves by these questions. The political dimension, including the “flow” of power, is one of these spaces. Language itself, that is, *communication* amongst peoples and between different peoples is another dimension. If in the previous section anti-essentialism drew us to focus on people’s context (culture, history, traditions, etc.), complexity emphasises *ethics*, *politics*, and *power* within such cultural and historical spaces. Drawing from contextual observations such as de Asúa’s underscores that the layers of complexity are in themselves portals towards important and non-negligible issues that arguably constitute the substance of the narratives complexity wants to problematise.

1.3: Anachronism, Patterns, and Historical Narratives

Having touched on the perceived need to reject essentialism due to the historical contingency of concepts and having outlined how the notion of complexity (which is also anti-essentialist) opposes the historical either-or between war or peace between religion and science, this chapter brings a final notion to bear. The notion of *anachronism* is closely related to both anti-essentialism and complexity. Anti-essentialism rejects historical fixity of definition in relation to “science” and “religion” and to “science and religion.” Complexity rejects fixity of conflict or harmony “theses” (or of any thesis or narrative). Anachronism could be said to reject the fixity of the present. Anti-essentialism and complexity are its insurance policies: the more aware of them one is, the safer one is of anachronistic mistakes. Anachronism is what happens when one “applies” present terminology to the past under the assumption that it does apply, perhaps not perfectly, but well enough. Harrison, in the epilogue of *The Territories of Science and Religion*, says that “the particular advantage of conceptual history is that it shows the relevance of historical analysis to the present while avoiding the attendant dangers of anachronism.”⁶⁵ Apparent historical complexity might arise for anachronistic reasons: applying modern categories to the past makes it look complex and messy.⁶⁶ Harrison, agreeing with Brooke, does not think of historical complexity as a “thesis.” He says that “the complexity

not question is the very nature of “relating” both “science” and “religion” and thus the possible re-framing of the questions.

⁶⁵ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 185.

⁶⁶ Peter Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization in the History of Science and Religion,” in Lightman, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*, 223.

thesis is not really a thesis at all, but rather a reaction to a thesis.”⁶⁷ Complexity is perhaps a first step, Harrison argues. It is the *critical*—albeit preliminary—step, critiquing and rejecting perpetual war or harmony between religion and science. Now positive narratives need to be given, so Harrison says that “complexity” as a critical stance still allows (and again Brooke agrees) for patterns in history. Harrison refers to three sources, one of them Brooke’s own *Science and Religion*, that remark a wide variety of patterns available to the historian.⁶⁸

1.3.0: Do Patterns Remedy Anachronism?

What is a pattern though? Harrison refers to the sociologist Robert Merton’s idea of “middle range theory” as a way of avoiding essentialism and single variable explanations, and yet integrating disparate hypotheses (even though Merton himself could be seen as an “essentialist” about science).⁶⁹ Brooke himself notes an ironic pattern: that of a Christian culture subverting itself by “eating itself” (my phrasing)—fostering the development of ideas, discoveries and modes of inquiry (“science”) which are eventually deployed to partially subvert the culture they arose from.⁷⁰ A variant of this “ironic” argument was, in fact, John William Draper’s in *History of the Conflict*, namely that “the decline of religious faith was a direct consequence of orthodox Christianity, not science.”⁷¹ It is a question in itself why one would think that an “ironic” pattern is more true than (say) a “linear” one or why modern awareness of the ironic

⁶⁷ Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 223.

⁶⁸ David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, *When Science and Christianity Meet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4; Ronald L. Numbers, “Simplifying Complexity: Patterns in the History of Science and Religion,” chap. 13 in Dixon, *Science and Religion*, 263-82; Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 26-42.

⁶⁹ Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 226. See Robert K. Merton, “On Sociological Theories of The Middle Range,” chap. 2 in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Enlarged Edition (New York: Free Press, 1968); Raymond Boudon, “What Middle-Range Theories Are,” *Contemporary Sociology* 20, no. 4 (July 1991): 519-20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2071781>. The chapter Harrison refers to in Merton’s *Social Theory* shows a reductive, essentialist view of science from Merton’s part (writing in the latter part of the twentieth century). Sociologists, Merton thinks—following physics, chemistry, or statistics and not history, philosophy, or literature—need not operate as the arts but as the sciences, “seeking out the objective, generalizable concepts and relationships” of sociological cases under investigation. Objective and generalisable concepts and relationships are, for Merton, “the core of a science, as distinct from the arts” (70).

⁷⁰ John Hedley Brooke, “Science and Secularization,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 119-20. The pattern could be phrased thus: “(Western) Christianity, which gives birth to (western) science, allows itself to be defined by science and then it is itself partially subverted or at least apparently made redundant by its own use of science.” This means that “secularisation” is not only *not* a logical implication that follows from the development of science but also that it is possible for it to happen for “religious” reasons. Echoing Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 230, argues that “secularization can be seen as something that takes place within, and partly as a consequence of, post-Reformation Christianity.”

⁷¹ James Ungureanu, “Relocating the Conflict Between Science and Religion at the Foundation of the History of Science,” *Zygon* 53, no. 4 (December 2018): 1113-4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12470>.

seems so heightened.⁷² What is relevant to the discussion is that a “pattern” is a way of avoiding anachronism. It appears to be that a pattern is a way of obtaining a robust and yet modest narrative that hopes to adhere better to “what actually happened.” To carry these patterns, Harrison suggests that “it is possible to bring structure to discussions of the historical relations between science and religion by piggybacking onto other, more general theories of modernity.”⁷³ Harrison’s *Territories* could be understood as doing exactly this, namely formulating a pattern which he then piggybacks on a more general theory of modernity (which in his case, at least so far, is one related with science and secularisation without relying on narratives of progress).⁷⁴ Harrison says that we could engage in the “construction of a new kind of metanarrative—‘meta’ in the sense that it does not take the categories for granted, but rather stands above them and seeks to offer a historical account of how we came to think in those terms in the first place.”⁷⁵

1.3.1: Anachronism and Metanarratives

Can metanarratives “stand above” the categories they use or critique? Narratives “fabricate” the meaning of words in the way in which they weave the contexts in which words make sense. In this sense they could be said to be “higher” than or “above” the categories they use. Notions themselves, however, may also “fabricate” narratives around themselves so the notions could be said to be “above” their carrier narratives. Or perhaps words and narratives co-create each other’s meaning, the words supporting the narratives and the narratives enarching the words? In any case, Harrison seems to want to avoid the incongruencies and pathologies that the words “religion” and “science” tend to conjure by setting the words within a coherent story which positions them and not the other way around. To “offer a historical account” of how things came to be involves, however, an understanding of how things are. This understanding of how things are will also somehow be embedded in the narrative as its frame. This “frame” may be more implicit than explicit because the narrative, at least as Harrison speaks of it, is standing above the meaning of these words as it traces their historical genealogies. How far is this “standing above” possible? Does not the tacit meaning of these words protrude and in fact

⁷² See Stephen Prickett, *Narrative, Religion and Science: Fundamentalism versus Irony, 1700-1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), who notes how modern (late eighteenth century onward) the growing cultural awareness of irony is (see esp. 32-53, and 225-55).

⁷³ Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 234.

⁷⁴ See Peter Harrison, “Science and Secularization,” *Intellectual History Review* 27, no. 1 (2017): 56-61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496977.2016.1255460>. Harrison defends a version of Brooke’s ironic pattern: secularization, insofar as it has happened, arises due to a *close connection* of scientific and religious notions.

⁷⁵ Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 234.

enable the metanarrator to see that this or that category was not what it is now? The following chapters will elucidate why this is not mere suspicion of the historians' work but an inevitable characteristic of human knowledge, effective in their work as in any work including this one.⁷⁶ To claim to reject an essentialist view of "science" and "religion" is, at the same time, to claim to have essential knowledge of what they refer to in order to deem some views inadequate and others adequate. The same applies to narratives: rejecting essentialist narratives means, at the same time, to claim to have essential knowledge of what is actually the case.

For some historical narratives to be "truer" than harmony or conflict (beyond historical modes of analysis), they have to be explicitly acknowledged as expressing the *contemporary situation*—what is the case in a way one can know now—more adequately than harmony or conflict. A difficulty with historical arguments is that one could forget that they are being told in a particular historical moment that conditions them as well. There is no real standing "above" our history. To be conditioned historically does not imply, however, that historical arguments cannot be less (or more) true, only that they are also historical. The "historicity" of all accounts needs to be acknowledged by a way of understanding not just history but reality, recognising historicity as inherent in one's understanding of reality. Insofar as "conflict" and "harmony" describe in some significant way how things are now, they will be seen in history despite the call for never-ending historical complexity and anti-essentialism. If they are in the present, they are in history now. The "now" *is* historical—it is the origin and end of one's historical understanding; it enables my seeing of history and it is always present in historiographies. Not despite more and more historical detailing but precisely because of it, the narratives of "ultimate conflict" or "ultimate harmony" may be more plausible. The narratives get perpetuated in some non-negligible sense if one's overall goal is to override them. Harrison himself, almost ten years after his Gifford lectures which gave rise to *Territories*, has come to agree with this point. The increase in "evidence" that the historians have provided for the last forty years to undermine facile "conflict" narratives may reinforce peoples' previous commitments.⁷⁷ The ineffectiveness of the historians' work of the last forty years shows that

⁷⁶ Michael Polanyi, *The Study of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 23: "the understanding of a descriptive statement must include both the capacity to relate it correctly to its subject-matter and the understanding of the subject-matter itself in terms of the statement in question." Decrying "essentialism" can only mean that a presumably "better" understanding is being proposed. If the descriptive statement(s) (like "science" or "religion" are this or that) are being undermined, other, even if unspoken, understandings are being proposed as relating correctly to an "essential" subject-matter and this subject-matter is presumably better known through these unspoken understandings.

⁷⁷ See Peter Harrison, "The Conflict Narrative, Group Identity, and the Uses of History," in *Identity in a Secular Age: Science, Religion, and Public Perceptions*, ed. Fern Elsdon-Baker and Bernard Lightman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 139-40.

“evidence” is never neutrally produced nor received. A person’s or a group’s identity, which is in the present, filters the evidence in accordance with this identity, regardless of what the evidence purports to do. Harrison thinks that the historians’ work has been ineffective because the historiographical work historians have been producing challenges the stories that constitute people’s core identities in the present, for example the enlightened, science-committed “modern, secular, progressive individual.”⁷⁸ Historiography may indeed challenge these identities, but there could be other reasons why the historians’ work has been ineffective. Their ineffectiveness may lie partly in that the stories they are telling are not compelling—they may be good historical work but bad stories. Saying “things are more complicated than you think” or “this is how we came to think this way” is not compelling although it may be true. Appropriate anachronisms *must* be recognised in order to come up with a genuine link that shows the unity and togetherness of past and present. Harrison seems to be attempting to elucidate these genuine links when allying himself with the sociologists and philosophers, seeking to make “theories of modernity” more historically plausible or robust, even though these large-scale narratives may be “deeply flawed,” as Harrison notes.⁷⁹ Are “theories” enough, however? Are they the kind of thing needed to change a culture’s self-perception, and to change our personal and communal dispositions?

The paradoxical effect that the excess of historical “data” has for undermining unidimensional narratives of conflict or harmony shows why it may be counterproductive to catalogue historians, philosophers, or sociologists—from the perspective of historians like Harrison—as “neo-harmonisers” or continuing the “conflict thesis,” as Harrison does respectively with Rodney Stark and Yves Gingras.⁸⁰ Harrison’s debate with Gingras is illustrative. Harrison (rightly) singles out Gingras’ progressive narrative and essentialist views of both “science” (or “the scientific worldview” as Gingras calls it) and “religion.”⁸¹ As

⁷⁸ Harrison, “The Conflict Narrative, Group Identity, and the Uses of History,” 139.

⁷⁹ Harrison, “Conflict, Complexity, and Secularization,” 234.

⁸⁰ Harrison calls Rodney Stark a “neo-harmoniser,” not belonging to the “myth-busting” historians which includes Harrison, Brooke, and others in Peter Harrison, “Neo-Harmonisers,” chap. 13 in Hardin, *The Warfare between Science and Religion*, 239-57. Harrison reviews Gingras’ *Science and Religion: An Impossible Dialogue*, trans. Peter Keating (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017) in “From Conflict to Dialogue and All the Way Back,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 27, 2017, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/from-conflict-to-dialogue-and-all-the-way-back/>, accessed March 24, 2021, and Gingras replies (with Harrison’s counter response) in “From Conflict to Dialogue and All the Way Back. And Then Back Again,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 18, 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/from-conflict-to-dialogue-and-all-the-way-back-and-then-back-yet-again/>, accessed March 24, 2021. Harrison chastises Gingras for claiming that the Templeton Foundation has funded their historical research, and so does Ronald L. Numbers, “Revisiting the Battlefields of Science and Religion: The Warfare Thesis Today,” in Lightman, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*, 188.

⁸¹ Harrison’s critique gains even more weight if we analyse Gingras’ use of John Henry Newman. See Yves Gingras, *L’impossible dialogue. Sciences et religions* (Montréal: Boréal, 2016), 122-3, 135-6, 231-5, 237, and 257. Gingras notes that in 1855, before White and Draper, Newman already addresses an antagonism between

Harrison does this, he does not seem to admit the validity of Gingras' historical situation from which Gingras (and Stark for that matter) reads and tells history as he does. Gingras' work and his debate with Harrison show indirectly that there is no historically neutral reality. Historians (and anyone else) are historically and culturally conditioned—they can read “history” only through this vantage point—so their work is always a response to these conditions and at the same time it changes these conditions. Gingras even notes that the fact that the historians cannot stop using the categories or the phrase “science and religion” indicates a problem in their “anti-essentialisms” (though he does not use this term). Historians cannot coherently evacuate “science,” “religion,” “science and religion” and the narratives about them of meaning and yet still use them meaningfully.⁸²

If challenging essentialisms and progressive historical narratives tactically backfires and leaves narratives of “conflict” or “harmony” unscathed, might such backfiring not also suggest that Harrison does not recognise in his own work and in the work of historians like him the historically conditioned nature of their historiographies and how their work is not just “history” but actively receives and changes “history”? Why are they writing about “science” and “religion” and not some other thing? They depart from and belong to their historical situation, such as this thesis does and as Stark and Gingras do. Being historically conditioned does not entail a form of historical determinism or ineluctable “progress” in history which culminates (conveniently) in “now,” but it does raise the fact that we are not *severed* from our belonging to history. Stark and Gingras may draw more explicitly from their historical situation but all historians do the same, explicitly and implicitly. Their work is never neutral “history,” but “history of the present” and “theory of the present” (echoing here Jürgen Habermas’

“science” and “religion”; antagonism already existed before Draper and White, so Gingras says that the historians’ battle cry against them is misguided. Newman’s use of “religion” or “religious,” however, is still largely along the lines of piety and devotion (*religio* not “religion” as Harrison says in *Territories*). For Newman the antagonism is between two *sciences*, Theology and Physics. See John Henry Newman, “Christianity and Physical Science,” in *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 200-17. Theology is philosophy of supernatural knowledge and general Science is philosophy of natural knowledge (201-2, 206). Physics, as part of general Science, knows nothing of final causes (203-4), which are an issue of Theology (204). They have different domains and methods (207-8) although both are sciences: Theology is deductive like geometry, and Physics inductive as it is empirical (208). One deals with Revelation and the other with the phenomenal world (208-9). Newman faults *the method*, the mixture of empiricism and induction with Theology, because it renders Theology uncertain, speechless and in competition with natural knowledge as devised through Physics (212-3). If Theology is devised as an inductive, experimental science, its “phenomena or facts” would be the triplet of Scripture, Antiquity (“events and transactions of ecclesiastical history”), and Nature (“the phenomena of the visible world”) (211-2), but this brings multiple collisions that, in Newman’s view ever since Bacon, have not helped the theological task and has undermined it by setting Theology over and against (or competing with) experiment and induction. This is a criticism to Natural or Physical Theology and implicitly of Protestantism (see Newman, “Discourse IX – Duties of the Church Towards Knowledge,” in *The Idea of a University*, 155). I have kept Newman’s upper cases for Theology, Physics, Science, etc.

⁸² Gingras, *L'impossible dialogue*, 15.

suggestion of “sociology as theory of the present,” which dovetails with Reeves’ alternative).⁸³ These remarks are appreciative of the work of Harrison, Brooke, and others. Work like theirs is relevant in “science and religion” discussions because it gives flesh and bones to what often are treated as abstract ahistorical generalities. Historiographies, however, as any other work, do not inhabit an ideal “historical” space unconditioned by culture, politics, history, and metaphysics. The conditioned nature of one’s intellectual endeavours needs pointing out to understand why the best bet for historians is not only “myth busting” but to myth bust while they speak intelligently to their cultural, political, historical, and metaphysical contexts with their historiographies. Historiographies transcend a supposed isolated “historical” understanding of reality, and in the case of science and religion historiographies, this transcendental dimension is particularly relevant since they seek to overcome the history of science’s own creation myth (the “conflict thesis”).⁸⁴ Pursuing impartiality (avoiding “apologetics”) and avoiding partisanship in historiographical works is important in a pluralistic context, but this avoidance is possible through a personal commitment, an indwelling (Polanyi)⁸⁵ of the reality under investigation, which is touched from and it returns to ourselves, our contexts, and situations in a given historical moment. This personal commitment, located as it is in one’s historical context, more than an abstract “what really happened,” determines whatever knowledge one may draw from “the past.” Awareness of anachronism may be a way of pursuing one’s personal commitment to a historical question, but it must be understood as a feature of one’s historical and temporal being which one cannot avoid but must embrace in order to find appropriate anachronisms, since one is always anachronistically speaking of “the past.”

⁸³ Jürgen Habermas, “Sociology as Theory of the Present,” chap. 4, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1988), 171-89. Although Habermas here must be chastised by David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 17, who says that the discipline of sociology itself is ideologically birthed so that the sociologist “does not present a package of certified knowledge, but begins a conversation” from her own personal, cultural, and historical standpoint.

⁸⁴ James Ungureanu, “Relocating the Conflict Between Science and Religion,” 1115-24, esp. 1116-20; *Science, Religion, and the Protestant Tradition: Retracing the Origins of Conflict* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 249-60, says that not Draper and White but the *discipline of history of science* has originated (and continues to perpetuate) the conflict thesis, especially via George Sarton who was heavily influenced by Comte’s positivism. See also Harrison, “The Conflict Narrative, Group Identity, and the Uses of History,” 135-8, on Sarton’s influence and Comte’s influence on Sarton.

⁸⁵ Polanyi’s notion of indwelling will be explored in Part Two of the thesis.

1.4: Conclusion

Having investigated some of the implications that seem to be drawn from rejecting essentialism, an observation that became clear was that rejecting essentialism (anti-essentialism) is a way of noting that there are contextual, historical, cultural, metaphysical, and theological issues that are already there when entering into the language-games of “science and religion.” These issues are obscured and largely unreflectively accepted by assuming that one knows what “science” and “religion” are. Essentialism also perpetuates rhetorically “science and religion” as an “essence.” Considering *the question* of the “relation between science and religion” as an “essence” was observed as largely contingent to western-Christian preoccupations (and methodological preoccupations to Anglo-Saxon contexts), and yet, insofar as one involves oneself in the project of making sense of this one cannot but work with some form of essential knowledge of things—without assuming the “essences” the anti-essentialist rejects—and participate in these questionings in the cultural garments that clothe them. It was suggested that this is inevitable. Insofar as scholars find themselves with the need to speak these words and to speak them together (however they do it), all of them (including the historians) demonstrate having essential knowledge simply because they continue to speak these words and make judgements with and about them.

To say that there is complexity in history does little to help, although it *does* help, seen as a critical response to progressive narratives of either conflict or harmony, pointing relevantly to the interweaving of the intellectual within the dimensions of ethics, politics, and power. If complexity is defined as *not-conflict, not-harmony*, however, it cannot help but to promote (by negation) the very things it seeks to be enlisted to fight. This is why both Harrison and Brooke give “patterns.” A narrative of not-this is also a narrative but it is incomplete. Its apophatic nature rests on a larger—largely implicit—cataphatic nature. “Not-this” rests on a tacit “but *this*,” even though “this” is more like a potential for discovery than something explicit and demonstrable. Such inarticulate and inexplicit cataphatic possibility is why Reeves’ third way forward of “reforming” the categories was suggested as necessary for any project that speaks meaningfully about theology, religion, or science.

Something similar happens when anachronism is seen primarily as an enemy to avoid. Avoiding already by negation sends me somewhere else. I am never left in a suspended “nowhere.” I might say, “we must avoid applying to the past categories foreign to it.” But how? Am I not seeking to avoid this by applying better categories to the past? What does “better” mean here? One of the things it means is that I am looking for contemporary expressions that

speak of what I deem to have been happening in “the past” as I study it. But my study of the past *is* anachronistic. Modern European languages (for example) already “anachronistically” filter ancient Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Latin, etc., to me (not to mention old English, French, German, Spanish, etc.). In looking for contemporary expressions that describe what I devise that was happening in “the past,” I am always in the process of *translation*, expressing differently what has already been expressed in a different situation. But what does “differently” mean? It means that insofar as I have been able to understand from my hermeneutic of text, tradition, archaeology, material culture, etc.—which happens in attempting to translate these into my own understanding—I seek to let “the past” speak to me in terms I can understand now, in my different historical situation. “The past” does not speak *from* the past but from its witnesses *now*, and it does so through *us* as listeners, tellers, and seers of it. Letting the past speak in our different situations is always anachronistic and this is not only a difficulty but a feature of being in history; it is a mark of being finite and temporal. The problem is not that “the past” is “in the past,” so we need to be careful with imposing our “now” on it. It is, rather, that “the past” is *also* “now” so that the now has, so to speak, two different temporalities; its temporality is imbued by history. The historicity of reality is a better way of being mindful of the pitfalls that anachronism warns about. The work of Hans-Georg Gadamer will be introduced in the second part of the thesis as it speaks of the historicity of reality. The notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (literally translated as “historically-effected consciousness”), among others, speaks of the temporal character of reality and it brings conceptual tools to deal with the problems that essentialism, complexity, and anachronism inadequately raise. These problems need to be described in more detail, and to that this thesis turns in the following chapter, focusing on two important works in recent science and religion historiographies: Harrison’s *Territories of Science and Religion* (2015) and Brooke’s *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (1991).

2: Essentialism, Complexity, and Anachronism: What they Can and Cannot Mean

2.0: Introduction

This chapter explores in more detail some of the problems in how current historiographical approaches to science and religion deploy the notions of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. Given the stated goals of the historians in relation to “science and religion,” the ways to meet these goals may backfire. Their goals are laudable and, at least from the point of view of this thesis, largely “correct.” To be faithful to history, to be more aware of the nuances and messiness of it, and to describe history in terms adequate to it; all of these are laudable goals when properly understood. The previous chapter showed that the avoidance of *essentialism*, the recognition of historical *complexity*, and the avoidance of *anachronism*, were some of historians’ ways to achieve these goals. However, the previous chapter suggested that rejecting essentialism, avoiding linear progressive narratives of conflict or harmony (complexity), and rejecting anachronism, are problematic “pacesetters” of thought. The chapter noted that these historians seem to know that it is not enough for these rejections or avoidances to set the pace, so historians are attempting to address this in various ways, providing “patterns” in history or attaching their historiographies to more general theories of modernity. This chapter zooms into the three categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism, aiming to be mindful of the insight in them and beginning to distinguish alternative courses of action to their rejection. It prepares us for the second part of the thesis, which introduces Gadamer’s thought, seeking to articulate in the following chapters a mode of proceeding that includes the insights gained in a direct connection to one’s historical situation—speaking more fluently in it than strictly “historical” approaches.

2.1: The Historian’s Essentials for Rejecting Essentialism

This section seeks to grasp John Hedley Brooke’s and Peter Harrison’s views on “science” and “religion” through their works *Science and Religion* and *The Territories of Science and Religion*. After getting a hold of them this section reflects on what this means—namely that to be able to say that certain narratives or views “distort” the past one assumes having some essential knowledge, not only of “the past” and how one studies it, but of one’s historical context as part of reality itself. This connection between history and one’s contemporary context or situation that is assumed in their historiographical works needs to be understood;

historians and especially non-historians need to take into account historiographical work such as Brooke's and Harrison's. But for such a historiographical work to be a constitutive element of other scholarly projects it is important that one does not inadvertently absorb and propagate the hermeneutic of negation to which they are attaching their work, setting themselves against essentialism, anachronism, and progressive harmony or conflict narratives.

2.1.0: John Hedley Brooke's *Science and Religion* on "Science" and "Religion"

Brooke tends to connect "science" with statements about nature (or about the physical world) and "religion" with statements about God and the God-world relation such as the doctrine of creation.⁸⁶ Much of what Brooke problematizes in *Science and Religion* is the assumption that these languages or statements are distinct and unrelated.⁸⁷ Brooke is also trying to avoid scientific, secularist, or religious apologetics.⁸⁸ Scientific and secularist interests overplay and religious interests underplay "conflict" because the appropriateness of conflict as a description of any historical "relation" is gauged from the prior plausibility or implausibility of core religious beliefs.⁸⁹ The "fundamental weakness" of the conflict thesis, says Brooke, is its "tendency to portray science and religion as hypostatized forces, as entities in themselves."⁹⁰ The reification of science and religion is why one must read historical works such as Draper's and White's critically. Their personal investments, Brooke says, drove them to project backwards onto history their current preoccupations.⁹¹ Also Brooke finds Draper's and White's criteria of evaluating previous knowledge wanting. They measure "scientific achievements" against "later knowledge," instead of judging them "against the background of prevailing knowledge at the time they were announced."⁹² This mode of proceeding is "profoundly unhistorical."⁹³ Both science and religion should be seen instead as "complex social activities involving different expressions of human concern, the same individuals often participating in both."⁹⁴

The problematic nature of the "conflict thesis," however, may spur a mirror-image reaction to it. Brooke says: "It is, in fact, so easy a target that scholars reacting against it have

⁸⁶ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 15, 22, 23, and 25.

⁸⁷ As one of many examples, Brooke notes that the very notion of *force* in Newton cannot be classified in the religious-scientific binary. Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 24.

⁸⁸ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 45.

⁸⁹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 42-56 on "conflict" and 57-68 on "harmony."

⁹⁰ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 56.

⁹¹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 46-7.

⁹² Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 48.

⁹³ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 48.

⁹⁴ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 56.

constructed a revised view that has also been driven to excess. If past conflicts can be spirited away, it is tempting for the religious apologist to step in and to paint a more harmonious picture.”⁹⁵ Perennial conflict is such a misreading of history that it is possible to counter-narrate it with a historiography of harmony. This temptation is even greater due to the fact that, as Brooke notes, religious beliefs—as theological and metaphysical fabrics—have served as *presupposition, justification, motivation, methodological regulators* and *selection criteria* of empirical generalisations about the natural world, and also as *explanations* or *primitive science* about phenomena in the natural world.⁹⁶ Revisionist histories with an apologetic intent may not deny conflict(s) but still may attempt to use history to show as problematic the perceived severance of religious values from science to a secular culture.⁹⁷ Brooke sees this strategy as equally problematic as the conflict thesis. The harmony thesis assumes “some correct and timeless view, against which historical controversies can be judged,” and such an assumption may be “an insensitive guide to the issues as they were perceived at the time.”⁹⁸ This strategy is the mirror-image of Draper and White as Brooke reads them, projecting backwards a particular view which, in hindsight “shows” that a given conflict was not “necessary” but was, in fact, a misunderstanding. Brooke aims to transcend the strictures of either conflict or harmony “if the interaction, in all its richness and fascination, is to be appreciated.”⁹⁹

Brooke shows broadly with a flurry of examples that languages or “statements” that are to do with God and the world and those which are to do with the natural world not only have to be treated historically, but that the ways in which they connected have to be understood historically in order to leave secular, scientific, or religious apologetics behind.

Brooke’s postscript opens the way to introduce Harrison’s work. Brooke writes that a consideration “that has been implicit in much of our discussion” is “the relevance of human values in shaping priorities for scientific research and in directing the application of scientific knowledge.”¹⁰⁰ Brooke says that early- and mid-twentieth century western culture’s intelligentsia—who aligned “science” with *is* and “morality” with *ought*—did not realise that this neat separation was already predicated on broader understandings of what is good and

⁹⁵ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 56.

⁹⁶ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 26-42. See 26-9 on presupposition, 29-31 on sanctions or justifications, 31-4 on motivations, 34-7 on regulating methodology, 37-8 on selection criteria, and 38-42 on explanation or primitive science. Brooke also notes that “scientific creeds have constituted an alternative religion” (41).

⁹⁷ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 56.

⁹⁸ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 57.

⁹⁹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 440.

valuable.¹⁰¹ Brooke in fact finishes his book with a question about whether one can assert and keep the notion of the supreme worth of every human life and whatever this entails without transcendental grounding.¹⁰² He is asking about the very intermingling of ultimate meaning and science, and here Harrison's work joins Brooke's.

2.1.1: Peter Harrison's *Territories* on "Science" and "Religion"

Harrison's *Territories* slices the terrains having on the one hand issues of human ultimate meaning and values (the domain of "moral and religious values") and on the other issues related to nature and the universe (the domain of "material facts").¹⁰³ Harrison's work is thus a work about the shifting terrains between the history of moral philosophy and the history of science.¹⁰⁴ He also speaks of acts of worship, sacred spaces and times, beliefs about transcendental realities and proper behaviour on the one hand and systematic descriptions of the world, attempting to grasp the first principles of nature and give naturalistic descriptions of the causes within the cosmos, on the other.¹⁰⁵ He also talks of "the ways of faith" and "the formal study of nature."¹⁰⁶ A key aspect of Harrison's view is that modern western culture calls these two camps "religious" and "scientific," respectively, but this differentiation is a recent western peculiarity. Both *scientia* and *religio* were up to quite recently (historically speaking) considered as *virtues*. Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle in regard to *scientia* or *episteme* as an intellectual virtue and adapts Aristotelian thought situating *religio* as a moral virtue between irreligion and superstition. *Scientia* and *religio* are seen as internal qualities, personal attributes that come in the nineteenth century to be objectified and externalised as sets of doctrines and practices.¹⁰⁷ Virtue, by the way, is not to be thought of as "moral" (as opposed to "intellectual"). *Episteme* in Aristotle and *scientia* in Aquinas are excellences (virtues), habituations directed towards knowledge.¹⁰⁸ The moral and the intellectual were not mutually exclusive.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 459-74.

¹⁰² Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 474.

¹⁰³ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, ix.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, x; also 7-11 on *religio*, 11-14 on *scientia*, 14-19 on the kind of conceivable parallels available between *religio* and *scientia* (that is, their contrasts as virtues).

¹⁰⁸ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 11-2.

¹⁰⁹ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 13. Harrison says that Aquinas improved on Aristotle by integrating the moral and the intellectual, but Aristotle himself considers *episteme* as a virtue for the regulation of conduct, alongside the other four intellectual virtues, *techne* (art or skill), *phronesis* (prudence or practical wisdom), *nous* (intellect or intuition), *sophia* (wisdom). Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1144b1-1145a12. I read from Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Penguin Classics, trans. J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin Books,

The emergence of the domains of “science” and “religion” as distinct and separate from each other is a key aspect of Harrison’s argument, and the roads they take from *religio* to “religion” and *scientia* to “science” have some similarities but also important differences. *Religio* gets externalised as “propositions” to do with bodies of knowledge in the early modern period and gets propelled by the emerging notion of “science” as a competing “system.” *Scientia*, although also externalised into meaning mostly “knowledge” in general (without the “virtue” aspect), only later in the nineteenth century comes to be “science,” encompassing approaches to knowledge of nature (“sciences”) such as “natural philosophy” and “natural history,” which have historically distinct approaches to nature and still had a moral, metaphysical, and theological significance up until the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹⁰ The idea of “religions” (plural) is even more problematic.¹¹¹ On the whole the very possibility of any kind of “relationship” between “science” and “religion” is birthed according to Harrison in the nineteenth century.¹¹² The latter half of the nineteenth century sees thus the emergence of “modern science,” with a new protagonist—the scientist—a new, irrefutable, amoral, and areligious tool—the scientific method—and a new turf to defend against “pseudoscience” or to differentiate from “technology,” or “the humanities,” or “religion.”¹¹³

Harrison also notes that the religious-secular duality on which the current understanding of “religion” and “science” is construed is also a recent historical contingency and thus applying it backwards to history is an anachronistic mistake and applying it today either in the West or in non-Western cultures as if it were the natural, neutral default, is historical naivety. Harrison’s work means not only to avoid anachronism but also to tell the story of how these categories changed their meaning so as to illuminate the present relation

2004), 164-6. All virtues *imply* or are such *in accordance with* prudence. Aquinas’ improvement on Aristotle is the inclusion of other aspects of experience (such as *religio*) within Aristotle’s already “moral-intellectual” frame.

¹¹⁰ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 145-8, also 4-5 and 176. Science also includes, apart from natural history (“detailed descriptions of the natural world”) and natural philosophy (“the provision of true causal accounts of the operations of nature”), “the construction of empirically adequate models (mathematical astronomy) [and] the production of useful technologies (arts or productive sciences)” (177).

¹¹¹ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 97-102. Religions (plural) are devised after a western Christian mould. From a variety of Christian monastic orders in the Middle Ages to a political-legal construct describing the kind of Christianity on a particular location (in the Augsburg Peace (1555) only Lutheran and Catholic) in the sixteenth century (97-8), increasingly from the seventeenth century onwards the religio-political boundaries were projected to the whole world coinciding with the genesis of Western colonialism (99). The so-called “Eastern religions” appear in the nineteenth century (101-2). “Adherents of other so-called religions are at times equally adamant that their commitments and ways of life should not be so classified,” Harrison notes (116).

¹¹² Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 147.

¹¹³ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 159-60. Harrison says further that “religion,” due to the problems it generates regarding the putative existence of other “religions,” tends to generate tensions, and that “science,” on the other hand—and which has been more of a conscious construction than a historical accident—tends to generate false or artificial unities (176).

between “science” and “religion.”¹¹⁴ These notions “resulted not from a rational or dispassionate consideration of how to divide cultural life along natural fracture lines, but to a significant degree has been to do with political power—broadly conceived—and the accidents of history.”¹¹⁵ For Harrison, then, science and religion (as understood today) are not analogous to natural kinds. They do not group coherent “things” under them. What tends to be grouped under their scope is not intellectually or morally bound together, partly due to historical amnesia. “We should not use our present maps to understand their territory,” he notes, lest one risks distorting past activities which would have been understood quite differently by their practitioners; “We should not assume natural kinds where there are none.”¹¹⁶

It is understandable that Harrison thinks that current talk of “science” and “religion” and their “relation,” regardless of how it is conceived—conflictive, harmonic, independent, or whatever—is off the mark.¹¹⁷ Harrison says: “Much contemporary discussion about science and religion assumes that there are discrete human activities, ‘science’ and ‘religion,’ which have had some unitary and enduring essence that persists over time.”¹¹⁸ The essentialism of most if not all contemporary approaches to the relation between “science” and “religion” means not only that any talk of “relation” needs to understand the historical formation of the terms. Without the historical dimension of the formation of the terms themselves there is a perpetuation of the same kinds of narratives simply because the terms themselves already construct certain narratives around them, and these narratives or ways of speaking and thinking cannot be challenged by other, equally amnesiac, narratives.¹¹⁹ Now, we not only need to be reminded of *why* we speak how we do. We need to become aware of this in order to ask, “should we be speaking thus?” and “how should we if not?” These questions may set the agenda for Harrison’s future work. He says that “the question of the origins of boundaries can move beyond description and understanding to a critical inquiry into the appropriateness of how current conceptual maps divide the territory.” Adequate concepts (and he reminds us of Plato’s image in the *Phaedrus*) “carve nature at the joints (rather than, as he went on to say,

¹¹⁴ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 3, 6, and 19.

¹¹⁵ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 4; also 175.

¹¹⁶ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 5. Harrison says towards the end of the book that “neither category consistently picks out some discrete feature of the world [...] these labels do not identify anything resembling a natural kind” (176), and again “science and religion are not natural kinds; they are neither universal propensities of human beings nor necessary features of human societies” (194).

¹¹⁷ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 6, 175-82.

¹¹⁸ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 19.

dismembering it like a clumsy butcher).”¹²⁰ Historical awareness of how we came to think and speak the way we do prompts the further question of whether we are speaking and thinking coherently (and intimations of how to do so if this is not the case).

Harrison’s epilogue—perhaps it could be compared with Brooke’s postscript—speaks also about the contemporary situation, and about how his work may enter into conversation with the history of moral philosophy precisely because of the “moral” nature of the changes Harrison describes—*scientia* and *religio* as virtues within an Aristotelian teleological frame. Some of his final reflections, akin to Brooke’s, are about the intermingling of intellect and morality. He could be seen as asking about the degree to which ethical and intellectual pursuits can be separated and the extent to which “modern science” may be a rhetorical, political, and institutional entity but not a morally or intellectually coherent one. “Modern science” may be rhetorically, politically, and institutionally portrayed as “neutral” with regards to the fabric that knits what is worth knowing, but in reality, such fabric pervades and directs “science.”¹²¹

2.1.2: An Appraisal of “Science” and “Religion” from Brooke and Harrison

Having laid out how Brooke’s and Harrison’s works deal directly with the problematic nature of “science” and “religion” talk, this section now points out some of the challenges that arise when considered side by side. Brooke and Harrison do not give “models” to relate “science” and “religion” but observe the richness (Brooke) of their intermingling layers and the historical emergence of the categories themselves (Harrison). Section [2.1.3](#) will follow this one with a reflection on what is a precondition for both Brooke and Harrison to call for the rejection of unidimensional narratives of conflict and harmony and for a historical sensitivity in the use of contemporary terminology.

2.1.2.0: Differences between Brooke and Harrison

One of the differences between them is that in Harrison’s view Brooke himself would be anachronistic or even essentialist in his use of “science” and “religion” to describe talk of nature and talk of God. Why should “science” be connected primarily with the former and “religion” with the latter? For Harrison such talk is already distorting the past, especially because, according to his analysis, “science” as is known today emerges until the nineteenth century. To

¹²⁰ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 6. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 265e. I read from Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 542.

¹²¹ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 185-98.

talk of Descartes, Boyle, and Newton “doing science” or having “scientific concerns” is then anachronistic, unless what is meant is that they were engaging in the habituation that is necessary to know anything at all. Also, to talk about them being “religious” or having “religious beliefs” assumes the propositionally oriented understanding that Brooke indeed has about these terms, at least heuristically.

How strict *can* one get, though? Harrison himself has to use the “common sense” understanding moderns have to talk about things with a very different meaning in the past. I already noted that Harrison describes “science” and “religion” by saying that “we have come to separate the domain of material facts from the realm of moral and religious values.”¹²² But what is a “religious value”? Strictly speaking, if one follows Harrison’s own account, there are no “religious values” that get separated from “material facts.” He is being anachronistic here: there were no “values” that could be “religious” before the transformation of *religio* as virtue to a body of knowledge and propositions. According to Harrison there were *virtues*; theological, intellectual, and moral virtues, and *religio* (following Aquinas at least) is a *moral* virtue¹²³ as Harrison knows.¹²⁴ Is Harrison here projecting to the past a Thomistic distinction between *religio* as moral and *scientia* as intellectual? Other examples may be given.¹²⁵ The point is not to shout “anachronism!” or “essentialism!” at every possible instance, but to highlight that Harrison has to be anachronistic and assume some “essential” knowledge (his own and the reader’s) to be able to communicate. He does well enough with the terms he is working on, “religion,” “science,” “natural philosophy,” “theology,” “belief,” etc., but what about the ones that *appear* fine just because we do not recognise the anachronism? For example, even here, I am relying on a common anachronistic sense of the readers’ understanding of “virtue” and “value” (just as Harrison is).¹²⁶ Equally, Harrison assumes we know what “moral” is, and here I have done the same. Am I being anachronistic? Yes, but reappropriating the past in our own historical situation is always anachronistic, since temporal distance is the means by which we receive the past. The challenge is finding adequate

¹²² Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, ix.

¹²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2a2ae, 81, 5-6. I read from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part II-II [Secunda Secundae]*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), q. 81, arts 5-6, <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/18755>.

¹²⁴ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 86.

¹²⁵ Harrison talks of “a religious way of life” when referring to Christianity’s Pauline formula of “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (36). What does “religious” mean here? What does “religious faith” mean in relation to the reformers (92)? What does the “religious meaning” mean in relation to the notion of *pistis* in the New Testament (48)?

¹²⁶ Harrison knows that “virtue” and “value” are not the same thing. See Harrison, “An Eccentric Tradition: The Paradox of ‘Western Values,’” *ABC Religion and Ethics*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/an-eccentric-tradition-the-paradox-of-western-values/10095044>, accessed April 21, 2021.

anachronisms, traversing the temporal distance as a bridge rather than a gap to fill. More than just finding the correct words, we need to get *the message* across, risking using at times the “wrong” words (although what “wrong” means here would be irrelevant insofar as communication is concerned). This chapter will explore the issue of anachronism in more detail in the last section of the chapter.

Another difference between Brooke and Harrison is that Harrison’s goal is explicitly to affect the way people think and understand the categories “science” and “religion.” Brooke’s overall goal is to transcend one-dimensional narratives of conflict and harmony between them. Brooke is less worried (although not untroubled) about terminology, being aware of anachronistic problems. He is not doing “history of ideas” or “history of concepts” as Harrison explicitly is. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that Harrison’s work is an account of how these terms came to be what they are in modern western consciousness. Brooke, although aware of the problematic tendency to essentialise them, is not giving an account of their emergence. Brooke instead identifies them as, broadly speaking, having certain “language territories” and being complex social and cultural realities, whose “relationship” happens in a myriad of ways within the same individuals, *within* “religion” and *within* “science,” and interpenetrating each other without denying conflicts or all sorts of relations between them. It may be worth pointing out that Harrison gave his original Gifford lectures twenty years after Brooke’s legendary book. Harrison’s sophistication in what Brooke has dubbed Harrison’s “philological” critique is at least influenced by revisionist efforts (including Brooke’s) traceable at least to the 1930s, as was mentioned in the previous chapter.¹²⁷ Having said that, Harrison was already acutely aware of the problematic talk of “religion” and “the religions” (plural) as may be seen in his first major publication in 1990, a year before Brooke’s *Science and Religion*. Talk of the “objectification” of “interior dispositions” (of *religio* and *scientia* as virtues) in *Territories* echoes his work on the English Enlightenment. There he talks of the “objectification of religious faith” as constructing “religion” as an object of “scientific” study, which then may compete with “science” as a body of propositional knowledge.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Brooke, “Historians,” 258-9.

¹²⁸ Peter Harrison, “*Religion*” and *the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-4; *Territories of Science and Religion*, x, 11, 74, 101, 129, and 131. Harrison follows this study by his study on how Protestant approaches to Scripture undermined the symbolic approaches of the Middle Ages, establishing many of the conditions for the emergence of “science” in *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). After this work (and prior to *Territories*) in *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) he gives us a study of how varying interpretations of the Fall, under the pervasive influence of Augustinian anthropologies, ignited various (at times conflicting) methods, means, and ends of configuring and attaining *knowledge*, based on the degree of severity of the Fall to human cognitive capacities.

2.1.2.1: Similarities between Brooke and Harrison

Perhaps the first thing to say about their similarities is that both clearly have something in mind when talking about “science” and “religion.” It is “essential” knowledge of these terms’ correlative realities, albeit in Brooke more than Harrison we may detect a family resemblance with “essentialism” as pointed out above. Both are clearly against progressive historical narratives because, in Brooke’s view, they miss the complexity of the past, and in Harrison’s view, “science” and “religion” did not exist until recently (from the nineteenth century onwards). Also, although not mentioned in the discussion above but in the previous chapter, both are acutely aware of the centrality of the political and the dimension of power.

The similarity that was pointed out by the end of the analysis of Brooke’s book and by the beginning and end of Harrison’s is the most instructive because it goes with some of the points made in the previous chapter. Both Brooke and Harrison are joined in the question of the intermingling of the intellectual and the moral. In historical terms, as Harrison says, it would be the question of the relations between the history of science and the history of moral philosophy, and both Harrison’s epilogue and Brooke’s postscript also include the relation of these to metaphysics and theology. Both Brooke’s and Harrison’s work make us aware of the ways in which what is deemed *real* and *good* is not detachable from knowing. What is deemed real and good orients and itself is reinterpreted in any pursuit of knowing.

2.1.3: Conclusion: A Basic Sense of How Things Are That is More Than Historical

Having grasped Brooke’s and Harrison’s views on “science” and “religion” through their works *Science and Religion* and *The Territories of Science and Religion* this section reflects on some of the implications of their views. First of all, I note that to be able to say that certain narratives or views “distort” the past one assumes having some essential knowledge, not only of “the past” and how one studies it, but of one’s historical context as part of reality itself. The connection between history and the contemporary situation that is assumed in their works needs to be understood. The fact that both historians point to how simplistic ways of talking about science and religion distort “the past” means that they are approaching these notions not only through a “not this” or “not like that” approach. Although not as explicitly, their approach also includes positive or “cataphatic” knowledge of these notions within a broader positive knowledge of “the past.” “Positive” here does not mean “good” as opposed to “bad” in what might be seen as “moral” terms. It means rather that their pointing at distortions assumes a

prior (even if not as explicitly articulated) knowledge of that which is being distorted. The very fact that they are able to point and say “no” to some things involves already more than a strictly historical “grasping” of “the past.” Their capacity to see the past as “history” involves an implicit recognition of something so that they may say that such and such is *not* the right way of looking or conceiving the past. This “something” in their case is not just a “historical” something although it does include “history.” It involves a metaphysics—an understanding of reality, not just of history but certainly including history—that allows them to see and distinguish in their historical research bad and good connections with the present (and more generally with how things are). Their work is not disconnected to what today, in our historical situation, is deemed reasonable and “right.”

So, both Brooke and Harrison possess an implicit understanding of “the past” as connected to today without which knowledge of the past is impossible. Their historiographical efforts may be ineffective, not because they are not convincing, but because other scholars, non-historians mostly but perhaps also historians, might not know how to reject essentialism, even if they desired to. Also, scholars with incommensurable starting points may simply reject, almost a priori, the very endeavour of Harrison and Brooke because to claim to “set the record straight” does not extract ourselves from our historical horizons. If my experience of “religion” is one in which irrationality and credulity are religion’s very essence (to echo a sentiment), this experience *is* historical because I am in history by being a finite and temporal being. My experience is *the vantage point* from which I read history. To say that religion’s essence is not irrationality—or that there is no “essence” of religion—requires the historian to transcend their “purely” historical discourse and recognise that history is a part of reality (accessed through our experience of “the present”). The following chapters will use Gadamer’s thought to clarify the relationship between history and our historical situation. Gadamer should help clarify that reality is historical, without in the process becoming speechless due to the historically unstable nature of our words.

After analysing some of the implications of Harrison’s and Brooke’s works in relation to essentialism and the possibility of its rejection, this chapter turns to the issue of complexity. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, complexity is supposed to be a *critical* tool. It is supposedly not a thesis but a reaction to simplistic theses. To what extent can complexity be an anti-thesis without being a thesis? Can one critique narratives without having one oneself or without some kind of narrating or storytelling?

2.2: “Critique” as a Historiographical Device is Also a Narrative and Rhetorical Device

The second aspect this chapter explores is the notion of “critique” as a narrative or rhetorical device. This is directly connected with Brooke’s understanding of “complexity.” Complexity, as was shown previously, was never supposed to be a “thesis” about anything. In *Science and Religion* Brooke was clear that, if anything, it was a *lesson*: something one notes when immersing oneself in historical waters. To recapitulate, Brooke noted that “the history of science has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and religion in the past that general theses are difficult to sustain. The real lesson turns out to be the complexity.”¹²⁹ History is complicated and does not permit, according to Brooke, facile narratives of any type of “relation” between “science” and “religion.” The problem to highlight here is the connection drawn by Brooke himself between an emphasis on historical complexity and the rejection of unidimensional narratives of conflict or harmony. As the previous chapter highlighted, Brooke himself sees complexity as a *critique* of these narratives of conflict or harmony. Again, to recapitulate, Brooke says that “complexity is a historical reality, not a thesis, and that instead of being placed alongside other theses, its primary role is to function as critique.”¹³⁰ The problem with associating complexity too tightly with “critique” is that complexity as a historical lesson becomes dialectically and rhetorically *constrained* and perhaps *defined* by what it critiques. If one takes “critique” as the primary step, complexity becomes a “thesis,” not primarily a historical reality but a methodological thesis defined as an anti-conflict, anti-harmony narrative. Complexity primarily as “critique” becomes thus a vehicle on which the narratives that it wants to reject may piggyback on, inserting itself in discourses still shaped by the theses it is supposed to undermine. Another way of pointing this out is to say that complexity as critique also has a *moral*: it does not simply point to “the facts” but is already an interpretation of them, with its lights and shades, yeses and noes.¹³¹

Brooke’s work, although almost completely read through the lens of complexity—and complexity as critique—may be read also as creative open mindedness.¹³² His classic book displays this creative open mindedness, noting the intermingled nature of what may be called “religious” and “scientific” notions, refusing to fall into the pressures of “common sense” narratives, anxious to shout either “conflict!” or “harmony!” and delving instead on the richness of the western intellectual tradition. This included keeping an open mind about wider

¹²⁹ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 6.

¹³⁰ Brooke, “Afterword: The Instantiation of Historical Complexity,” 235.

¹³¹ Something similar is pointed out by Noah Efron, “Sciences and Religions: What it Means to Take Historical Perspectives Seriously,” chap. 12 in Dixon, *Science and Religion*, 247-62.

¹³² Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 14, 25.

claims such as the secularisation thesis (that the rise of scientific knowledge undermines religious allegiance) and others, like Merton's correlation between religious and scientific reform.¹³³

It seems necessary then to point at the limits of "critique." When complexity becomes the "complexity thesis" it becomes a rhetorical device defined by problematising or saying "no" to unidimensional narratives of "conflict" or "harmony." Its rhetorical identity, paradoxically, makes complexity parasitical on these narratives, taking part in their perpetuation. In order to explore the limits of critique, Rita Felski's work becomes pertinent. To speak of the limits of critique, however, does involve critique in the sense used here. Felski does perform a negative movement—she is saying no to a totalising view of critique—but she avoids an infinite regress of "critique of critique" (of critique...) by showing what she terms a "post-critical" approach. The limits of critique are "revealed" by perceived transgressions, dead-ends, or totalising (and exclusivist) impulses—reductionisms of any kind. Critique normally precedes a change of direction. The new directions or the prior ways that held us to the point of change cannot be given by critique. The very fact that we can perceive when critique falls short shows us both the need of critique and that it is not always adequate. Felski helps us see that critique is best understood as a fundamental part of the wider processes of understanding.

Before exploring Felski's work, however, it is worth observing that the overlap between Felski's post-critical approach and Gadamer's thought (which will be explored in depth in the following chapters) happens despite both Felski and Gadamer responding to different contexts and concerns. On the one hand, Felski's work responds to an overflow of critique arising from post-Enlightenment thought, an intellectual milieu to which Gadamer belongs. She is addressing an excess from post-modern thought that does not let texts speak or be read. On the other hand, Gadamer, as a post-modern thinker himself, provides a post-modern approach that includes critique without totalising it, thereby coinciding with Felski's postcritical approach. Chapter four's section on complexity as a hermeneutics of tradition and chapter six's section on Habermas' critique of philosophical hermeneutics elaborate on the place of critique in philosophical hermeneutics.

¹³³ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 13-4. As noted in the previous chapter, Brooke does see a relation between secularisation and science, but it is an indirect, ironic one. Science is not a direct cause of secularisation, but the deployments of the new knowledge by a Christian culture partly undermined or "secularised" this culture. A notable, often ignored aspect, of this "secularisation" in Brooke's book is how the combination of scientific and historical criticism of the Bible in the nineteenth-century, often by Christian theologians and clergy, effected a purely historical understanding of Scripture which caused pressure and division in Christian Europe (chap. 7, 307-73). For the discussion of religious and scientific reform see chap. 3, 110-57.

2.2.0: The Limits of Critique: Rita Felski

Rita Felski talks about the problems of deploying “critique” without understanding its limitations. Felski notes that an ethos of critique “encourages scholars to pride themselves on their vanguard role and to equate serious thought with a reflex negativity.”¹³⁴ This thesis does not see this ethos dominating the historians here discussed, but from Felski one becomes aware of the “directional” nature of critique. Critique *comes from* and *sends me* somewhere. Scholars need awareness of the rhetorical moves they make, especially because these moves take a narrative life of their own, beyond the scholar’s intentions. A lack of awareness of the limitations of critique may lead to “critiquiness”: “an unmistakable blend of suspicion, self-confidence, and indignation.”¹³⁵ The role of critique, says Felski, tends to be to “expose hidden truths and draw out unflattering and counterintuitive meanings that others fail to see.”¹³⁶ The critic reads against the grain, between the lines, drawing from the invisible the power moves, the hidden agendas, calling into question or “problematizing” (some of which is being done in this thesis). Critique includes, Felski says,

a spirit of skeptical questioning or outright condemnation, an emphasis on its precarious position vis-à-vis overbearing and oppressive social forces, the claim to be engaged in some kind of radical intellectual and/or political work, and the assumption that whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *uncritical*.¹³⁷

Felski notes, following Paul Ricœur, that critique is a type of *hermeneutic*. It is a mode of engaging, a mode of *understanding* associated with what Ricœur calls a “hermeneutic of suspicion.”¹³⁸ By recognising it as a kind of hermeneutics it becomes useful for some things and less useful (or useless) for others, allowing space for other hermeneutics appropriate for the task at hand. By redescribing critique as a form of hermeneutics of suspicion Felski recognises in it “an attitude of vigilance, detachment and wariness (*suspicion*) with identifiable conventions of commentary (*hermeneutics*)—allowing us to see that critique is as much a matter of affect and rhetoric as of philosophy or politics.”¹³⁹ Such a description casts “critique” as within the domain of rhetoric and narrative; critique does not simply “reject” or “problematise” but also accepts and gives its own solutions since it is also a form of discourse.

¹³⁴ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 186.

¹³⁵ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 188.

¹³⁶ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 1.

¹³⁷ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 2 (author’s italics).

¹³⁸ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 1-13.

¹³⁹ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 3.

Critique in itself not only pokes holes in structures but is in itself a structure.¹⁴⁰ “We mistake our object if we think of critique as consisting simply of a series of propositions or intellectual arguments,” says Felski.¹⁴¹ She asks questions about why critique seems so ubiquitous, why it is so hard to escape, the degree to which it may predispose us to a fixed narrative, how it may orient us spatially, and the ways in which it weaves a specific intellectual disposition and mood.¹⁴² These questions are important because “modes of thought are also orientations toward the world that are infused with a certain attitude or disposition; arguments are a matter not only of content but also of style and tone.”¹⁴³ Why are critics, says Felski, so quick to “interrogate, unmask, expose, subvert, unravel, demystify, destabilize, take issue, and take umbrage?” What assures the critic that “a text is withholding something of vital importance, that [our] task is to ferret out what lies concealed in its recesses and margins?” Furthermore, “Why is critique so frequently feted as the most serious and scrupulous form of thought? What intellectual and imaginative alternatives does it overshadow, obscure, or overrule? And what are the costs of such ubiquitous criticality?”¹⁴⁴ One of the features of this mood, observed by its rhetoric, is that it encourages scholars to “stand above” their subjects of study or to look behind them so as to unmask what is actually happening:

Critique, it is claimed, just is the adventure of serious or proper “thinking,” in contrast to the ossified categories of the already thought. It is at odds with the easy answer, the pat conclusion, the phrasing that lies ready to hand. In looking closely at the gambits of critique—its all too familiar rhetoric of defamiliarization—I question this picture of critique as outside codification.¹⁴⁵

Felski is not arguing *against* critique; she is questioning its equation with the whole of thought and the assumption of its being “outside” what it critiques. Felski questions the assumption of critique being “exceptional,” that it and it alone displays what it is to be thoughtful, truthful, and profound—that critique “just is the exercise of thoughtful intelligence and independence of mind.”¹⁴⁶ Such a view entails that refusing or questioning critique is equated with “complacency, credulity, and conservatism,”¹⁴⁷ so that one cannot question or gauge its limitations without falling into gullibility and uncritical (that is thoughtless) reflection. Felski

¹⁴⁰ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 3.

¹⁴² Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 3.

¹⁴³ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 8.

¹⁴⁷ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 8.

notes that critique is not always the way to go, it is not the appropriate “method” for all possible problems; “different methods are needed [. . .] there is no one-size-fits-all form of thinking.”¹⁴⁸

Felski proposes a *postcritical* approach. Although uncomfortable with the term, Felski has not been able to think of a different one; it may signal an overcoming of critique and this is not what she means. Bellow this term will be connected with Michael Polanyi’s post-critical philosophy to clarify what it may mean, but Felski says that rather than “looking behind the text—for its hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motives—we might place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible.” The text is thus a *coactor*: “something that makes a difference, that helps makes things happen.”¹⁴⁹ We could think of reading “as a coproduction between actors rather than an unravelling of manifest meaning, a form of making rather than unmaking.”¹⁵⁰ In Felski’s mind “postcritical” means that to even begin to “critique” properly one has to have listened. Listening happens when I recognise the text as speaking, and the text speaks through its linguistic means, embedded in the cultures of its provenance, and where it is being read. Listening involves already responding to the text’s address, and in responding the text speaks through *me*. The effects and formation that texts (or more generally a subject-matter) have on me precede and supersede my “critiques.”

2.2.1: Complexity and Genealogy Beyond Critique

Felski’s delimitation of critique articulates why there is a rhetorical and dialectical constraint on using Brooke’s “complexity” primarily as a critical device. Felski says that the genre of critique “is symbiotic, relational, and thus intrinsically impure; it feeds off the ideas of its adversaries, is parasitic on the words that it calls into question, [and it] could not survive without the very object that it condemns.”¹⁵¹ Brooke’s work becomes thus narrowed and it turns into a carrier of the narratives it seeks to reject, simply because “critique” needs them for its existence. Critique is in itself a structure, it not only problematises or unmaskes but asserts and proposes.

The title of this section includes the notion of “genealogy” because Harrison’s work can also be read as belonging to the critique genre. Genealogy as critique suffers the fate of critical excess: it propagates what it critiques. Harrison seeks to go behind the categories of

¹⁴⁸ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 12.

¹⁵¹ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 126.

science and religion, make them unfamiliar, destabilise them in order to reveal their genealogical precedence to hopefully change how we think and speak them. The last chapter noted that Harrison thinks that we can create new metanarratives, ones that may “stand above” the categories, offering a historical account of how they came to be. Harrison provides a genealogy of these terms, and as we saw, this genealogy is constructed in explicit criticism to what he takes to be the case in the present, namely “science” and “religion” as competing systems of belief, bodies of knowledge, conglomerates of propositions that are true or false in exclusion of or tension with one another. Harrison’s genealogical efforts, just like Brooke’s observation of complexity, may be hindered if aligned exclusively or primarily to a critical approach.

Felski’s postcritical approach does not negate the effectiveness of critique or its need; it recognises critique as one of many ways of engagement, useful insofar as it “gets at” its object. Felski’s focus is on reading texts, and here I am extending this to reading “history,” in the sense that history, just like texts, requires our interpretation and our involvement. Engaging with texts involves not just text interpretation but text creation, as Werner Jeanrond observes.¹⁵² History, likewise, involves our interpretive efforts as we inhabit history and “create” it. Furthermore, historiography is not just “history” but it is a *textual* account of “history.” Therefore, a textual approach to historiography—applying Felski’s critique to the historians’ written accounts of history—is warranted.

Perhaps the best “legacy” of these historians is, as Noah Efron says about Brooke, that they seem to treat their subject-matters (other people expressed through their testimonies) with humility and respect.¹⁵³ In endorsing Efron’s assessment I cannot but judge Brooke’s and Harrison’s work (and Efron who says this) with a “moral standard” that is in my mind both essential (it claims fixity) and anachronistic (it is in hindsight). Brooke, for example, navigates in this “essentially anachronistic” way whether to investigate or question the validity of claims about the “fruitfulness” of a particular tradition for the fostering of certain modes of thought and practices that are seen as “good” in hindsight by past historians.¹⁵⁴ He evaluates the claims’ implications, including the cultural chauvinism of older western historians, and this moves him to question and critique them.¹⁵⁵ Should his judgement of questioning cultural chauvinism be rejected for being anachronistic, such as other historians were in their time? Is Brooke being

¹⁵² Werner G. Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking*, trans. Thomas J. Wilson (Crossroad: New York, 1988), xv.

¹⁵³ Efron, “Sciences and Religions,” 256-7.

¹⁵⁴ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 57.

¹⁵⁵ Brooke, *Science and Religion*, 58.

uncritically anachronistic? It is unlikely that a resounding “yes” may be uttered in public. Making decisions on what to question, what to follow up on, and what to challenge needs critique but is not confined by it. A “postcritical” kind of hermeneutic, echoing Felski, is necessary to understand and use the historians’ work without re-instating through the backdoor the very stories and categories they seek to undermine and problematise.

2.2.2: Michael Polanyi: Personal Knowledge as Post-Critical Hermeneutics

A “post-critical” hermeneutic will claim essential knowledge, will be anachronistic, and may be best described as *acritical*. *Acritical* does not mean thoughtless or “uncritical.” Whenever there is criticism, as Michael Polanyi says, what one criticises is “*the assertion of an articulate form.*”¹⁵⁶ When one judges a particular articulation, this judgement expresses the standards against which a particular articulation was subjected. Such judgements are inevitably constructed upon one’s *tacit knowledge*. This kind of *personal* knowledge is what sustains what Felski calls a postcritical approach, and it relies on a fiduciary framework of which one has no self-evident knowledge, and yet one cannot but submit to it in order to know anything at all. Polanyi says:

Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework.¹⁵⁷

According to Polanyi, Augustine’s *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis* (“unless ye believe, ye shall not understand”) speaks of the fact of our embeddedness in and indebtedness to these fiduciary frameworks. Believe in order to understand, however strange it might sound at first, expresses the actual direction of our sharpest intellectual pursuits. Polanyi says that

the process of examining any topic is both an exploration of the topic, and an exegesis of our fundamental beliefs in the light of which we approach it; a dialectical combination of exploration and exegesis. Our fundamental beliefs are continuously reconsidered in the course of such a process, but only within the scope of their own basic premisses.¹⁵⁸

I do not understand first and then believe later. To even begin “assessing” or understanding I must have already opened myself to the subject matter—I must have already believed. Opening myself to understanding involves putting both my beliefs and what I am exploring on the same

¹⁵⁶ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 264 (author’s italics).

¹⁵⁷ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 266.

¹⁵⁸ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 267.

table, and in doing so my trust has already been moved towards a truth that I have not yet seen but whose echoes I am drawn to. The table on which I am able to dialectically explore any topic as I exegete my own judgements is the fiduciary framework I have already given myself to. In Gadamer's thought this fiduciary framework is a way of speaking of *tradition*, the process and experience of receiving and passing on.

Polanyi's conception of personal knowledge allows me to recognise the unity of myself (my beliefs and judgments) with the subject matter(s) I am exploring. When thinking about ourselves, our present and our history, a personal conception of knowledge highlights that we belong to history and that the past's voice speaks to us through our present. Our present voices our trodden paths, and these paths are the sounds of our present. The following chapters will explore Gadamer's discussion of the experience of tradition as describing a hermeneutics of personal knowledge—a "postcritical" hermeneutics.

2.3: Historicising Reality and the Historicity of Reality: Anachronism and Temporality

The final aspect that this chapter addresses is the rejection of "anachronism" that we have seen in both Brooke and Harrison. So far this chapter has shown that there is something important to be said about rejecting essentialism and about complexity as a critical stance against some simplistic historical narratives. Both negations have laudable goals. At the same time, the chapter has shown that attaching historiographical projects to rejecting essentialism is in practice impossible and that reading complexity in terms of critique narrows its utility rather than enhances it. Even when I de-essentialise, problematise, and critique fixed and confused ways of using historically complex notions (such as "religion" or "science") I am committing myself to something essential in them that allows me to see the historically non-linear paths of meaning change in these notions. In the case of complexity, a post-critical hermeneutic seems to suit it best: complexity is better seen as creative open-mindedness, including but not confined to a negative rejection of some narratives.

As with essentialism and complexity, the worry of anachronism speaks of real problems. There is a real danger in forms of anachronism that do not recognise the difficulty that words bring to thought and speech (and to stories or narratives) in relation to the past. But also, as the previous chapter and the last sections pointed out, anachronism as such is not the problem. One judges "the past" or, as was said in the previous chapter, its witnesses now—speaking through our "reading" of them—precisely by traversing a (temporal) distance that is present in the same moment as "the present." I read Plato's *Republic* now. I read the book of

Genesis in its original language now. Their belonging to “the past” is something that is there as we approach them in the present moment; their “historical” character is also a part of the present, which is another way of saying that the present is also “historical.”

This section’s title says “historicising reality” and “the historicity of reality.” The emphasis in this section (and project) is on the historicity of reality if a “postcritical” hermeneutic is to be preferred. Historicising reality, on the one hand, stands for the tendency to see the past as an object before me, to the extent that I might see myself “outside” of it, facing it in its totality before me. It allows me to think of myself as outside of history, so that my privileged vantage point of the present is not considered methodologically as within history. On the other hand, the historicity of reality emphasises that the distinction between the past and my specific historical situation exists within the temporality of our existence. The otherness of the past and the temporal distance between what is “contemporary” and what is “history” are also experiences within time. History is experienced *within* history, not outside of it. Preferring “the historicity of reality” over “historicising reality” as an overall hermeneutic is not to reject a critical historical approach to “history.” Following Felski’s and Polanyi’s observations, it rather means to recognise the place and limitations of such an approach. This thesis emphasises “the historicity of reality” through what philosopher Owen Barfield calls “the evolution of consciousness” (see below). Barfield’s thought is an entry point to Gadamer’s and it allows us to glimpse why Gadamer might be a relevant conversation partner with regards to the issues that the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism raise.

2.3.0: Owen Barfield and the Evolution of Consciousness: The Historicity of Reality Without Historicism

The lines of enquiry developed in this thesis are based on the work of Gadamer. A helpful analogous approach is that of Barfield. Barfield’s notion of the evolution of consciousness and the historical dimension of language has interesting and unexplored parallels with Gadamer’s notion of historically effected consciousness.¹⁵⁹ These notions emphasise different things when

¹⁵⁹ Hopefully further work will allow me to explore further connections between Barfield’s notion of evolution of consciousness and Gadamer’s notion of historically effected consciousness. Both are deeply historical thinkers that were not doing “just” history but speaking of a historically constituted reality. Another key term for both that is worth more attention is the idea of *representation* (*Darstellung*, for Gadamer), which highlights for both the participative nature of mind and world (the participative nature of *phenomena* or appearances). Their discussion on what a “name” is highlights this participation, and so does their view of language being fundamentally metaphorical (both coming to this conclusion by their experience of poetry). Other connections are their use of Aquinas to articulate the relation between word and world, their Romantic background, and their use of the work of R. G. Collingwood. Barfield, unlike Gadamer, sets on equal footing the Graeco-Roman and Hebraic background of western culture, so his horizons are broader.

deployed by Gadamer and Barfield, but both express that one has to take temporality (historicity) seriously in order to elucidate the nature of understanding, one's relationship with what is deemed real, and especially how "the past" fits in both historicity and understanding. These themes are related to—and in Gadamer's case explicitly developed—Heideggerian themes.¹⁶⁰

2.3.0.1: Language Connects all History in Every Present

Barfield's notion of the evolution of consciousness means to highlight—especially through the phenomenon of language—that the way one experiences the world in its immediacy is dynamic. In other words, the way we experience the world changes throughout time, and these changes affect or give rise to thought as much as our thought influences our experience of the world. An example he gives illustrates his point. Barfield tells us to observe the changes the words "subject" and "subjective" have had throughout (English-language) history. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) describes that in the seventeenth century "subjective" meant "*pertaining to the essence or reality of a thing; real, essential.*" For the first half of the eighteenth century the OED notes that subjective means "*having its source in the mind.*" In the second half of the eighteenth, the meaning changed to: "*pertaining or peculiar to an individual subject or his mental operations [. . .] personal, individual.*" Finally in the second half of the nineteenth century, the meaning is: "*existing in the mind only, without anything real to correspond with it; illusory, fanciful.*"¹⁶¹ Barfield notes the quite astonishing feat of culture and language, inverting entirely the meaning of "subjective," going from "real, essential" to "illusory, fanciful." His wider point, however, relates to the fact that the modern world has come to have as an implicit assumption the default *separation* between "subject" and "object," so that "the most real" is correlative to the *disconnection* between subject and object. Nothing can be further from the truth, thinks Barfield, and language itself shows us the way. The evolution or change of the word "subjective" in fact shows a play between our consciousness or experience of the world and the world we experience. The unity between world and

¹⁶⁰ Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2, summarises one of the two chief issues that the early Heidegger felt important thus: "the problem of 'historicity' for an understanding both of individual human existence (as inherently temporal) and of Christianity (as a historically situated and developing religion)." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), just after §77 (dealing with Wilhelm Dilthey's historicism and Count Yorck) says at the beginning of §78 (The Incompleteness of Foregoing Temporal Analysis of Dasein) that "...we have shown that historicity, as a state-of-Being which belongs to existence, is 'at bottom' temporality" (456).

¹⁶¹ Owen Barfield, *Speaker's Meaning*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 114-5. See *OED Online*, s.v. "subjective, *adj.* and *n.*," March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192702>, accessed March 28, 2022 (author's italics).

consciousness is shown through the very fact that words have a history of changing their meaning. A change of meaning is not only a change of what people thought, but also of how they experienced the world. This is, strictly speaking, more than “conceptual” change—not only the “ideas” but also the experienced world, the very perception of “the world,” changes as well.

To distinguish and note the participative nature between consciousness and world Barfield talks separately of the history of ideas (or the history of concepts) and the evolution of consciousness (or the history of consciousness).¹⁶² Barfield thinks that the history of ideas may trace what people or individuals “thought” or “believed” in a particular moment in history, but without awareness of the evolution of consciousness (and how this shapes what “the world” means), one ends up thinking that people just “thought” differently and not that they also might have experienced the world differently. Barfield says that a semantic approach to history is necessary.¹⁶³ A semantic approach to history is based on the historicity of language itself. The historicity of language is a way of speaking of the meaning of language throughout history, a meaning available to us precisely through language. This meaning is missed or severely misconceived if one assumes that what has changed are merely ideas about an “objective world” independent of these ideas. Barfield’s point is that such an “objective world” that is independent of our conceptions of it does not exist. Insofar as there is “a world” it is correlated with our ideas precisely through our experience of it, and language shows this. Here Barfield could be seen as articulating a kind of “anti-essentialism” because he assumes that even if we share the same words with other peoples and times, the *worlds* of people in the past or of other cultures may be different due to the differences in, and evolution of, language. Barfield’s “anti-essentialism” is also deeply mindful of anachronism. The temporal and contextual nature of language is a given in his approach, suggesting that the way people speak (or spoke) casts light on how they inhabit (or inhabited) their worlds and on the very worlds they inhabit (or inhabited).

2.3.0.2: *A Name is the Thing Itself? Our Experience Tells Us So*

Another example of how language shows the mutual implication of world and idea through one’s experience is the importance of words and names in the mediaeval world (and before) in

¹⁶² Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry*, 2nd ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 65-70.

¹⁶³ Barfield, *Speaker’s Meaning*, 24-5. Barfield talks of the “lexical meaning” and the “speaker’s meaning” of words (26-7) to highlight the need for a semantic approach: it is in their normal, lexical, use and its modifications via the speaker’s meaning that both the world perceived and the ideas about it change and effect one another.

contrast to how “modern” people think of them. For a mediaeval person, a name *is* the thing itself:¹⁶⁴ “To learn about the true nature of words was at the same time to learn about the true nature of things,” as Barfield puts it.¹⁶⁵ What could be called terminological debates in the Middle Ages were not only pedantry but ways of discerning the very essence of reality. For most moderns, however, nominalism is the name of the game: words speak of something independent of them and we attach the words (or “concepts”) to these “independent realities” as post-it notes to things. Barfield argues that what modern people think as “independent realities” are anything but “independent.” Iain McGilchrist makes exactly the same point in the context of how *attention* brings “reality” into being. McGilchrist says that we neither “discover an objective reality nor invent a subjective reality” but that there is “a process of responsive evocation, the world ‘calling forth’ something in me that in turn ‘calls forth’ something in the world.”¹⁶⁶ What is “real” happens in and through experience. McGilchrist’s image for a responsively evoked reality is Escher’s drawing hands. There is no “subject” and “object” that are separate and which then “relate” to one another but they co-construct each other, they construct “reality” together. What Barfield says about how consciousness and the phenomenal world participate in each other is just like Escher’s hands. This participation is brought to the fore by language. Language, as a historical phenomenon, shows the participative nature of past and present. Just as there is no unfelt solidity, unheard sound, unseen colour, there is no present without past or past without present; as Escher’s hands, both are weaved together in our experience.

Barfield notes that modern (western) people can come to realise again the participative relation of themselves with the phenomena through imaginative attention to their own ideas about the phenomenal world. This coheres with McGilchrist’s observation about how attention evokes the phenomena and how phenomena evoke attention. Barfield’s *Saving the Appearances* begins in fact with an exercise of attentive imagination. Just as a rainbow comes to be “real” thorough a correlation between its “particles” and our consciousness, the same is the case with sounds, tact, etc.¹⁶⁷ The world as the entirety of what we can think and speak of happens in the “betweenness” (McGilchrist),¹⁶⁸ between what Barfield calls “the particles” (or the “unrepresented”) and our consciousness.

¹⁶⁴ Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 84-95.

¹⁶⁵ Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 86.

¹⁶⁶ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 133.

¹⁶⁷ Barfield, *Saving the Appearances*, 15-21.

¹⁶⁸ McGilchrist, *Master and His Emissary*, 31.

Barfield's observation of the evolution of consciousness—that the experienced world changes throughout history—helps us differentiate between historicising reality and the historicity of reality. Historians may trace the history of concepts, and this is a crucial task, but they should not assume that conceptual history alone can elucidate the full meaning of the notions under investigation. Noting that our ways of experiencing the world change through time is to note that not only “conceptual” meaning but “experiential” meaning—which is always the living source of the concept—is necessary to understand what people of the past were about. Harrison's work is highly anti-essentialist, problematising profoundly any methodological talk about the “relation” between “religion” and “science.” Less commented on or understood is his thesis of “externalising” *scientia* and *religio*, from “inner virtues” to external practices and doctrines. From Barfield's observation of the evolution of consciousness and how this results in a qualitatively different world, Harrison's suggestions not only are intelligible but are seen beyond historical modes of analysis. Barfield's emphasis on a semantic approach to history, highlighting experiential meaning, may help historians note that understanding historical changes calls for imaginative re-cognition of how the past expressed in language meant and means something. By bearing related names (for example, *episteme*, *scientia*, *science*) these realities are connected in ways that express and communicate what is real, then and now, telling the stories of translations and re-appropriations, faintly but surely suggested in our language. What are these translations and re-appropriations saying? In pursuing such a question an aversion to anachronism loses its usefulness; this question shows the interconnected nature of present and past—it is an “essentially anachronistic” connective.

Harrison's (and Brooke's) project hints towards forms of connecting present and past through patterns and tentative guiding narratives. They must connect past and present explicitly for their work to make any sense now. If they are to be effective, however, they must connect past and present experientially as well as conceptually. In Harrison's case, he moves towards attaching his work to more general theories of modernity, ones that trace the changes not in “scientific revolutions” but in our moral dispositions,¹⁶⁹ echoing Alasdair MacIntyre's *After*

¹⁶⁹ Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*, 185-90.

Virtue (1981)¹⁷⁰ and Charles Taylor’s “conditions of belief” in *A Secular Age* (2007).¹⁷¹ Barfield is helpful here because his notion of the evolution of consciousness speaks as well about the evolution of the phenomenal world, and both correlated evolutions in turn arise from observations that include a process like the one Harrison observes. In more general terms, Barfield shows historians and non-historians reading historiographical works how to connect historiographical works to the present. Barfield’s insights show that the ideal historical world constitutes and is constituted by the (present) experientially real world, a world which clearly already shapes all questioning and which is the embodiment of history.

2.3.1: Philosophical Hermeneutics: Experience and Language as the Glue between Times

From Barfield’s approach one could say that historicising reality differs from acknowledging the historicity of the real in that the former tends to recognise not its own historically conditioned nature in its modes of proceeding. It may be called “historicism” because it considers “the past” as in the past, so that one may approach it as if outside of it. Barfield shows an integration of a historical sensitivity without historicism via an attention to words as language (not only as concepts or ideas), embedding conceptual history or history of ideas in his semantic approach. Barfield’s semantic approach to history does not negate or undermine the history of concepts, but the history of concepts is integrated in a larger framework of experience. We could say that Barfield points to what Nicholas Davey says that Gadamer’s hermeneutics is: a philosophy of experience.¹⁷² With the emphasis on language, historicity, and experience, this thesis moves to its second part. The next chapter introduces Gadamer, his

¹⁷⁰ Apart from *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), especially the chapters dealing with the notion of virtue (chaps. 10-18) including the notion of tradition (chap. 15), and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), see MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). A dialogue between MacIntyre’s and Gadamer’s views on the good, virtue, tradition, practical reason, and narrative would be beneficial for developing a “hermeneutic” approach, akin to what will be proposed in the following chapters.

¹⁷¹ Even though Charles Taylor’s massive *A Secular Age* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) mentions Gadamer only once (286), his joint volume with Hubert Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) gives Gadamer and his notion of fusion of horizons an important place (chap. 6, esp. 110-29). Also, Taylor’s recent work on language in *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016) clearly overlaps with Gadamer’s sources in German Romanticism (ix-x) and Gadamer’s interest in language. Among other interactions with Gadamer’s thought, see especially Charles Taylor, “Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes,” chap. 2 in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 24-38. For a work connecting both MacIntyre and Taylor in the spirit of Gadamer’s hermeneutical thought see Jason Blakely, *Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and the Demise of Naturalism: Reunifying Political Theory and Social Science* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).

¹⁷² Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), esp. chap. 1, thesis two (5-6) and chap. 3 (109-70).

thought and main ideas relevant to the problems this thesis has raised so far, in order to articulate a hermeneutical approach that may help integrate historiographical work such as Harrison's and Brooke's, mindful of the issues that essentialism, complexity, and anachronism speak of, without assuming that one can be above or outside of one's historicity.

2.4: Conclusion

This chapter has sought to understand in more depth the notions of essentialism, complexity and anachronism as found in Harrison's *Territories of Science and Religion* and Brooke's *Science and Religion*. This chapter's concern was both with their work as source for and constitutive of science and religion discourses. Specifically, this chapter has pointed out what essentialism, complexity, and anachronism cannot realistically mean and what is needed in order to attend to some of what they do mean.

Rejecting essentialism cannot mean having no "essential" knowledge of things (or that words have no "essential" referent). This chapter showed that both Brooke and Harrison do have what could be called essential, but not necessarily essentialist, knowledge of both "science" and "religion" given that they associate them to some things and not others, regardless of the historical period. Anti-essentialism is thus an awareness of the unstable nature of the words used as concepts or categories and what they refer to, especially when the words are used to talk about history. Both Brooke and Harrison see in different ways and in different degrees these categories as raising questions about areas of the moral and the intellectual, and about how metaphysics and theology are always at play in these questions and in the answers given. Even the framing of "moral" and "intellectual" areas as separate is problematic—both "moral" and "intellectual," as both Brooke and Harrison show, are not neatly separable and are always present in the territories of science and religion.

Historical complexity, this chapter argued, is narrowed and becomes parasitic on the narratives that it seeks to reject, if it is attached primarily to "critique." Following Felski this chapter observed that a "postcritical" hermeneutics is better suited to what historical complexity seeks to express, which is an open-minded approach, aware of the richness of history and the myriad of ambiguities and ambivalences present in institutions, groups of people, and in individual persons. This approach is not against critique but it is not ruled by it—it affirms critique as necessary and useful for certain purposes but particularly unhelpful when what is sought is to let texts (or "history") speak to us. Critique is also a rhetorical and narrative structure, with its affective ideals of detachment and neutrality, so to be ruled by

critique is at base against a humane reception and transformation of the witnesses of the past, or what will be articulated later as the experience of tradition.

Finally, anachronism was interpreted as a warning against unawareness of the way we speak about the past. It was not, however, singled out as a problem as such, for it was pointed out that reality is historical, meaning that history imbues it. This chapter contrasted the historicity of reality to historicising reality which is to approach history as if from above or from the outside. To articulate a first step towards Gadamer's thought I engaged with Barfield's notion of the evolution of consciousness and the correlative evolution of the phenomenal world. Barfield's approach is an example of an understanding of reality where historicity and temporality are constitutive without falling into historicism. Barfield was seen as giving a philosophy of experience which attended to language. Both experience and language are concepts which will be explored in Gadamer's thought in order to articulate the unity of past and present. Experience and language are the means of finding appropriate anachronisms.

The following three chapters—Part Two of the project—introduce us to Gadamer and his thought (chapter three) and appropriate it in relation to the themes that are being explored in this thesis (chapters four and five) in order to propose a comportment that is mindful of the actual problems of historicity, language, and experience and helps scholars navigate them.

Part Two

Critique and History as Hermeneutical Experiences: Overcoming the Aporias in Essentialism, Complexity, and Anachronism through Hans-Georg Gadamer's Thought

3: Hans-Georg Gadamer: Three Relevant Facets of His Thought

Hans-Georg Gadamer, philosopher and classical philologist, was born on 11 February 1900 in Marburg, Germany, exactly 250 years after René Descartes' death,¹⁷³ and in the year Friedrich Nietzsche died.¹⁷⁴ *Truth and Method*—Gadamer's magnum opus—was published in 1960 and it is the work that brought the equation of Gadamer with philosophical hermeneutics.¹⁷⁵ The word “method” in the title echoes Descartes' *Discourse de la Méthode*, and here Gadamer challenges many of modern philosophy's assumptions on the nature of knowing, including the very ideal of “method” as the mark of true knowledge. Gadamer retired from his university professor role in 1968,¹⁷⁶ although he continued writing and speaking in Germany and around the world until his death on 13 March 2002 in Heidelberg.¹⁷⁷ An overview of his life and collected works can be found in the Appendix.

The three chapters in Part Two explore Gadamer's work in order to give insight into the issues that have been raised in the previous chapters regarding essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. This chapter explores three facets of his thought: an ethical, political, and practical side exemplified by his engagements with Plato and Aristotle; a metaphysical and theological side exemplified by his approach to Kant and Hegel; and the relevance of history, phenomenology, and finite temporal existence exemplified Dilthey's, Husserl's, and Heidegger's influence in his thought. These facets will help us overcome the aporias in essentialism, complexity, and anachronism in chapters four and five.

The issues this thesis has explored so far, especially essentialism and anachronism, have in common the problem of *historicity*: how can we think and speak with and about history given that we ourselves *belong to* and are active *participants* in history? The notion of complexity, given that it has become a methodological *critical* tool for historiographical works

¹⁷³ Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (London: Routledge, 2003), 1. Grondin also wrote Gadamer's biography, published in German before Gadamer died as *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie* (1999) and translated as *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Grondin's *The Philosophy of Gadamer* and Karl Simms, *Hans-Georg Gadamer* (London: Routledge, 2015) are accessible introductions to Gadamer's thought.

¹⁷⁴ R. Lanier Anderson, “Friedrich Nietzsche” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/nietzsche/>, accessed March 29, 2022.

¹⁷⁵ I will be using *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), *T&M* hereafter.

¹⁷⁶ Robert J. Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13; Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 18-25.

¹⁷⁷ A short chronology can be found in Etsuro Makita's comprehensive site, which expands Makita's *Gadamer-Bibliographie (1922-1994)* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). The site has lists of all Gadamer's published works, including translations into different languages, a list of his former students and a list of the awards he received throughout his life (https://www.rs.tus.ac.jp/makita/gdmhp/gdmhp_d.html, accessed March 29, 2022).

and wider afield, needs a direction that includes “critique” but that is not governed by critique, especially if complexity is to transcend the very things it critiques. The issue of historicity and critique is one of belonging in history, as one changes history by being in it, and of how one narrates and makes sense of this change-through-belonging without rendering oneself speechless and one’s language meaningless due to critical excess. Historicity is about the temporality of our *experiential* reality as much as it is about *language*. The problems raised by the three historiographical categories are about understanding through our language a reality that is temporally or historically constituted and that we change as we speak (in) it.

Beyond this chapter, the chapters that follow address each of the historiographical categories. Complexity as more than critique will be the subject of chapter four. Essentialism and anachronism as instances of the issue of historicity follow in the fifth chapter. Part Three begins with chapter six, engaging with some of Gadamer’s most well-known critics and with other questions that arise from his thought, including some ways in which philosophical hermeneutics may be refracted that are helpful for integrating the insights of historiographical works in science and religion discussions. Chapter seven concludes the thesis by showing how there is already scholarship performing this integration.

Let us now move to the first of the three facets explored in this chapter. The following section focuses on how, through Gadamer’s reading of Plato and Aristotle, one can locate a focus on ethics, politics, and practical philosophy in his thought.

3.0: Politics, Ethics, and Mindful Practice in Philosophical Hermeneutics

3.0.0: Between the Platonic Aristotle and the Aristotelian Critique of Plato

Even though Aristotle criticised Plato, Gadamer observes that Aristotle was still swimming in Platonic waters. Although much of western tradition tends to set one against the other so that it is hard to speak of Platonic-Aristotelian thought, Gadamer does not read Aristotle as breaking with Plato fundamentally. Aristotle, the Platonic logician and Plato, the dialectician, both follow the *logoi* (*Phaedo*)—following the lead of how we speak.¹⁷⁸ Gadamer says that “in the entire traditional Aristotelian works we never get back to a point where Aristotle was not a critic of Plato’s doctrine of the ideas, but also [. . .] we never arrive at a point where he really ceased to be a Platonist.”¹⁷⁹ This sets Aristotle and Plato in a different light than the depiction

¹⁷⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 13-15.

¹⁷⁹ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 8.

of Aristotle and Plato in Raphael's fresco *The School of Athens*: Aristotle's palm downwards (the empiricist or realist) versus Plato's upwards index finger (the idealist). Gadamer notes that Plato himself in the *Parmenides* criticised the doctrine of ideas of which Aristotle was critical in his *Metaphysics*. From *parousia*, *symploke*, *koinonia*, *methexis*, *mimesis*, *mixis*, both "the *Parmenides* and Aristotle's critique finally single out *methexis*" to speak of the *participation* of appearance and idea, of the particular in the universal, the many in the one.¹⁸⁰ It is true that opposing the "privileged ontological status that Plato accords the idea, Aristotle emphatically asserts that the primary reality is the particular individual, the *tode ti* (this-something)." Nonetheless, Aristotle

remains within the framework of Plato's orientation towards the *logoi*. His "primary" substance in no way excludes the *eidos*. On the contrary, there is an obvious and indissoluble connection between that "secondary" substance—the *eidos* that answers the question *ti estin*—and the primary substance of any given "this."¹⁸¹

Gadamer does not read Plato and Aristotle seeking for systems, doctrines, definitions, and syllogisms. Gadamer reads them as following in different paths the lead of language into the question of the possibility of what it is to be. "The common problem, basic to both Aristotle's and Plato's investigations," says Gadamer, "is how the *logos ousias* (the statement of being, of what a thing is) is possible."¹⁸² They are united in their common questioning so Aristotle's critique, far from signalling a break with Plato, displays a deeper unity with him. This unity is also observed by more recent scholarship thereby supporting Gadamer's insights.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 10. See also "Zur Vorgeschichte der Metaphysik," in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 6, Griechische Philosophie II* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 6, 9-29 (*GW 6* hereafter). Here he discusses the problems of the entanglement of ontology and cosmology (being and the all) (12-19); dealing with concepts as parts of the world (the question of the whole and the part, the one and the many) (19-24); and the priority of the objective over subjectivity (being and thought) (24-29).

¹⁸¹ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 15 (my italics).

¹⁸² Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 16.

¹⁸³ See Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) for a comprehensive case for this view. Gerson says: "perhaps Aristotle is a Platonist *malgré lui*. I mean the possibility that Aristotle could not adhere to the doctrines that he incontestably adheres to were he not thereby committed to principles that are in harmony with Platonism. In short, I explore the claim that an authentic Aristotelian, if he be consistent, is inevitably embracing a philosophical position that is in harmony with Platonism" (275). Christopher Shields, "Plato and Aristotle in the Academy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 645-67, makes a similar point: "attention to the intricate intra-Academic dialectic that developed between Plato and Aristotle serves to teach us something of value about each of them. The easy, natural tendency to portray them as polar opposites entrenched in permanent philosophical combat only serves to occlude this avenue of insight" (664).

3.0.1: The Distinction between Noetic and Sensory in the Natural and Human Realms

Gadamer defends Plato against Aristotle insofar as Aristotle's critique makes Plato someone who disconnects completely (or "separates" with his *chorismos* critique) appearance and idea, the sensory and the noetic. Plato is responding to his context and background, Gadamer notes, especially the tradition of the mathematical sciences. Pythagorean mathematics did not separate the truths of its proofs and its objects (circles, triangles, numbers) on the one hand, and the sensory reality they arose from (actual circles, triangles, quantities) on the other. Plato's *chorismos*, the "ontological divorce of the noetic from the sensory" allowed mathematicians to understand that they were not doing a kind of physics.¹⁸⁴ Plato was not positing an absolute separation or disconnection between appearance and idea but a *distinction* that allows generality and commonality between the many and the one. As all right-angled triangles are conceptually equivalent and not tied to any one drawing of a triangle, so the noetic and the sensory (or mathematics and physics) may be similarly distinguished.

The problem of the good or the just arises in a similar way as the problem of the noetic and the sensory. How do we distinguish between what is just and what is considered conventionally to be just? The problem of idea and appearance is also present in the moral realm. Is what is just ultimately public convention? If so, whose conventions? The question itself calls for "something" that is not totally independent but also not totally determined by convention. The separation Plato posits between appearance and idea is then, as Gadamer says, "the truth of moral consciousness as such."¹⁸⁵ It indicates that there is goodness and justice that is not totally reduced to the conventional (the appearance, the sensual). Compounded with Plato's dealings with the Sophists, namely rhetorical masters whose arguments were not obviously "false" but persuasively misleading due to their ends, Gadamer notes that Plato has to emphasise the "divorce" of the sensory and the noetic in order to assert the fallibility of the sensory to the point of deviating completely from real understanding. The *chorismos* is thus a component of true dialectic, Gadamer says, not an impediment to dialectic. The "distance" of appearance and idea is not to be "bridged" with the anxiety of absolute separation, even though Aristotle criticises the *chorismos* as interfering with the ontological primacy of the particular. Dialectic—thought—could be understood then not as a *deduction* from the universal to the particular nor as *induction* from the particular to the universal, but as the play between appearance and idea, the sensory and the noetic, the one and the many. This play is not divorced

¹⁸⁴ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 17.

¹⁸⁵ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 18.

from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the “texture” of thought—persuasiveness involves *knowledge* of the concrete, the sensory, the appearance, the audience; dialectic and rhetoric are always implicated in each other. Describing the *play* of thought—to use Gadamer’s concept of *Spiel*—also reminds us of how the *chorismos* or hiatus that Aristotle criticises is overcome (as Plato himself notes) by *the beautiful*.¹⁸⁶ The beautiful *mediates* the sensory and the noetic, appearance and idea,¹⁸⁷ and the polyphonic notion of play—as a performance or drama and as amusement and game—speaks of this mediation.

Under the light of dialectic, the idea of the good is of crucial importance for it is not simply one idea among many. Both Plato and Aristotle see this as a central concern. Gadamer notes: “The question about the good and, in particular, about the good in the sense of *arete*, the ‘best-ness’ of the citizen of the *polis* (city-state), dominates Plato’s writings from the very start.”¹⁸⁸ Gadamer notes that, beyond Plato’s “aporetic” dialogues (where Socrates refutes and negates what people think they know regarding the good), in the *Republic* is sought a kind of knowledge that is beyond knowledge (*techne*, art or skill). Knowledge of the good is not the kind of skill or art of the artisan. This means that to know the good is a form of ignorance—it is not like being a specialist in this or that. Gadamer says that if “measured against such a concept of specialized expertise, it could indeed be called ignorance.”¹⁸⁹ This ignorance—true human wisdom—“must inquire beyond, and see beyond, all the widespread presumed knowledge that Plato later will call ‘*doxa*’ (belief, opinion).” The good can be glimpsed “only in this *apoblepein pros*—this looking at it in seeing past all else.”¹⁹⁰ The good being “beyond all beings” is also shared by the beautiful: the beautiful-in-itself, Gadamer says, is also “beyond all beings as is the good-in-itself (*epekeina*).”¹⁹¹

The unity of Platonic-Aristotelian thought, including the concern with the good, emphasises the centrality of ethics in Gadamer’s thought. Lest we misinterpret what “ethics” means here, I mean the mode of being shared by a people, their character or *ethos* which involves a relation to the good (as an idea-in-practice). Based on what I have said so far it is impossible to posit an “otherworldly” (“Platonic” as is commonly thought) account of the *idea* of the good that is totally separated from “this-worldly” manifestations of the good in human life. The “idea of the good” is thus understood less as a “concept” and more as a relation to the

¹⁸⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Three, I.III.C, 490-506.

¹⁸⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, 497.

¹⁸⁸ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 21.

¹⁸⁹ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 23.

¹⁹⁰ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 23-4.

¹⁹¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 494.

good (as the sun allows us to see but cannot be gazed at directly). One does not grasp it but views it indirectly, through its effects.¹⁹² Here beauty shows its advantage; even though it is analogous to the good in having an “ultimate effulgence,” it is “distinguished from the absolutely intangible good in that it can be grasped, it is part of its own nature to be something that is visibly manifest. The beautiful reveals itself in the search for the good.”¹⁹³

3.0.2: The Centrality of Practical Philosophy and *Phronesis*

The centrality of the good for ethical reflection brings us to one of Gadamer’s main interests: practical philosophy. Gadamer notes that Aristotle, following Plato (who followed Socrates), “accepted Socrates’ equation of virtue and knowledge in the sense that he incorporated explanation into the moral being of *ethos*.”¹⁹⁴ This results in the founding of a philosophical tradition that reflects on *ethos*, namely “ethics” or “practical philosophy.” Practical philosophy, however, includes also what the Greeks call the *polis*, the organisation of the city, its people, and their life together (what the tradition of “politics” reflects on). “Ethics” and “politics”—encompassed by Aristotle’s practical philosophy or practical science—presuppose *ethos* and *polis*: mores, rootedness in custom and tradition and, in the case of politics, “the polis and everything that is implied in this givenness—primarily that a polis has its gods.”¹⁹⁵

Practical philosophy involves lived life and its various spheres as central sources for thought-in-action. A paramount observation for Gadamer is that Aristotle rooted *theoretical* and *practical* philosophy on their own footings: practical philosophy is not a type of theoretical philosophy, but in enquiring about the humanly good Aristotle opposes it to “questions about the universal idea of the good that Plato’s dialogues frequently put in the mouth of Socrates.”¹⁹⁶ When Plato develops the unity of the good of all things—that is the good of the soul, of the polis, and the entire cosmos—he does this upon “the theoretical basis of numbers,” following in this regard a Pythagorean vision.¹⁹⁷ As we saw, this “Pythagorean vision” is critiqued by Plato—by distinguishing between idea and appearance, sensory and noetic—even though he also finds it apposite to speak of the unity of the good in all things.

¹⁹² Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 27-31.

¹⁹³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 496.

¹⁹⁴ Gadamer, “Aristotle and Imperative Ethics,” in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 143.

¹⁹⁵ Gadamer, “Aristotle and Imperative Ethics,” 143.

¹⁹⁶ Gadamer, “Aristotle and Imperative Ethics,” 148.

¹⁹⁷ Gadamer, “Aristotle and Imperative Ethics,” 148.

The recognition of distinction—not rupture—is important because it at once validates on its own terms spheres that involve in an explicit way a continual play between idea and appearance, namely the *Geisteswissenschaften* or the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences. “Validation” only means here that by distinguishing (without assuming radical rupture) between the particular and the general we recognise that the humanities deal also with truth and knowledge in ways that are at times different from mathematical or “scientific” ways of proceeding. Gadamer says that the kind of knowing that the Socratic dialogues are inviting us into—thereby noting that Aristotle criticises Plato following a Platonic instinct—“is another mode of knowing beyond all the special claims and competences of a knowing superiority, beyond all otherwise known *technai* and *epistemai*.”¹⁹⁸ This kind of knowing is found in different shades in both Plato and Aristotle, both agreeing that “in human actions the good we project as *hou heneka* (that for the sake of which) is concretized and defined only by our practical reason—in the *euboulia* (well-advisedness) of *phronesis*.”¹⁹⁹

Phronesis, or as the Latin translation has it, *prudentia*, is thus the reasonableness within moral being and by “moral being” we mean human experience. Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is what happens in the play of theory and practice: it guides practice not by a kind of “theoretical” or “rule-based” normative approach but by thoughtful living, a kind of attentive and patient engagement as we live and belong in the world. This “engagement” speaks of the unity Gadamer sees of theory and practice, which is what *phronesis* makes evident. Practical wisdom is a practice that is “theoretical”—playing here with *theoria* (contemplation), a form of observation (the cosmos), being an onlooker or participating in a festival.²⁰⁰ *Phronesis* as a human experience shows how the sensory is already noetic and the noetic sensorial. *Theoria*, contemplation, is thus a practice; it displays the distance between idea and appearance, but the kind of distance is “that of proximity and affinity.”²⁰¹

When practice—this living together that *ethos* speaks of—is not recognised as imbued with *logos*, the root of the human sciences (and of thought and science in general) is weakened. *Phronesis* is the possibility of living in thoughtful (“logical” in that it has *logos*) action; practice that in itself gives rise to knowing that is not as demonstrable as mathematics but that is

¹⁹⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics,” in *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 185.

¹⁹⁹ Gadamer, *Idea of the Good*, 177.

²⁰⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Praise of Theory,” in *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*, trans. Chris Dawson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 31-2; “On the Philosophic Element in the Sciences and the Scientific Character of Philosophy,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 17-8.

²⁰¹ Gadamer, “On the Philosophic Element,” 17.

nevertheless real. To miss or reject the logos-imbued character of practice is to render the arts and humanities the “inexact” sciences, perhaps not even “sciences” properly speaking—which in today’s world would amount to saying that there is, at best, inferior knowledge in them. The rejection or undermining of knowledge-in-practice would show the prejudice of certainty as the hallmark of knowledge, a certainty that eludes the most valuable “indemonstrable” quality of relationships we have which depend on the “indemonstrable” good, the true, the just, etc.

A term that can illuminate aspects of what phronesis invokes is *mindfulness*.²⁰² We say, “be mindful” of others, meaning not just awareness of others but being considerate, attentive, and appropriately responsive to our connection with one another, embedded in our concrete acting in the world. Mindfulness—to be mindful—is to hone our attentiveness so that we may live well; so that we may aim at the good in practice. Its meditative or meditational resonances emphasise what phronesis means: being thoughtful, acting thoughtfully or mindfully. These words can still speak of the meaning of “prudence,” a word whose currency is waning.

Platonic-Aristotelian thought is thus held together by the question of the good in thought and in deed, and how it arises from the very question of idea and appearance. Given that Aristotle focuses on the particular so that the universal seems from an Aristotelian point of view “overemphasised” by Plato, and given that this is indeed an emphasis on a distinction and not on an absolute separation, Platonic-Aristotelian thought is a short-hand for the soil of western philosophy in Gadamer’s thought. Modern questions framed as the relation between “object” and “subject” turn out to be extensions (and at times contractions) of the long tradition of western philosophy.

Gadamer’s reading of Platonic-Aristotelian thought gives Gadamer’s thought a “direction” or a ripeness towards ethics, politics, and mindful praxis. Gadamer’s “political hermeneutics,” as Sullivan observes especially in Gadamer’s early writings, are “a reflection on one experience, that of the soul in its partnership with the political community.”²⁰³ The focus on the good or the just and on phronesis, connected to other areas of interest for Gadamer’s thought, namely history (see last section of this chapter), make Gadamer’s thought

²⁰² Neville Chiavaroli and Stephen Trumble, “When I say ... phronesis,” *Medical Education* 52, no. 10 (October 2018): 1005, <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13611>. Chiavaroli and Trumble say that “mindfulness” is mental in focus so perhaps the term “judiciousness” is better. I think “mindfulness” is better because it highlights precisely the “mental” aspect as eminently practical and concrete. For the relevance of *phronesis* (and hermeneutics as a whole) in medicine see Fredrik Svenaeus, “Hermeneutics of Medicine in the Wake of Gadamer: The Issue of *Phronesis*,” *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 24, no. 5 (September 2003): 407-31, <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:META.0000006935.10835.b2>.

²⁰³ Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 16.

particularly useful to explore historiographical work as a practice of political and ethical deliberation, and of mediation between past and present. By virtue of what historiography critiques and recommends, historiography is open to political and ethical questioning beyond mere historical assessment of events, and philosophical hermeneutics is a helpful guide in assessing these political, ethical, and practical dimensions of historiography. Chapter six in particular reiterates the importance of these dimensions in hermeneutics through Gadamer's debates with Derrida, Habermas, and Betti.

3.1: Metaphysical and Theological Inclinations of Hermeneutics

3.1.0: Kant and the Rejection of *Intellectus Infinitus*

Gadamer connects Platonic-Aristotelian thought with Kant's in Kant's limitation of the claims of theoretical knowledge. Practice, says Gadamer following Kant, is what conditions our understanding. Such reasoning is behind "religion within the bounds of reason alone"—the exclusion of "the infinite" or "infinite mind" or God—from theoretical-philosophical reflection since it is merely boundary setting, giving no real theoretical or philosophical knowledge. Kant's limitation of theoretical knowledge is not only a critique of "religion" but of "pure reason" as such; it is possible experience—practice, what one can do and experience—that bounds thought.²⁰⁴ The rejection of "the infinite" is repeated in various places in Gadamer's thought,²⁰⁵ although it is not "the infinite" as such but conceptions of it like infinite

²⁰⁴ For Kant, pure reason's only utility is negative: "it does not serve for expansion, as an organon, but rather, as a discipline, serves for the determination of boundaries, and instead of discovering truth it has only the silent merit of guarding against errors." *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 672. The positive cognition that belongs to pure reason, thinks Kant, is found in its *practical* use. Given that reason is prone to go beyond its proper "negativity" as discipline—its tendency towards speculation about the transcendental or highest ends of freedom, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God—Kant says that this tendency's only positive cognition is that these highest ends are not necessary for "our *knowing*, and yet are insistently recommended to us by our reason," so "their importance must really concern only the *practical*" (674, author's italics). Thus, as Gadamer says in his reading of Kant, making room for faith is tantamount to reason's submission to the moral-in-practice.

²⁰⁵ Gadamer says in the foreword to *T&M*: "It is true that my book is phenomenological in its method. [...] This fundamental methodical approach avoids implying any metaphysical conclusions. [I agree with] Kant's conclusions in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: I regard statements that proceed by wholly dialectical means from the finite to the infinite, from human experience to what exists in itself, from the temporal to the eternal, as doing no more than setting limits, and am convinced that philosophy can derive no actual knowledge from them" (xxxiii). Gadamer echoes Kant's rejection of the "dialectic" of finite and infinite: "Existence can never be 'cobbled out' of ideas—that would be nothing but unnatural Scholasticism." Gadamer, "Kant and the Question of God," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, 7. Kant shows that "The idea of one per se necessary being already involves the nonsense of the ontological argument: its existence is supposed to be already implied in its concept [...] a being necessary in itself cannot be derived from contingency" (8). In "The Phenomenological Movement," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (London: University of California Press, 2008), Gadamer expands: "It seems to me that it is essential for taking finitude seriously as the basis of every experience of Being that such experience renounce all dialectical supplementation." Furthermore, he says that "it is 'obvious' that finitude is a privative determination of thought and as such presupposes its opposite, transcendence, or history

understanding (*intellectus infinitus*). Gadamer says that this *intellectus infinitus* is unknowable through our existential experience—it is not phenomenologically given—unsupported by “revelation.” It is only a regulative idea (as Kant sees it) from which no (speculative or theoretical) knowledge can be attained.²⁰⁶ Gadamer sees in both Platonic-Aristotelian and Kantian thought an emphasis on practical philosophy, although Gadamer departs from Kant (and follows Plato and Aristotle instead) in that the notion of truth transcends conceptual knowledge.²⁰⁷ One of the Kantian outcomes of circumscribing “pure reason” in the practical or the moral is that, according to Gadamer, Kant ends up depriving the moral (and the aesthetic) from any cognitive “content.” Therefore Gadamer, in seeing phronesis as foundational, cannot go along with Kantian “reason.” There is reason in the moral, there is truth in art. Phronesis as reasonableness—reasonable comportment or behaviour—is reason-able-ness: the reason-able nature of things.

Connected to Kant’s boundary-setting nature of “pure reason” is Kant’s rooting the metaphysical tradition on the principle of freedom. Freedom cannot be contradicted or “proven” by any scientific fact. It is a “fact of reason.”²⁰⁸ The principle of freedom gives context and validates our teleological experience. In Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, Gadamer observes that Kant makes conceptual room for the idea of nature as the “guide-line for teleological judgement,” because regarding “something as a natural organism and not as machine clearly assumes a priori that we admit the thought of purpose and purposiveness.”²⁰⁹ Now, Kant’s articulation of the spirit of the post-Newtonian science is well known, and one can see it clearly in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* or the summarised version of the *Prolegomena*. Here Kant is deemed to have “‘crushed’ all ‘dogmatic metaphysics’ with its

or (in another way) nature. Who will deny that? I contend, however, that we have learned once and for all from Kant that such ‘obvious’ ways of thought can mediate no possible knowledge to us finite beings. Dependence on possible experience and demonstration by means of it remains the alpha and omega of all responsible thought” (172). If the basis upon which we can actually “demonstrate” this or that is only our possible experience, experience’s basic orientation (in *language*) is the appropriate focus point. Language is “genuinely universal and, if one can so express it, infinite in a finite way. All our ways of thinking are dependent upon the universality of language” (172).

²⁰⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxxiii; “Kant and the Question of God,” 8; “On the Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics,” 183; “The Phenomenological Movement,” 172.

²⁰⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part One, I.II-III, 39-91.

²⁰⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Natural Science and the Concept of Nature,” in *The Beginning of Knowledge*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 2001), 138; “The University of Heidelberg and the Birth of Modern Science,” in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, trans. Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 41; “On the Philosophical Element,” 9-10; “Life and Soul: The *Phaedo*,” in *The Beginning of Philosophy*, trans. Rod Coltman (New York: Continuum, 2001), 43.

²⁰⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Natural Science and Hermeneutics: The Concept of Nature in Ancient Philosophy,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1985): 41.

critique.”²¹⁰ Unfortunately, Gadamer says, Kant is read without considering Kant’s overall goal, namely founding metaphysics anew on new foundations—the principle of freedom—in the light of the new sciences. This is what Kant does in the *Critique of Judgement* through the a priori nature of the teleological judgement. The anti-metaphysical reading of Kant is attained by reading him primarily through the *Critique of Pure Reason* (forgetting or ignoring the third critique). This one-sidedness gets “inherited” when reading Hegel (and German Idealism in general) as merely attempting to justify the fact of “science” over and against “metaphysics.”

3.1.1: Hegel and the Bad Infinity

Gadamer says that Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, in the wake of Leibniz, have also been read along one-sided Kantian (the Kant of the *Prolegomena* and of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) lines. Instead of being read (as Gadamer does) in and through the metaphysical tradition, they are read mostly as following Kant’s perceived post-metaphysical lines, attempting to merely justify the fact of “science” in opposition to metaphysics. One can see, according to Gadamer, that Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and even Leibniz whom Kant criticised, were attempting to find a comprehensive “system” of philosophy, fitting together all the faces of knowledge:

Growing from the Kantian impulse, German idealism tried even more fundamentally to reinstate the concept of “science” in its full richness and to ground the unity of the theoretical and the practical philosophy of science on the primacy of practical reason. [...] The final attempt to fulfil this task was undertaken by the Romantics. Hegel’s speculative synthesis of all the forms in which Spirit appears in art, religion, and philosophy—that is, in intuition, devotion, and thought—was intended to bring together the whole truth. This Romantic dream was soon exhausted. Idealism’s speculative synthesis fell before the onslaught of the empirical sciences that were then beginning their triumphant advance. Idealist philosophy of nature became a laughing stock, and the idealist transfiguration of political reality was equally unable to resist. “Progress” became the byword of the new epoch.²¹¹

The work of Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, which Gadamer reads as continuing the spirit of *first philosophy* or metaphysics, even though attempting to hold together “science” and “metaphysics”—natural philosophy and philosophy—could not support the “progress” of the empirical sciences. As Gadamer says, “under the nineteenth-century ascendancy of natural scientific research, natural philosophy was quickly forgotten (perhaps even too quickly). In any case, the age of the science of nature or of history was no age for philosophy.”²¹² One of the

²¹⁰ Gadamer, “Natural Science and the Concept of Nature,” 138; “Philosophy or Theory of Science?” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 152.

²¹¹ Gadamer, “Praise of Theory,” 24-5.

²¹² Gadamer, “Natural Science and the Concept of Nature,” 138

casualties is the loss of phronesis, which means the loss of our recognition of the unity between theory and practice. Losing natural philosophy—a philosophy of nature—for “science” means losing the connection between thought and world if “science” is understood reductively. Seen as constituted primarily by method, experiment, and identical repetition to “deduce” theoretical-normative principles of “nature,” this perception of “science” took the day in the nineteenth century and it is still a popular perception.

There is a Hegelian notion that Gadamer sees himself as defending, although he uses it in a peculiar way. The notion of a “bad infinity” [*schlechte Unendlichkeit*], as well as the issue of the logic of question and answer, has a Hegelian import in Gadamer’s thought. Gadamer develops his priority of the question with an eye on Hegel, although Gadamer follows Plato more than Hegel. Gadamer saw this “Hegelian aspect” of the priority of the question via the English Hegelian, R. G. Collingwood.²¹³

The bad infinity which Hegel posits may be thought of as an intuitive notion of infinity: that which does not end. Why does Gadamer defend this infinity? The use he gives to the bad infinity is different than what Hegel deploys it for. Gadamer uses it to describe the dialogue of the soul with itself. He is not using it to talk about “the infinite” as such but to describe how one continuously keeps oneself open to “the whole of being.”²¹⁴ Hegel describes this bad infinity as the infinity of imagination rejected by Spinoza, “an endless alternation of determinations.”²¹⁵ This description matches how Gadamer speaks of openness to being: it has the character of an end that keeps delaying its arrival;²¹⁶ it speaks of “a world-horizon which encloses us and within which we live our lives.”²¹⁷ A way of understanding his predilection for Hegel’s “bad infinity” is Gadamer’s focus on *finitude*. To be finite involves situatedness; it involves having a *horizon*.²¹⁸ Hence we say that we must “expand our horizons” or that we need to “broaden our horizons” when another vantage point is needed. Gadamer’s defence of Hegel’s bad infinity is an emphasis on our finite nature; it highlights that insofar as we experience anything at all in our lives, we do so encountering our limitations.²¹⁹ Gadamer’s refashioning of Hegel’s bad infinity echoes then his agreement with Kant about (rejecting the

²¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Heritage of Hegel,” in *Reason in the Age of Science*, 45-7; *T&M*, 370-84.

²¹⁴ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 37.

²¹⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on Logic: Berlin 1831*, trans. Clark Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 109.

²¹⁶ Gadamer, “The Heritage of Hegel,” 40-1.

²¹⁷ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 37.

²¹⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, II.I.D, 311-8.

²¹⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 355-70, esp. 359-6.

notion of) infinite understanding (*intellectus infinitus*).²²⁰ He means in both cases to emphasise finitude. This emphasis on finitude is another way of speaking of the relevance of phronesis. With the term “mindfulness” as a possible translation (as suggested above) it is possible to observe that to be mindful is to be mindful of the other to whom I find myself in relation. It is primarily the other that conditions us—it is the other with whom we come to shared horizons. Phronesis is then, for Gadamer, a way of emphasising finitude as the dialogical back and forth of I and Thou.²²¹

Emphasising finitude does not mean that Gadamer is against “the infinite.” He is against “infinities” that cannot be experienced, or that claim to transcend finitude by a kind of “summation” or “accumulation” of more and more “perspectives.” This cumulative view of the infinite—that the finite needs only continual addition so as to transcend itself towards the infinite—resembles what Gadamer took in *Truth and Method* to display what one does in the natural sciences when *objectifying* a particular reality. The notion of objectification allows us to move here towards Wilhelm Dilthey. Despite his attempts to give the notion of life and experience their place in “history,” Dilthey still attempts to found history on “objectifying thought.” Despite largely agreeing with Dilthey about life and experience in history, Gadamer nonetheless questions the “founding” of history on objectifications of experience.

Before moving on to Dilthey, however, it must be emphasised that Gadamer’s approach to Kant and Hegel reveals that philosophical hermeneutics is not metaphysically or theologically neutral. It is a philosophy of finitude—a philosophy of experiencing—open to the transcendent. Chapters five and six in particular will even show some ambivalence between Gadamer’s hermeneutics and some kinds of metaphysics and theology. The metaphysical and theological inclination of hermeneutics will serve in the following chapters to bring into the open the metaphysical and theological layers in historiographical work.

²²⁰ A shared horizon echoes how the infinite includes the finite within itself. To have a horizon, concurring with Gadamer, is to be finite, but to be finite is to be included and determined by the infinite for it is *the horizon* that constitutes my finitude. Hegel, *Lectures on Logic*, 109-11. See also Nathan Ross, “Metaphysics,” in *G. W. F. Hegel: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Baur (London: Routledge, 2015), 37-8.

²²¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 366-70. For how these aspects (finitude, horizons, *phronesis* and the other) are interrelated see Gadamer’s conversation with Riccardo Dottori: “Phronesis: *A Philosophy of Finitude*,” in *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori*, trans. Rod Coltman with Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2003), 19-29.

3.2: History, Phenomenology, and Historicity

3.2.0: Dilthey's Historicism

One of the outcomes of the triumph of what could be called “objectifying” thought—the rise of “science” as a “progressive” enterprise through “empirical research”—is what Gadamer calls historical thinking.²²² Historical thinking or historical consciousness speaks of the increasing “scientification” of our self-understanding: history itself may be considered an “object,” analogously to the “objects” of nature.²²³ Dilthey’s attempt to found history and the humanities on epistemological foundations (on “objective” grounds) is a telling witness of these momentous changes of the nineteenth century, as Stephen Gaukroger has shown.²²⁴ Gadamer argues that Dilthey could not fulfil his goal of founding the historical sciences on epistemological grounds. The Cartesian subjectivist assumption of self-consciousness, in fact, cannot even ground the natural sciences. Gadamer’s perceived failure of Dilthey allows him (through Husserl’s phenomenology and above all through Heidegger) to raise the question of understanding beyond subjectivism. This involves enquiring into the kind of “objectivity” that is appropriate to the arts and humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and into how “understanding” as a whole happens, scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) or otherwise.²²⁵ Gadamer’s criticism of Dilthey should not detract us from seeing his fundamental agreement with Dilthey’s motifs, especially as Dilthey navigates between the ahistorical nature of both British empiricism (John Stuart Mill’s induction) and German Idealism.²²⁶ Still, Gadamer thinks he showed that for Dilthey “the *pathos* of empirical science and the ideal of the objectivity of science remained till the very end in an irresolvable conflict with his own point of departure in life experience and the experience of the historical world.”²²⁷ Phenomenology would help Gadamer to *begin* with concrete being in the world and take the experience of the historical world beyond the subject-object predicament.

²²² Gadamer, “The University of Heidelberg and the Birth of Modern Science,” 38.

²²³ See Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, I.I, 181-221. Here Gadamer traces how hermeneutics changed from the enlightenment to romanticism, tracing the pre-history of romantic hermeneutics via both theological and philological hermeneutics, focusing especially on Reformation and post-Reformation changes through Luther up to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, giving examples of the changes through Spinoza in the seventeenth and Chladenius in the eighteenth century.

²²⁴ Stephen Gaukroger, *The Natural and the Human: Science and the Shaping of Modernity 1739-1841* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) records the wider process of the “scientification” of western culture through the increasing application of “science” (as it was to be called) to *the human*, which includes “history.”

²²⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, I.II, 222-44.

²²⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Problem of Dilthey: Between Romanticism and Positivism,” in *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer: Volume I*, ed. and trans. Pol Vandavelde and Arun Iyer (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 75-6.

²²⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Dilthey and Ortega: The Philosophy of Life,” in Vandavelde, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy*, 93 (author’s italics).

3.2.1: Self-Consciousness and Husserl's Phenomenology

Husserl's insistence on the phenomena teaches Gadamer to attend to them.²²⁸ To say that Gadamer's "method" is phenomenological is not to say that he agreed with what for Husserl, according to Gadamer, was the ultimate foundation of phenomenology, namely the transcendental ego. Self-consciousness, for Gadamer, is not an adequate "foundation"; the very idea of "foundation" is suspect for Gadamer. Talk of founding phenomenology is still reductive in Gadamer's view because it still—despite the richness and power of phenomenological description and possibilities—claims to reduce things to this or that basic or foundational "entity." We should "give up the idea of a foundation, which renders that which is founded dependent once and for all on what provides the foundation," Gadamer says. What we need instead is to recognise that which we have always understood.²²⁹ Gadamer is saying that *existence* is for our *Dasein* (as Heidegger would have it) the most real, not our phenomenological descriptions of "reality" through our examinations of consciousness. To recognise that phenomenological description should not lead us beyond but further into the wealth of our concrete lives is to go beyond phenomenological pursuits of essences and certainly beyond finding any eidetic "foundations." Gadamer's way to move beyond the merely eidetic (or "ideal") is thoughtful practice. Phronesis as practical knowledge or mindful existence describes this thought-in-practice.

3.2.2: Heidegger and Hermeneutics of Facticity

The impulse to move beyond "consciousness" Gadamer receives from his interests in the truth of art and literature, but the momentum he received from Heidegger. Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" means "an interpretation of human existence [*menschliches Dasein*], which follows the self-interpretation of this existence in the concreteness of its life-world."²³⁰ This approach is phenomenological, but it does not focus on "consciousness" but in the concrete being in the world. This was another thing that Heidegger helped Gadamer see: that the "technical" terms of Aristotle and Plato, which have been developed in the metaphysical tradition, refer "back to the life-world experiences of speaking and language."

²²⁸ Gadamer, "The Phenomenological Movement," 130-5.

²²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Contemporary Relevance of Husserl's Phenomenology," in Vandavelde, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy*, 148-9.

²³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Remembering Heidegger's Beginnings," in Vandavelde, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy*, 212. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21-35, esp. 27, and 32-5.

Phronesis, one of these “technical” words which Heidegger introduced Gadamer to, this “eye of the soul” (as Aristotle calls it),²³¹ “was obviously the proper linchpin for the *pathos* of existence, which at the time showed the presence of Kierkegaard in Heidegger’s rise.”²³² The focus on existence—on the “facticity” of human life—means for Gadamer an emphasis on finitude. Focusing on finitude is to recognise fully the historicity of reality. Its “texture”—that is *experience*—allows insight into the problem of understanding as constituting human existence, which is very important to Gadamer following Heidegger. Understanding rekindles our senses to recognise the centrality of practical wisdom (mindfulness) in conceiving knowledge beyond objectifying knowledge as something inherently personal (Polanyi).²³³

Understanding is not something the subject “does” to attain the “object” but something that happens to us “over and above our wanting and doing” as Gadamer puts it.²³⁴ It is not an “act” of consciousness.²³⁵ Understanding is “never a subjective relation to a given ‘object’ but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.”²³⁶ The effective history (*wirkungsgeschichte*) of being is what we come to share when we come to understand, and it is shared with us *from* that which is understood. This sharing—a reception—is an *event*:

The issue here is not simply that a nonobjectifying consciousness always accompanies the process of understanding, but rather that understanding is not suitably conceived at all as consciousness of something, since the whole process of understanding itself enters into an event, is brought about by it, and is permeated by it. The freedom of reflection, this presumed being-with-itself, does not occur at all in understanding, so much is understanding conditioned at every moment by the historicity of existence.²³⁷

It may be puzzling to hear that “understanding” is not, in Gadamer’s view, “subjective” nor “objective.” Being-with-itself, that is “self-consciousness,” does not occur (thereby there is no subjectivity or any subjectivity attaining objectivity). A way to make sense of this is to

²³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a28-31; Plato, *Republic*, 533d, 540a-b.

²³² Gadamer, “Remembering Heidegger’s Beginnings,” 213 (author’s italics).

²³³ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, II.II.B, 322-33. Here Gadamer speaks of Aristotle’s relevance to hermeneutics precisely because Aristotle distinguishes the kind of knowledge that *phronesis* involves (moral knowledge) and how it differs from—without thereby ceasing to be “knowledge” or to have similarities with—both objective (or theoretical) and technical knowledge (*episteme* and *techne*). Aristotle coins for this kind of knowledge the notion of “self-knowledge.”

²³⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxvi.

²³⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century,” in Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 125. This entails in my view the ontological primacy of *knowing* over any subjectivity or objectivity in the following sense: it is knowing that determines us more than we determine knowing. Therefore, what Gadamer does not do, and which is an issue raised by his thought, is to see that one of the implications of his thought is that *being known* is a way of describing this event of our understanding. A word for the primacy of being known is *love*—the drawing of ourselves beyond ourselves as we become more ourselves.

²³⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxviii.

²³⁷ Gadamer, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century,” 125.

remember how it is to read a gripping novel or listening to a song that brings us some memory or having a meal in the place you are from after almost forgetting its taste. Or think of finding out you have been cheated on or discovering that your only book manuscript has been lost. There is consciousness in the “surroundings” of these events to be sure: I am aware that it is me who is reading, listening, eating, being cheated on, or losing the manuscript. But being fully engaged, uniting ourselves with the novel’s story, the song’s melody, the meal’s taste, or the dreadful news—the *union* of us and what we are united with—is more like being apprehended by *it*, than us willing our consciousness towards apprehending it. Reality’s apprehension of us when we understand is an “event” because it takes us more than we take it. Gadamer’s insistence on historicity (that is, temporality) is because the temporality of reality is the rhythm of events in our lives. One is not “thinking about” or is “conscious of” one’s own life as primary way of being, but rather one is *there*, in the happenings of life so that this “aboutness” is developed as a consequence of reality’s apprehension of us.

The response to Dilthey’s historicism through Husserl’s phenomenological description and Heidegger’s own critique and appropriation of these is what Gadamer (in *Truth and Method*) says he measures himself against.²³⁸ They represent the critique to objectifying reason in history—to objectifying historical consciousness or historicism—and the breadth and need for conceptual history (Dilthey); the mode of exploration that focuses on *experience* and attention to the phenomena (Husserl); and the observation of how *historicity*, that is, *temporality*, is embedded in the very core of experience so that understanding happens through the effects of historicity (Heidegger).

These three focus points—history and historicism, phenomenology and experience, and understanding as an effect of finite temporal existence—make Gadamer’s thought particularly helpful to understanding essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. The next two chapters will foreground complexity (chapter four) and essentialism and anachronism (chapter five) and see them as parts of a “critical” hermeneutics used by historiographical work. The final part of the thesis is tasked in turn with suggesting an alternative hermeneutical approach, since the “critical” hermeneutics of which essentialism, complexity and anachronism are parts of is deemed inadequate if one wants to foster historically informed approaches to science and religion.

²³⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxiv.

3.3: Conclusion

The aim of this third chapter was to explore three facets of Gadamer's thought in order to point out specific areas of relevance for the study of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. Given the facets of Gadamer's thought explored in this chapter, it can be seen that the issue of historicity, underpinning the first two chapters, falls within the web of Gadamer's thought. In particular, as the previous section showed, Gadamer's focus on history, experience, and temporality can help illuminate how to deal with the assumptions about temporality embedded in essentialism, complexity, and anachronism.

From Greek thought this chapter noted that Gadamer reads the western philosophical tradition with a Platonic emphasis—Aristotle is, after all, the first Platonist. Here the question of the distinction and participation between the sensory and the noetic, appearance and idea, was highlighted as existing both in the “natural” and in the “human” worlds; in nature the distinction between sensory and noetic is manifested as the distinction between physics and mathematics and in relation to the human being is manifested as the existence of the (moral) good beyond only convention. The idea of the good was highlighted as particularly important because it drives Gadamer to focus on ethics, that is, on practical philosophy. Gadamer highlights how Aristotle was able to give wings to both theoretical and practical thought by highlighting both as knowledge-filled, imbued with *logos*. For Gadamer the notion of *phronesis* is of particular importance because it is in thoughtful living, in mindful community that an *ethos* emerges, which is the source of practical philosophy. This *ethos* is also the context of any “science” either the natural or human sciences (the arts and the humanities). Due to the focus on the good, practical philosophy, *phronesis*, and ethics, Gadamer's thought helps this thesis reflect on the historiographical work under investigation through an ethical, political, and practical lens.

Gadamer's focus on experience and finitude was highlighted through Kant and Hegel. Rejecting infinite understanding (Kant) and championing the bad infinite (Hegel) were ways in which Gadamer focused on the finite without reading either of these thinkers as post-metaphysical thinkers who were simply attempting to justify the fact of what was for them the new science. *Phronesis* again came to the fore, precisely because practical wisdom's “subject matter” is the good in practice—it “mingles,” one could say, the infinite and the finite, such as the beautiful does. This section emphasised the metaphysical and even theological positioning of hermeneutics as a philosophy of finitude open to the transcendent, helpful to elucidate the metaphysical and theological layers in historiographical work.

Finally, speaking of a proper finitude took us to Dilthey, whom Gadamer saw as unable to ground the legitimacy of the historical experience. Gadamer saw Dilthey as attempting to ground the historical experience on “objectifying thought,” namely on inductive or “empirical” grounds, such as in the natural sciences. In a way, Gadamer’s disagreement with Husserl is the same as with Dilthey. They could not see beyond the subject-object schema, Gadamer thinks. Both remained tied to subjectivist and objectivists prejudices, even though both influenced Gadamer—Dilthey with the breadth and depth of historical thinking and Husserl with the attention to the phenomena and our experience. Heidegger’s critique of both of these thinkers helped Gadamer see the need to transcend the subject-object schema as “the most real,” focusing instead on the historicity constitutive of our “factual” life, that is on existence (*Dasein*). Gadamer’s particular interest in *Truth and Method* is to ask the question of how understanding is possible. It is through this question that we move to our next chapters; understanding’s temporal dimension, especially in chapter five, will be of particular interest given this thesis’ interest in the historiographical categories explored and their common root in the problem of historicity.

4: Complexity: From Critique to a Hermeneutics of Tradition

4.0: Introduction

The previous chapter dipped our toes in Gadamer's thought, with the view of continuing to draw from it conceptual tools to deal with some of the problems that the historiographical categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism raised in the first two chapters. This chapter will deal with a way of conceiving the notion of complexity as more than a critical stance against unidimensional narratives of "conflict" or "harmony." The implications of embodying complexity beyond critique will be further clarified in Part Three of this thesis.

This chapter shows some of the limitations of "critique" as described in the previous chapters. A hermeneutic of critique, as chapter two showed, lives in the domain of rhetoric and narrative since it is also a form of discourse. As we have seen, the issue of historicity is one of belonging in history as we inhabit it and change it. Just as there is no standing above of our historicity, there is no "critique" that can stand above the discourses it critiques. Critique, as a form of discourse, also has its pitfalls and blind spots. The first section delves into a major blind spot of critique which Gadamer calls "the prejudice against prejudice." To spell out in more detail what "prejudice" means, the chapter uses Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing in the second section. Tacit knowing clarifies what Gadamer means when saying that prejudices—pre-judgements—more than our judgements, constitute our understanding. The third section delves into a particular fabric of prejudices—belonging to an ethos which has already authority over us. This ethos Gadamer calls *tradition*. Tradition is a logos-imbued ethos, the praxis through which one's reason and communication operate. Polanyi helps us again, especially since he comes from the natural sciences. Polanyi understands how scientists cannot become or continue to be scientists without submitting themselves to the authority of their tradition of research. This submission is embodied in one's trust in the knowledge of teachers in order to learn to discern "reality" in the eyes of a particular research tradition (scientific discipline). The third section ends with the notion of a "hermeneutics of tradition" to articulate an alternative meaning of complexity. This approach includes critique but is not governed by critique. A hermeneutics of tradition "overcomes" what it critiques by not being parasitic on it.

4.1: Critical Thought and the “Prejudice Against Prejudice”

One of the most important aspects of Gadamer’s work in *Truth and Method* is his analysis of *prejudices, authority, and tradition*.²³⁹ Such analyses brought criticisms, notably from Jürgen Habermas, suspecting in Gadamer an insufficient “critical” stance towards one’s own culture or tradition. Criticisms of this kind support Gadamer’s underlying points, although Habermas’ concerns are not misplaced (chapter six will address them). When one is singled out as “insufficiently critical,” what one is being told is that one is not as critical as one “should be,” and this in turn means that whoever is raising the claim thinks that “more criticism” is needed. On what basis do they think this? It is their own prejudices which allow both their knowledge and their ignorance. Gadamer claims about the Enlightenment’s “prejudice against prejudice”²⁴⁰ the following: one cannot have any judgements without already existing understanding: without standing under something that permits these judgements. This “something” may be “correct” or “incorrect”—meaning that it allows me to judge and know correctly or incorrectly—but without it there is no knowing. Criticism of prejudices as such is also “prejudiced” and must be seen in a wider “prejudiced” arena. The question Gadamer is interested in is thus to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices because *prejudices are the conditions of my understanding*.

One of the problems with the word “prejudice” is that it has come to mean an overly “subjective” or feeling-based tendency and an ignorant—or worse, harmfully naïve—view of one’s own “opinions.” A prejudiced person not only does not know “better” but they do not know better because of wilful ignorance, perhaps tinted with some inherent irrational intolerance, verging on bigotry. A contemporary word for prejudice would be *bias*. It has the same problem: it is understood as something “inherent” in us, but when spoken of it tends to acquire “moral” weight to describe a negative inclination. Gadamer could be seen as recuperating the ambivalence of prejudice or bias since he is concerned with differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. To understand the ambiguity and thus the impossibility of being “anti-prejudice” or “prejudice-free” a statistical analogy is introduced, given that statistical bias can exemplify the nature of prejudices.²⁴¹ The wider goal is to show that critique, in the manner we have been exploring it, can be understood as a kind of prejudice, specifically what Gadamer calls the “prejudice against prejudice.” Critique as *against*

²³⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, II.I.A-B, 278-96.

²⁴⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 283.

²⁴¹ Gadamer is aware of the “prejudiced”—and hence *hermeneutical*—nature of using statistics for arguments. See Gadamer’s “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” in Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 11. See also Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 18-32.

something, without an orientation towards something that includes critique's negativity but transcends it, is akin to imagine a neutral "rational" ground from which one can judge without being judged. Expanding the hermeneutical horizon of our understanding of critique—showing critique to be a form of prejudice against prejudice—permits us to reinterpret complexity along different lines, not as against critique but certainly as greater than critique.

4.1.0: Statistical and Mathematical Analogies for Understanding What a Prejudice Is

Two analogies will give us a sense of Gadamer's understanding of prejudice. A biased estimator is an estimator (a number) that deviates from a parameter (another number) to be estimated. Think of the estimator as a model, a way of obtaining a number which estimates the parameter. The parameter is the "centre" or the "origin," and the estimator's accuracy is measured by its distance to the parameter. The estimator's "bias" is the distance between the estimator and parameter—the difference between estimator and parameter. Now, the parameter to be estimated is a fusion of measurements, calculations, and value judgments. The estimator describes the distance between itself and the parameter but the parameter, although treated in practice as a neutral position, is not "neutral" in any absolute sense. The parameter is based on a lot of somethings that then give meaning to the estimator's deviations. In this sense, the parameter to be estimated is also "biased" because it already includes existing realities (how and when it was measured, what the tools to calculate it or adjust it were, etc.). The way Gadamer speaks of prejudices is akin to the parameter to be estimated. A prejudice (the parameter) is what is before the judgement (the estimator), it is *what enables me to judge*. The parameter is a prejudice, a form of pre-conception—a way of being ready to conceive or understand the estimator through its distance to the parameter. It is therefore not only obvious but important to see why Gadamer says that it is our prejudices more than our judgements that constitute our being.²⁴² Gadamer is saying that our willing, choosing, and deliberating are understanding-ready. Their "readiness" are our prejudices. Our judgements rest on an implicit fabric of pre-understandings from which our judgements are made. An important garment of this understanding-ready nature of our judgements—which we simultaneously weave and wear—is what Gadamer calls *tradition*.

A coordinate system in mathematics is also a good analogy for understanding what prejudices and tradition are. Anything in a coordinate system, by virtue of being there at all, conforms itself to the coordinate system and is conditioned and enabled by it. The system

²⁴² Gadamer, *T&M*, 288-9; "The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem," 9.

allows an entity (a relation between sets, for example) to manifest itself. Transformations in mathematics are thus important because they transform relations between coordinate systems. There are times when certain ways of grouping—which is what coordinate systems do, group, and allow aspects of relations to be shown—are inadequate, so one requires ways of going from one system to another. “Inadequate” here means that certain systems allow us to see the same relation in a different light, so that we might be able to look for certain things in one system but not in others. The multiplicity of coordinate systems and the transformations of relations between coordinate systems make the relation relative to the coordinate system and to the transformation. Prejudice and tradition are thus of the kind of these coordinate systems (and the transformations): they orient and thereby show as much as they conceal. What Gadamer calls prejudices—and tradition is a source of these—is like a coordinate system or like a parameter to be estimated. They enable us to measure and to see difference. Prejudices are primarily a medium of understanding.

Both analogies have important shortcomings. The lack of temporal, social, and bodily context, crucial for anything applied to human beings and their lives, is one of them. The orientations we gather from our own life, bodies, relationships, and experience have certain invariants (another useful mathematical notion). We are enabled and limited by our bodies (from conception, growth, and decay); we also are enabled and limited by our upbringing, family, and culture, in ways that are unevenly distributed. Our first five years of life are probably more important than any other five years of our lives, our mother tongue(s) present(s) the world to us more “naturally” than learned languages, etc. These are elastic-but-fixed prejudices—they are the broad conditions of any judgement, knowing, or understanding—and we move *through* and *with them* as we live and know anything at all.²⁴³

4.1.1: The Prejudice Against Prejudice

With a wider notion of prejudice, this section moves to Gadamer’s discussion of prejudice. “Not until the Enlightenment,” Gadamer notes, “does *the concept of prejudice* acquire the negative connotation familiar today.” Literally a “prejudice” means “a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined.”²⁴⁴ He

²⁴³ See Jon Nixon, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: The Hermeneutical Imagination* (Cham: Springer, 2017) and Anniina Leiviskä, “The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Concept of Tradition to the Philosophy of Education,” *Educational Theory* 65, no. 5 (October 2015): 581-600, <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12135>. for how Gadamer’s work is being used in the field of education, where honing our capacity to judge—to discern this or that in a given situation or subject matter—is paramount.

²⁴⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 283 (author’s italics).

notes that in German legal terminology it means a provisional verdict prior to the final one, which if against someone (in a legal dispute for example), could affect them negatively. Gadamer notes that “the French *préjudice*, as well as the Latin *praejudicium*, means simply ‘adverse effect,’ ‘disadvantage,’ ‘harm.’”²⁴⁵ This negative meaning is derivative of its wider meaning as pre-judgement—a prior to and looking forward to an examination of something. It has both negative and positive possibilities within its tacit nature as enabling a judgement.

The Enlightenment critique of prejudice is directed against the tradition of Christianity, and specifically the dogmatic interpretation of Scripture. “It wants to understand tradition correctly,” and that, Gadamer argues, means “rationally and without prejudice.”²⁴⁶ The German Enlightenment “recognized the ‘true prejudices’ of the Christian religion,”²⁴⁷ but it still deemed prejudices to be “true” insofar as they can be justified “rationally.” The assumption here is that reason is prejudice-less or “neutral” and this neutrality makes reason the only valid and impartial “foundation.” In the nineteenth century, Dilthey, although with the desire, knowledge, and impetus to uphold the human sciences and the historical world, still wanted to root the human sciences on an epistemological basis.²⁴⁸ The very word “epistemology” is tilted towards conceiving knowledge through objectifying thought, emerging from Neo-Kantianism after the demise of Hegelian metaphysics.²⁴⁹ The subject-object dichotomy is at the centre of this epistemological emphasis; it points to self-consciousness (subjectivity) as what constitutes the person and to attaining knowledge (or “objectivity”) by removing the personal from the reality under investigation. Objectivity is approximated by the systematic or methodical elimination of subjectivity. Dilthey’s epistemological instincts, according to Gadamer, undermine Dilthey’s own goals. But where were these instincts coming from? Gadamer points to the Romantic movement. Although reversing the *mythos* to *logos* narrative of the Enlightenment to a *logos* to *mythos* one, the Romantic movement keeps the Enlightenment’s opposition of these categories.

Reversing the Enlightenment’s presuppositions 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. But the romantic reversal of the Enlightenment’s criteria of value actually perpetuates the abstract contrast between myth and reason. All

²⁴⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, 283 (my italics).

²⁴⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 284.

²⁴⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, 285.

²⁴⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, I.II.A-B, 222-44.

²⁴⁹ Gadamer, “Philosophy or Theory of Science?,” 151-4; *T&M*, 222-33.

criticism of the Enlightenment now proceeds via this romantic mirror image of the Enlightenment.²⁵⁰

Dilthey's Romantic background of historical consciousness shares with the Enlightenment the same tenet of its break with tradition. The achievements of Romanticism, "the revival of the past, the discovery of the voices of the peoples in their songs, the collecting of fairy tales and legends, the cultivation of ancient customs, the discovery of the worldviews implicit in languages, the study of the 'religion and wisdom of India,'" are the seeds of historical consciousness.²⁵¹ Nineteenth-century historical thought is thus a continuation of Enlightenment thought through the impulse of Romanticism; nineteenth-century historical thought values the past by exploring it as if it is an object of natural science. Romanticism culminates the project of the Enlightenment—as chapter three mentioned with regards to Dilthey's approach—by objectifying not only nature but history. Romanticism allows Enlightenment twice over: if Enlightenment is sceptical of tradition for only reason "makes sense," Romanticism is sceptical of reason, for only tradition "makes sense." Historical thought still moves as the Enlightenment, even if it critiques its rejection of tradition:

Meaning that is generally accessible through reason is so little believed that the whole of the past—even, ultimately, all the thinking of one's contemporaries—is understood only "historically." Thus the romantic critique of the Enlightenment itself ends in Enlightenment, for it evolves as historical science and draws everything into the orbit of historicism. The basic discreditation of all prejudices, which unites the experimental fervor of the new natural sciences during the Enlightenment, is universalized and radicalized in the historical Enlightenment.²⁵²

When Gadamer says that according to Romantic-Enlightened historical thought even the thinking of one's contemporaries is understood only "historically," he could be said to be describing a tension implicit in current science and religion historiographical works. The tension arises when historiography wants to remain strictly "historical," while also hoping to change current discourses. Historiographical works of science and religion give us a lot of "history," but do they think that we the contemporary situation can be understood *only* "historically"? Probably not, but their work reads "history" using the present as a jumping point to "the past," and then it aims to "explain" the contemporary situation or at least to undercut some "distortions" of present beliefs about the past. Either through historical genealogies of how we arrived at our contemporary situation (Harrison) or rejecting any straightforward

²⁵⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 286.

²⁵¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 287.

²⁵² Gadamer, *T&M*, 288.

understanding of both past and present (Brooke), they want us to have a “historical” understanding that positions the present, rather than seeing both past and present as always already mutually implicated in the now. Can they claim to “explain” our situation if they *a fortiori* begin already in our situation? They seek to “set the historical record straight” but is this enough for their historiographical works to mean anything at all, that is, for their work to have more than just “historical interest”? “No one disputes the fact that controlling the prejudices of our own present to such an extent that we do not misunderstand the witnesses of the past is a valid aim, but obviously such control does not completely fulfil the task of understanding the past and its transmissions.”²⁵³ Gadamer questions “historical reason” from this very point. Is it the case that we are separated from the past in such a way that the present is primarily available through historical reason, through “genealogical readings” or “anti-narrative critiques” of our contemporary situations? What I am asking is whether the mode of proceeding by these historians does justice to their (and everybody’s) being within history. Gadamer says that “history does not belong to us; 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.*²⁵⁴

The conception of history assumed by the historiographical works of Brooke and Harrison is one that needs the “construction” and “deconstruction” of prejudices. Construction and deconstruction of “history” are not problematic in themselves. “History” as an exercise in remembering *for* and remembering *from* a situation requires a telling, a kind of “distinguishing between,” this or that to even say something. Both constructive and deconstructive modes are forms of remembering for and from a particular historical situation. Problems arise when we forget that construction and deconstruction are conditioned by present concerns—by our current historical situation. To forget our historicity is, in the language of prejudices, like thinking that one can become prejudice-less, forgetting that our situation is not “neutral” but is the means by which we understand anything at all. Historiographies are not measured against more abstract “history” but against our judgements, located as they are in our current situation—in our shared prejudices. All histories are told by someone and to someone; tellers

²⁵³ Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” 6.

²⁵⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 288-9 (author’s italics). He reiterates: “It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being.” Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” 9.

and audiences are “historical” by being here now. It is our shared contexts and concerns (culture, language, geographical location, etc.) that allow the historians’ narrative or rhetorical artifacts—their attempts to speak to us—to speak. Our contemporary shared contexts and concerns need deep acknowledgment. Otherwise, anybody who wants to be mindful of “history” to think “present” problems cannot learn from the historians’ historiographies because they are predetermined by an assumption of disconnection between past and present. The historian, Gadamer notes, needs to recognise that “something of the historicity of the historian’s own understanding is already at work in his choice of objects and in the rubrics under which he places the object as a historical problem.”²⁵⁵

Gadamer questions the prejudice against prejudice seeking to open “a way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.”²⁵⁶ “In fact,” Gadamer says, “the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world.”²⁵⁷ This is why Gadamer thinks that the idea of “absolute reason” as historical, temporal beings is an illusion: “Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.”²⁵⁸ That our pre-judgements more than our judgements constitute our historicity speaks of the situated nature of our reason, and this situated nature requires us to understand and acknowledge “the fact that there are legitimate prejudices.” Gadamer says that “we can formulate the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics as follows: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?”²⁵⁹ Gadamer does not deny critical reason; he assumes it must be always operative. He is interested, however, in what makes it possible: distinguishing prejudices “by which we *understand*, from the *false* ones, by which we *misunderstand*.”²⁶⁰

Given that we can characterise the impulse of “prejudice against prejudice”—shared by what has been called “critique” throughout this thesis—as also a “prejudice,” it will be helpful to elucidate how prejudices work. To clarify how they work, Polanyi and his notion of tacit

²⁵⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” in Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 48.

²⁵⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 288.

²⁵⁷ Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” 9.

²⁵⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, 288.

²⁵⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 289.

²⁶⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 309 (author’s italics).

knowing become relevant. Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing gives texture to the notion of prejudices or pre-judgements, which Gadamer also calls pre- or fore-understandings (*Vorverständnis*).²⁶¹ Tacit knowing describes the ubiquitous nature of prejudices and thus it also shows the involvement of tradition in our knowing. Tacit knowing as the way of being of prejudices and tradition will give us ways of interpreting complexity as greater than critique.

4.2: The Structure of Prejudices: Tacit Knowing

Having explored what a prejudice is—the directed (based on our bodies, histories, contexts, etc.), understanding-ready nature of our judgements—and the problem of a form of critique that claims to be always subverting “prejudices,” this section moves to the question of how prejudices enable our knowing. Calling for Polanyi's help to do this is not alien to Gadamer's thought. Gadamer mentions Polanyi in passing, noting that his notion of experience agrees with Polanyi's conception of personal knowledge. Defending a notion of experience that is personal “against the concealment it has suffered in the institutionalized process of the [empirical sciences, *Erfahrungswissenschaften*],” Gadamer saw himself “close to Michael Polanyi.”²⁶² “In the end,” Gadamer says,

one could say that the primary task of hermeneutics as a philosophical theory lies in showing that it means to integrate all knowledge we have in the sciences into the “personal knowing” of the individual “experience,” as Michael Polanyi has shown in his book, *Personal Knowledge*.²⁶³

Hence hermeneutics is not yet another iteration of the humanities vs. sciences dilemma—defending one against the other—but a way of reframing the whole approach to any kind of systematic and specialist knowing and learning. Gadamer also mentions Polanyi's notion of *tacit knowing*, which is what I will focus on.²⁶⁴ In Polanyi's introduction to *The Tacit*

²⁶¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 281.

²⁶² Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 189; “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 36; “Selbstdarstellung: Hans-Georg Gadamer,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 2, Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen Register* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 505 (*GW 2* hereafter).

²⁶³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (January 2006): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406063228>; “Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik,” in *GW 2*, 112.

²⁶⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Natur und Welt: Die hermeneutische Dimension in Naturerkenntnis und Naturwissenschaft,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 7, Griechische Philosophie III. Plato im Dialog* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 434 (*GW 7* hereafter); “Hermeneutik,” in *GW 2*, 431. See Chris Mulherin, “A Rose by Any Other Name? Personal Knowledge and Hermeneutics,” in *Knowing and Being: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi*, ed. Tihamér Margitay (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 68-79, for further similarities between Gadamer and Polanyi. Mulherin mentions, without developing it further, our own suggestion (73-5): that both Polanyi and Gadamer “highlight not only the inevitability but also the necessity of all thinking being entrenched in history and tradition, and depending on authority and judgments” (73). For wider connections between Polanyi and the phenomenological tradition, especially with Heidegger (the starting point of

Dimension, Polanyi gives a summary of what he will develop: “Thought can live only on grounds which we adopt in the service of a reality to which we submit.”²⁶⁵ There is a reality to which we submit which we know from the grounds we adopt, and these grounds we know tacitly in our submission to the reality they constitute. This tacit adoption Polanyi calls *indwelling*. The following sections will introduce some examples Polanyi uses to clarify the structure of tacit knowing. From these examples the notion of indwelling will be introduced to emphasise what tacit knowing means, and it will help this chapter clarify how Gadamer distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices.

4.2.0: The Structure of Tacit Knowing I: Recognising a Face

Polanyi asks us to think about how we recognise someone’s face. When we see someone we know, we recognise their face, but when asked about describing its features, or even when we try to remember some of them, the eyes, the nose, the shape of the lips or the colour of the eyebrows, we seem to be unable to pin them down specifically.²⁶⁶ Why is that so? Polanyi does not say this, but it is the same with people’s bodies: we may recognise someone’s walk—we may even be able to do an impression of it—but we seem to be unable to describe exactly what it is that we know, although clearly we know it because we recognise and imitate it. The number of examples can grow and grow (someone’s accent, someone’s voice, etc.). How is it possible for people to know more than they can say? Polanyi discusses two experiments performed independently that point to an answer to this question. These experiments involve electric shocks happening when a person is shown certain syllables (first experiment) and when a person says certain “shock words” (second experiment).²⁶⁷ The results were interesting because although the persons did not know which syllables induced shocks, they, after being exposed

philosophical hermeneutics), see Yu Zhenhua, “‘Being-in-the-world’ in a Polanyian Perspective,” in Margitay, *Knowing and Being*, 50-67.

²⁶⁵ Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983), xi.

²⁶⁶ The notion of *attention* seems paramount. Do I recognise someone’s face *only* if I am paying some kind of attention? It is understandable that if I am looking for someone I am somehow already attending to them and may recognise them if I see them. But there are times when we recognise faces we are not looking for, and there are times when despite looking we do not recognise them. The kind of attention seems crucial, perhaps as a form of expectation, but this most crucial question is beyond what can be dealt with here and it does not alter Polanyi’s discussion, which is based on when we *do* recognise a face. More on attention in the next chapters.

²⁶⁷ For the first experiment see Richard S. Lazarus and Robert A. McCleary, “Autonomic Discrimination Without Awareness: An Interim Report,” *Journal of Personality* 18, no. 2 (December 1949): 171-9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01238.x>; “Autonomic Discrimination Without Awareness: A Study of Subception,” *Psychological Review* 58, no. 2 (March 1951): 113-22, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054104>. For the second see Charles W. Eriksen and James L. Kuethe, “Avoidance Conditioning of Verbal Behavior Without Awareness: A Paradigm of Repression,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 53, no. 2 (September 1956): 203-9, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0040008>.

to the electric shocks, happened to show signs of anticipation of the shock in the first experiment and in the second they stopped saying the shock words. Enquiring on what made the participant expect the shock (first experiment) and how the participant had stopped the shocks (second experiment), in both cases the participants could not say. Polanyi explains: “In both cases the shock-producing particulars remained tacit. The subject could not identify them, yet he relied on his awareness of them for anticipating the electric shock.”²⁶⁸ The persons learned to rely on their awareness of the shock-producing particulars in relation to—and in attending to—the electric shock. Polanyi notes that “we know the shock-producing particulars only by relying on our own awareness of them for attending to something else, namely the electric shock, and hence our knowledge of them remains *tacit*. This is how we come to know these particulars, without becoming able to identify them.”²⁶⁹

There is a relation between the particulars and that through which they mean something. We attend to the shock, which gives the *meaning* to that which we know tacitly, which is the shock syllables or the shock words. We know the particulars (the shock syllables or the shock words) tacitly in terms of what they mean (the shock), which is the reality they constitute. We know the unity of the particulars and what they jointly constitute by focusing on the joint constitution which gives the meaning to the particulars; we know the particulars *tacitly*, in terms of what they mean, not directly in themselves. In *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi speaks of two types of awareness: subsidiary and focal awareness.²⁷⁰ In *The Tacit Dimension* he calls subsidiary awareness simply awareness and focal awareness he calls attention. It is useful to think in terms of two kinds of awareness because in the case of the experiments we would say that the persons have subsidiary awareness of the syllables and the words and that they have focal awareness of the shock. They focus on the shock by looking at the syllables or the words. In the case of recognising a person’s face Polanyi says that “we rely on our awareness of its features for attending to the characteristic appearance of a face.”²⁷¹ When the person’s face appears to me and I recognise it, I am aware of its features *from* which I attend *to* the face. I know the features tacitly by attending to the face. In the case of a person’s walk we find the same thing. I know the walking features tacitly when the person’s walk appears to me. We attend *from* the person’s walking features *to* their walk so that we know their walk and tacitly the features, which we are unable to specify.

²⁶⁸ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 9.

²⁶⁹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 9-10 (author’s italics).

²⁷⁰ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 55-7.

²⁷¹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 10.

4.2.1: The Structure of Tacit Knowing II: Learning a Skill and Using an Instrument

Polanyi says that learning a skill has a similar *from-to* structure. We are aware of our muscular coordination and actions, but we cannot tell what we are doing with them because they are being coordinated to perform a skill; “We are attending *from* these elementary movements *to* the achievement of their joint purpose, and hence are usually unable to specify these elementary acts.”²⁷² One learns a skill, for example to cycle, by being aware of some particular acts so that *from* them one moves *to* this larger and more encompassing reality of “cycling” which we recognise. I attend to “cycling” whilst being aware of some actions that my body performs in order to learn this skill, a skill I still do not possess but am submitting myself to in view of obtaining it. Pedalling, having my hands on the handlebars in a particular way, feeling my body and the bike together, and countless more particulars, are tacitly known by attending to cycling, so that what exactly I come to know of them I cannot tell. This is not a defect of our coming to know; it is, in fact, how one comes to learn anything. The structure of tacit knowledge is one that goes from the particulars to that which the particulars constitute. I know the particulars of cycling tacitly through what they mean through cycling.

Learning to use an instrument or tool also has a similar structure. My mobile phone is in a sense a piece of plastic, chemicals, and metal. But what *is* my mobile phone? To conceive it primarily as its materials is to have interiorised already a “theory” of what “is” is. Such a “theory,” somewhat paradoxically, would imply that what “is” means is primarily *devoid* of what things mean. But how can we evacuate “meaning” from “is” *without* evacuating all our affirmations—all uses of the “to be”—from any meaning? Following Polanyi here, he says that “meaning” is the relation between the particulars, of which I am subsidiary—tacitly—aware, and what I attend to, which I am focally aware. To be clear, I am not negating the reality of the tangibility and materiality of my mobile phone and its components. I am only saying that, as Polanyi notes, what is more real is not tangibility but what things mean (given the tacit dimension of knowing).²⁷³ Therefore I know my mobile phone tacitly by what it means: emails, work, “a break” on social media, videos, contact with others via WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, procrastination, etc. To use it as a tool involves that it extends my body—my fingers, eyes, and ears—into virtual places. Just as I extend my body when I learn a skill, using an instrument extends my body through it. A keyboard becomes an extension of my hands, a bike becomes

²⁷² Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 10 (author’s italics).

²⁷³ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 33.

an extension of my arms and legs, a mobile phone becomes an extension of my eyes and fingers. The body is the tacit core of all my knowing:

Our body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical. In all our waking moments we are *relying* on our awareness of contacts of our body with things outside for *attending* to these things. Our own body is the only thing in the world which we normally never experience as an object, but experience always in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body. It is by making this intelligent use of our body that we feel it to be our body, and not a thing outside.²⁷⁴

If all our knowing happens *from* our bodies attending *to* a reality my body contacts, we could say that everything our bodies participate in—any “reality” I attend to—gives meaning to my body and shows the tacit dimension my body inhabits. My knowing moves away from me, by me extending my body through my body *dwelling in* some particulars for attending to something else. Also, reality is “absorbed” into, or interiorised by, my body.²⁷⁵

4.2.2: The Structure of Tacit Knowing III: Indwelling and the Nature of Discovery

The structure of tacit knowing is one of *indwelling*: as my body comes to dwell, for example, in my keyboard or my mouse—as I interiorise them, extending my body through them—I know them in terms of what my body does with them. Once they are interiorised—once they come to be known tacitly as extensions of my body—I no longer know them as separate but tacitly by what they do, just as I know my body tacitly by the world it feels and inhabits. Indwelling is the way in which we interiorise skills or tools by extending our bodies; we do not know these “extensions” directly but tacitly in terms of what they do, which is what we attend to and gives them their meaning. Polanyi concludes that “it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning.”²⁷⁶ I indwell my keyboard as I attend to the

²⁷⁴ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 15-6 (author’s italics).

²⁷⁵ The body as constitutive of our experience (and hence only “accessed” as an object in a secondary way) is an increasingly voiced contention in philosophy and many of the sciences. See for example Charles Taylor, “The Validity of Transcendental Arguments,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 20-33; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), esp. Part One: The Body (67-206), particularly the Introduction to Part One (67-74) and section VI: The Body as Expression and Speech (179-206); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). The whole movement of 4E Cognition, where one of the “E’s” is *Embodiment*, attempts to take this fact as foundational. See *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, ed. Albert Newen, Leon De Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Our bodily nature is crucial to understand not only our experience but our organs, including our brains. See Thomas Fuchs, *Ecology of the Brain: The Phenomenology and Biology of the Embodied Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Fuchs shows that the brain is an organ “which does not produce the mind like a gland produces its secretions, but which mediates our bodily, emotional, and mental relations to the world. The process of life and experiencing life are inextricably linked: it is not the brain but the living human being who feels, thinks, and acts” (vii).

²⁷⁶ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 18.

letters, words, and sentences appearing on my screen; I know the keyboard tacitly, by attending to what I type that appears on my screen.

Given that we know particulars or features not by looking at them but by dwelling in them—by interiorising them so that we see what they constitute (what they *mean*)—any understanding of what “knowing” is must account for the tacit structure of knowing. Polanyi—writing in the 1960s, in the wake of the rise and fall of positivism, as Gadamer was—notes that any ideal that aims at complete lucidity amounts to the destruction of all knowledge. Because we participate tacitly first if we are to know anything at all, and because we return to this tacit structure from any explicit knowledge, any ideal that does not take actual processes of knowing into account (including the tacit dimension) undermines knowledge itself. Even mathematical theories used to describe any reality have their beginning and end in tacit knowing. Polanyi argues: “a mathematical theory can be constructed only by relying on *prior* tacit knowing and can function as a theory only *within* an act of tacit knowing, which consists in our attending *from* it to the previously established experience on which it bears.”²⁷⁷ That tacit knowing is the beginning and end of our knowing means that “the ideal of a comprehensive mathematical theory of experience which would eliminate all tacit knowing is proved to be self-contradictory and logically unsound.”²⁷⁸ Explicit logic, however, convinces few, so Polanyi gives a paradigmatic example of tacit knowing: the process of discovery. This process is the *sine qua non* of any quest to know, exemplified by how a problem—or one could say a question—is pursued:

It is a commonplace that all research must start from a problem. Research can be successful only if the problem is good; it can be original only if the problem is original. But how can one see a problem, any problem, let alone a good and original problem? For to see a problem is to see something that is hidden. It is to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars. The problem is good if this intimation is true; it is original if no one else can see the possibilities of the comprehension that we are anticipating. To see a problem that will lead to a great discovery is not just to see something hidden, but to see something of which the rest of humanity cannot have even an inkling.²⁷⁹

There is a deep paradox here, and Polanyi finds it already in Plato’s *Meno*. In the context of finding what virtue (excellence) is, given that they do not know what it is, Meno asks Socrates: “How will you look for it, Socrates, when you do not know at all what it is? How will you aim to search for something you do not know at all? If you should meet with it, how will you know

²⁷⁷ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 21 (author’s italics).

²⁷⁸ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 21.

²⁷⁹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 21-2.

that this is the thing that you did not know?” Socrates replies: “Do you realize what a debater’s argument you are bringing up, that a man cannot search either for what he knows or for what he does not know? He cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.”²⁸⁰ Polanyi phrases Meno’s paradox thus: “to search for the solution of a problem is an absurdity; for either you know what you are looking for, and then there is no problem; or you do not know what you are looking for, and then you cannot expect to find anything.”²⁸¹ Or as Gadamer puts it, referring to the same passage in the *Meno*: “The model of all empty argument is the sophistic question how one can inquire into anything that one does not already know.”²⁸²

Polanyi says that if all knowledge is explicit, “capable of being clearly stated, then we cannot know a problem or look for its solution.” But problems do exist, “and discoveries can be made by solving them,” so this means that “we can know things, and important things, that we cannot tell.”²⁸³ I intimate what is hidden *from* the particulars I am aware of. This kind of knowing is immanent in all attempts to know anything at all. Gadamer notes that Plato (Socrates) does not overcome the paradox “through superior argument, but by appealing to the myth of the pre-existence of the soul.”²⁸⁴ For Polanyi this appeal does not convince. Gadamer, it could be said, understands why Polanyi would think so. Moderns tend not to see the truth in myth. Gadamer, however, observes something akin to Polanyi’s point about discovery precisely through following the myth. The myth of pre-existence or *anamnesis* “depends on the certainty of the knowledge-seeking soul, which prevails against the emptiness of formal arguments.”²⁸⁵ The “*anamnesis* sought for and awakened in *logoi*” is the presupposition of Platonic dialectic. “The ‘recollection’ that I have in mind,” says Gadamer, talking about *anamnesis*, “is derived from myth and yet is in the highest degree rational. It is not only that of the individual soul but always of ‘the spirit that would like to unite us’—we who are a conversation.”²⁸⁶ Us being a conversation is our orientation towards discovery as Polanyi articulates it, and it is already hinted at by Plato. Polanyi notes further that “great scientific discoveries are marked by their fruitfulness.” But how can we recognise the truth of something

²⁸⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 80d-e.

²⁸¹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 22.

²⁸² Gadamer, *T&M*, 354.

²⁸³ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 22.

²⁸⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 354.

²⁸⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, 354.

²⁸⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 110.

by “appreciating the wealth of its yet undiscovered consequences?”²⁸⁷ It is absurd if we assume that all knowing is explicit. But if knowing has a tacit dimension, it makes sense; we have “tacit foreknowledge of yet undiscovered things.” Polanyi says:

It appears, then, that to know that a statement is true is to know more than we can tell and that hence, when a discovery solves a problem, it is itself fraught with further intimations of an indeterminate range, and that furthermore, when we accept the discovery as true, we commit ourselves to a belief in all these as yet undisclosed, perhaps as yet unthinkable, consequences.²⁸⁸

The implications of what Polanyi has shown is that we must commit ourselves to what we cannot see; we must do that to discover—that is to know—anything at all. And given that a discovery brings further invisible and undisclosed possibilities, to affirm it as true is to move *from* the discovery *to* the reality those possibilities presumably manifest.

But as we can know a problem, and feel sure that it is pointing to something hidden behind it, we can be aware also of the hidden implications of a scientific discovery, and feel confident that they will prove right. We feel sure of this, because in contemplating the discovery we are looking at it not only in itself, but, more significantly, as a clue to a reality of which it is a manifestation.²⁸⁹

The very pursuit of a discovery begins in this way: we intimate this concealed reality hinted at by our clues and the discovery itself is sustained by an intimation of even further concealed possibilities. The discovery “claims to have made contact with reality: a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.”²⁹⁰

Polanyi’s conclusion is that in the paradigmatic case of intuiting a problem and discovering a solution, the structure of tacit knowing as commitment to an unseen but intimated reality is paramount, to such an extent that attempting to make it explicit undermines knowing itself. We interiorise the particulars we are aware of—which we indwell and thereby know tacitly—by attending to a yet unseen entity to which they bear witness and which joins them together. It is futile, Polanyi notes, to argue against the tacit dimension by saying that the discovery could not happen and decry that one needs explicit “objective” (or impersonal) measures to evaluate the truth of further discoveries prior to their happening (again here Polanyi is thinking of positivistic philosophies). A discovery is profoundly personal—it requires my commitment. It is by submitting my whole self to an as yet unseen approaching discovery that I may find the truth of the particulars of which I am aware and from which I

²⁸⁷ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 23.

²⁸⁸ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 23.

²⁸⁹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 23-4.

²⁹⁰ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 24.

intimate the discovery. It is obvious that my intimations could be wrong, that there may be nothing that holds together the particulars I am aware of, thereby crushing what we hoped to be an impending contact with reality. But this is the risk involved in knowing and discovering anything at all. Polanyi says: “To accept the pursuit of science as a reasonable and successful enterprise is to share the kind of commitments on which scientists [and knowers in general] enter by undertaking this enterprise.”²⁹¹ These commitments cannot be formalised, attempting “to find strict criteria of truth and strict procedures for arriving at truth.”²⁹² Our commitments are to a reality that calls us that we cannot yet see, so we cannot formalise it nor make it explicit. To attempt to formalise or make these commitments explicit is to “exercise the kind of lucidity which destroys its subject matter.”²⁹³

Gadamer’s notion of prejudice or fore-understanding is like Polanyi’s tacit commitment to an as yet unseen discovery. In the context of reading a text Gadamer calls this the “fore-conception of completeness,”²⁹⁴ translated also as the “anticipation of perfection.”²⁹⁵ Our commitment to an as yet unseen discovery is like the anticipation of a “complete” or “perfect” unity, happening in the tacit dimension. Tacit commitment to an as yet unseen discovery and anticipating completeness say that the formalising, or in Gadamer’s case the objectivising or methodising of our commitments, destroys the truth of the subject matter: be it a discovery in the guise of learning a skill, using a tool, understanding an idea, or a text.²⁹⁶ Both ideas speak of discovery—that there is a coherent inexhaustible unity towards which one is aiming, anticipating it tacitly without seeing it.

4.2.3: Distinguishing Between Legitimate and Illegitimate Prejudices: Do They Discover?

Polanyi’s description of tacit knowing allows us to note that what Gadamer calls “prejudices,” “pre-judgements,” or “pre-understandings” (fore-understandings) act like the tacit part of our knowing. They have this *from-to* structure which we have seen that tacit knowing has, *from* the particulars *to* what I attend to that they point to. Prejudices are tacitly known by us as we are aware of them as particulars from which we attend to something else, a text, a person, a work of art, an intimation of a discovery, etc. They cannot be explicit. We indwell them to know that

²⁹¹ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 25.

²⁹² Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 311.

²⁹³ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 25.

²⁹⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 305.

²⁹⁵ “Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 1, Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990), 299 (*GW* 1 hereafter).

²⁹⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 369.

which we attend to. The meaningful relation between the two terms that constitute tacit knowing—the particulars I am aware of and what I attend to from them—Polanyi calls “the *understanding* of the comprehensive entity which these two terms jointly constitute.”²⁹⁷ Translating to the language of prejudice, this means that our understanding is constituted by the meaningful relation between what we are seeking to know—which we attend to—and our prejudices. The movement of understanding is from my prejudices to what I attend to. I indwell my prejudices to know anything, which means that I know them tacitly, indirectly, only in terms of that which I attend to. By saying that we indwell our prejudices I simply mean that we dwell in them—we make a tent in their land, inhabit their surroundings, feed from them to have a sense of knowing, including knowing where and who we are. In this sense a “prejudice” is not solely in the realm of “ideas” or “thoughts” I can “will” to have or not to have. Prejudices show that “theory” and “practice” are anything but disconnected. One could say that they are bodily orientations towards understanding, ways of being that shape what we can and cannot know.

Thinking of prejudices in the way just described allows us to approach Gadamer’s underlying question: how do we distinguish between legitimate prejudices, by which we understand, and false ones, by which we misunderstand? Knowing that prejudices are known tacitly in terms of something else tells us that we cannot simply “choose” to make them explicit and “discard” them at will to proceed prejudice-free in our inquiries. To think that I can somehow dig the ground upon which I am standing without moving my feet—without standing somewhere else—is to fall into the prejudice against prejudice. My inquiry is now dominated by all the prejudices that I unconsciously use to pursue my inquiry, even though I can tell myself that I am standing nowhere, prejudice-less, unbiased. A prejudice that becomes a judgement, or that is no longer tacit, is no longer a prejudgement. It has come into my focal awareness from its original subsidiary place. Gadamer talks about our prejudices being “provoked.” It happens when something calls for our attention, or what Gadamer calls being addressed.²⁹⁸ Being addressed, says Gadamer, requires “the fundamental suspension of our own prejudices.”²⁹⁹ To suspend a prejudice is already to have “dug” it out from the tacit dimension so that it no longer—by being suspended—works as a prejudice. Gadamer says that “all suspension of judgements and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a

²⁹⁷ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 13 (author’s italics).

²⁹⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, 294.

²⁹⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 310.

question.”³⁰⁰ It is no longer one of these particulars I know tacitly by attending to that which addresses me, but becomes part of what addresses me. It ceases to be a part of that *from* which I am addressed, and it is now a part of that *to* which I attend to—it becomes, effectively, a part of what addresses me and which I attend to from other prejudices. Using Polanyi’s from-to structure, one could say that the logical structure of a question, as Gadamer calls the “suspension” of our prejudices, is one in which the ground from which I pursue a discovery becomes part of our horizon. Prejudices come to my attention not by explicit description of them but by becoming a question, by entering into the horizon of what is to be discovered, rather than being the means by which I discover, which is their natural state.

Gadamer thinks that what addresses me is opened through me “owning” my prejudice, that is by them becoming part of *the question* that an address raises in me. The legitimacy or illegitimacy of our prejudices cannot be assessed up until this point. The question now becomes “does it help me listen?” Legitimate prejudices enable understanding, and illegitimate ones hinder it. To answer the question posed in terms of “listening” requires a return of the union between my prejudice and the address into the tacit dimension. It requires, in other words, that I *indwell* them to see if there is something more to listen to, that is to see if they take me further in the pursuit of discovery.³⁰¹

An important point here is that rejecting the prejudices I am aware of *tout court* is no sign of thoughtfulness or learning. Such rejection is, in fact, an “uncritical” acceptance of the prejudice against prejudice. To claim to reject prejudice as such is a way of misunderstanding. It is to be governed by prejudices I did not reject because I was indwelling them to perform my critique of the ones I focused on. “It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices,” notes Gadamer, “that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition.”³⁰² Gadamer says that “the naivete of so-called historicism consists in the fact that it does not undertake this reflection, and in trusting to the fact that its procedure is methodical, it forgets its own historicity.” We need to move from this misunderstanding of what it is to understand towards a conception that includes its own historicity. “Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity.”³⁰³ The following

³⁰⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 310 (author’s italics).

³⁰¹ It is important to note here, even though there is no place to discuss it further, that the pursuit of discovery is a thoroughly personal phenomenon because it happens within our personal constitution, that is within our experience, which is always constituted by far more than my “subjectivity.” This supra-subjective nature of discovery is important to recognise because discovery is more than “finding things out” in an alleged impersonal way. True discovery, it could be argued, is always already bound by our *mindfulness*, that is to the pursuit of the good-in-practice, because it is only in relation to the good that true knowing is possible.

³⁰² Gadamer, *T&M*, 282.

³⁰³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 310.

chapter delves in more detail into what Gadamer calls the historically effected nature of understanding, a way of talking about the unity of understanding in history and our historicity, which Gadamer calls the “fusion of horizons” between past and present—between history and our historicity.³⁰⁴

4.2.4: Complexity as Prisoner of Critique

Thus far I have used Polanyi’s description of the tacit dimension of knowing to explain how it is that prejudices operate in our knowing. One of the implications we saw is that I cannot be consciously—that is explicitly—deploying my prejudices in the process of knowing. They necessarily are tacit for it is through them that I attend to what I am coming to know. However, their tacit nature does not imply that I cannot become aware of them. As we saw above, whenever something addresses me, that is whenever something presents itself as a question to me, my prejudices come into play, and until this point I cannot claim to have understood anything at all. Also, it is not until this point that the possibility of “rejecting” a prejudice becomes a live option, even though its rejection is not necessarily a default position. This section concludes by noting that the rejection of our “prejudices” or “biases” and “guarding against them” cannot be the primary mode of proceeding. It cannot be the defining impulse. Understanding happens when my prejudices come into play, not necessarily by rejecting them (although we might), but by bringing them to the table of our attention alongside that which has dug it from its proper implicit place.

We always understand through our prejudices. Whatever has provoked us, a conversation with someone, a text we are reading, an event we have experienced, a work of art, or any other thing that claims our attention, gives us the chance to interiorise whatever is left between a play between our prejudices and the message of the provoker (the conversation, the text, the event, the work of art, etc.). Gadamer calls out the naivete of historicism because coming to attend to our prejudices and rejecting them by default is *not* proper historical thought but it in fact destroys the truth the subject matter holds. It is *through* our prejudices mingling with the subject matter that we know anything at all.

Critique as described in the previous chapters has this anti-prejudice prejudice and it is how the notion of complexity tends to operate if equated primarily with a “critical stance” against narratives of conflict or harmony. The question raised by this problem is about the place of critique within a better overall mode of proceeding, because to reject our prejudices by

³⁰⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 311-18.

default is not the conduct of understanding. “Better” here means a mode of proceeding that is aware of the prejudiced nature of all knowing—aware of the tacit dimension of knowing. To emphasise, as Gadamer and Polanyi do, the tacit dimension or the prejudiced nature of knowing does not mean that one never changes one’s mind, learns anything new, or destroys or rejects absurdities because one stays “prejudiced” (in the pejorative). Given that prejudices are the conditions through which we experience anything at all, what is meant by recognising the prejudiced nature of knowing is not, as Gadamer puts it, “that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, ‘Nothing new will be said here.’” On the contrary, “we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity.” But how do we recognise the new? “Is not our expectation and our readiness to hear the new also necessarily determined by the old that has already taken possession of us?”³⁰⁵

The truth a subject matter gives me is destroyed if approached by an anti-prejudice prejudice, that is with a *critical* mindset, because if I cannot recognise something as addressing me I do not “see it” at all. If a text never speaks to me, if it does not address me—if it does not speak to my experience so as to question me—I learn little through it. My prejudices never mingled with it; I emerge the same, familiar with the text but with little understanding of what it speaks of. Remaining unchanged is perhaps the worst outcome of having critique “controlling” our inquiry. If historiographical categories such as complexity, essentialism, or anachronism are understood primarily as critique and are not embedded in a wider positive approach, any understanding or learning—any discovery, true insight, as Polanyi talks about—is subsumed, and swallowed by the critical formula of being against something. In the case of complexity, being against narratives of harmony or conflict would end up as the meaning of complexity, missing potential openings that are not parasitic on the narratives critiqued. But how does one “oppose” the prejudice against prejudice? Is an infinite regress of negations, having a prejudice against the “prejudice against prejudice,” unavoidable?

4.3: Releasing Complexity: Complexity as a Hermeneutic of Tradition

After exploring the nature and structure of prejudices and how they are deeply operative in all explorations of reality, and after showing that the default position of the *rejection* of “prejudice” as such is in itself a prejudice and therefore not unprejudiced, this section asks the question of how to include critical reason without destroying the very basis of our knowing.

³⁰⁵ Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” 9.

That is, how do we acknowledge that fore-understandings (prejudices) are what enable us to understand, and that critique operates also within this framework of pre-understandings? The goal is to release the notion of complexity (and critical historiographies more generally) from a “critical only” or a “mostly critical” attire, not by opposing critique or opposing the “prejudice against prejudice,” but by consciously working within the sources of our prejudices. This section explores two of these sources of prejudgements in order to draw from them elements to frame complexity in a different light.

4.3.0: Tradition’s Authority is Proportional to What is True in It: On Authority and Knowledge

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer addresses the notions of authority and tradition, also shunned by the Enlightenment, because they are seen as providing prejudices (*tout court* interpreted as against reason). Authority and tradition are undeniably sources of prejudices. The anti-reason charge, however, is doubtful. As we saw, reason itself is “prejudiced”; it is situated, directed, and enabled by our prejudices. Against the Enlightenment rejection and deformation of the notion of authority, Gadamer claims that authority is based on *knowledge*.³⁰⁶ Critical thought may claim its discoveries and insights to be true insofar as there is truth in them, and this truth authorises or gives them credence. Critique is thus also a form of authority, and it cannot overthrow “authority” without undermining its anti-authority bias. Gadamer notes that authority’s bad name comes from thinking about it as being about blind obedience to commands. The essence of authority, however, is “an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one’s own.”³⁰⁷ Authority does bring the capacity to command and be obeyed, but this capacity is proportional to the knowledge that makes someone authoritative and which anyone in principle may discover to be true. This kind of authority is the one a teacher, master or an expert has. The prejudices taught by them are legitimised by their superior knowledge; one is reasonable by adopting the prejudices they teach. These prejudices, according to Gadamer, become “prejudices not just in favor 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.”³⁰⁸ Even if the expert or teacher abuses their authority, authority is involved in decrying the expert’s corruption; it is now the abused who becomes authoritative—since it is them who know the

³⁰⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 291.

³⁰⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, 291.

³⁰⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, 291-2.

truth—and the corrupt “authority” is now anything but. Since authority goes from one pair of hands to another—it cannot be eliminated—a prejudice against authority can only be a stance against corrupt “authorities” and not an opposition to the notion of authority itself.

What Gadamer is calling prejudices that become “a content,” can be described with what Polanyi called interiorisation. When one is learning to type on a keyboard one attends to each individual key—one looks at each key, slowly and hesitantly, and presses them, and each time one checks the screen to see if one pressed the right one given the letter desired. Once the student achieves certain skilful performance, the student rarely sees the keyboard. One comes to know the keyboard tacitly, by indwelling it—that is by extending one’s body through it—and from the keyboard one attends to the screen, which now is the criterion of telling us if we are typing well or not, not the keyboard itself. We interiorise the skill of typing. The prejudice taught is a content in itself because the instruction I received from my instructor is not ultimately in favour of my instructor but it is validated fundamentally by the *skill* itself being performed by someone. When Gadamer says that the prejudices we are given by teachers or experts can be validated by “good reasons,” I take him to mean that the teacher or expert could *show me* someone they taught who displays the skill, or they themselves could display the skill. We see that they have mastered the skill by interiorising the prejudices they are teaching us, so to learn the prejudices by indwelling them will give me “a content,” namely learning the skill.

Another “good reason” would be to carry out the entire procedure that leads to the conclusion a teacher or expert wants to teach us as prejudice. This is what can happen when one learns mathematics or physics. One may either see the teacher prove a theorem and then be confident that the principle one is using for this or that is “correct” or in the case of physics, see a performance of an experiment that shows how the model proposed is fit. This is another example of “good reasons.” In both examples—expert typing and proving or experimenting—these “good reasons” are available in principle, but most advanced learning cannot proceed by always demonstrating, showing, or deducing every single aspect of what one is to learn from the expert. Every single student of physics or mathematics would have to witness the teacher prove—and would have to somehow pay for all the experiments needed to show—every single result one is learning, meaning that one would need to basically repeat hundreds of years of *successful* proving and experimenting, each week, in each classroom in the world. In reality most scientists- or engineers-to-be *trust* the authority of the professors or books they learn from, acknowledging their superior knowledge, and assuming that the procedures could be performed in principle. Most working scientists or engineers who use mathematics do not know the proofs of every single bit of mathematics they use. They use their mathematical, statistical,

or computational knowledge prejudicially; they indwell it and *from* these prejudices they attend *to* other issues.

What validates the prejudices for the student, in both examples above, is the person who presents them, but who presents them validates the content. If my differential equations students come to think that I “know what I am talking about” (let us suppose they are more than vaguely correct), they would judge this from their grasp of the content. It is my knowledge that validates my “authoritative” status, not the other way around.

An issue Gadamer does not speak of is the issue of *trust*. This issue complicates what is an otherwise more straightforward observation of authority being proportional to someone’s knowledge. Trust provides a context to even see that the superior knowledge someone possess is something we can rely on. One could raise the question: how do I *know* that someone’s knowledge is superior to mine? They could be deceiving me or simply *think* they know but not really know. They could, just as Descartes’ demon, design the whole display of their knowledge for an ignorant person like me to *think* that they know, even though they do not know as much as they are saying. Any recognition of authority—of superior knowledge—seems to be predicated on at least a *suspension* of my mistrust, of my “suspicion,” enough for the supposed authority to show me something, enough for them to let me see for myself that they know more and then trust their knowledge. This suspension of mistrust is akin to the kindling of a hope, or at least an expectation of being shown something greater, something better, containing a fountain from which I may know more. In other words, even though authority is based on knowledge, it needs to be accepted. This willingness to “submit” to the authority, which is an issue of trust, is not straightforward and cannot be brushed aside. The closest Gadamer gets is when he speaks of keeping oneself “open” for further possibilities. But this barely gets at the issue of trust, which precludes any openness. If my prejudices are biases of our openness to the world (as Gadamer says) there is still a commitment to them that I seem to have to exercise in order to know and discover anything at all. I, of course, trust them “by default” in my everyday experience of the world, but in pursuing a problem, I seem to have to trust that in submitting myself to that which opens the world to me (my prejudices) I may know and discover something. This disposition of trust is crucial and unavoidable. There is an entire web of trust that sustains the process of knowing, and it is this trust that someone’s superior knowledge should evoke for others in principle to consider them an authority whose judgement they would choose over their own. This amends Gadamer’s notion of authority in the following sense: authority is based on knowledge, and this knowledge cannot be apprehended without trust. Gadamer’s fiduciary lacunae are filled by Polanyi. The particular kind of authority this

thesis is interested in, that of *tradition*, is within what Polanyi calls a *fiduciary framework*. As discussed in chapter two through Augustine's dictum of believing in order to understand, I will be mindful of tradition as within this fiduciary framework more than Gadamer tends to be.³⁰⁹

4.3.1: Tradition: Transmission and Mediation Between Past and Future

Prejudices, as we have seen, are the understanding-ready nature of our thought. What makes tradition a particularly important source of prejudices is that it has a kind of "axiomatic" authority over us. Our knowing happens both through and within it. Our finite historical being, Gadamer notes, "is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes and behavior."³¹⁰ Two examples that rest on the authority of tradition are readily available: trust in science and the force of morals. Gadamer mentions the latter (morals) but not the former (science), even though they rest fundamentally on the same grounds, that is on their cultivation within a culture of knowing which needs the sharpest use of our *reason* to preserve them. The antithesis between reason on the one hand and prejudice, authority, and tradition on the other is here most evidently dissolved. Even the purest of all traditions does not "persist because of the inertia of what once existed." Its persistence or preservation rests on mindfully receiving, responding, and contributing to it. Preservation "is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one." Change, and not what persists, is almost invariably what we are prone to seeing but *both*, says Gadamer, need the full engagement of our reason.³¹¹ That preservation and change need the full engagement of our reason means that the essence of tradition is to enable reason within a process of mediation. Tradition is not either conservation or innovation, but *mediation*. It shows us the effective unity between past, present, and future, which means that it constitutes our present moment. I am saying "future" here to highlight that "the present" means not just a distinction between "now" and "the past" but also an orientation towards what has not yet come to pass. This mediation is central in any historiographical work. Gadamer says that the effect "of a living tradition and the effect of historical study must constitute a unity of effect, the analysis of which would reveal only a texture of reciprocal effects." In other words, the antithesis between tradition and historical research, "*between history and the knowledge of it, must be discarded.*"³¹²

³⁰⁹ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 266.

³¹⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 292.

³¹¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 293.

³¹² Gadamer, *T&M*, 294 (author's italics).

This antithesis is what I deem to be operative in primarily critical approaches, and which must be recognised as artificial for scholars to be able to integrate historiographical works into their reflections, and for historians to have a more effective reception of their work beyond academic curiosities. This work is attempting to point in that direction. It points, in the final chapter, to people who speak more fluently between times—between their historical situation, their past, and their future. Speaking more fluently between times sounds like *translation* between times, and translation is in fact for Gadamer a model for tradition:

For, of course, tradition means transmission rather than conservation. This transmission does not imply that we simply leave things unchanged and merely conserve them. It means learning how to grasp and express the past anew. It is in this sense that we can say that transmission is equivalent to translation.

The task involved in bringing together the petrified remnants of yesterday and the life of today provides a vivid illustration of what tradition always means: not just the careful preservation of monuments, but the constant interaction between our aims in the present and the past to which we still belong.³¹³

Gadamer describes our relation to tradition as a dialogical process: the back-and-forth which transmission involves—between “then” and “now”—requires a dual knowledge which is one in the translator. This dialogical relation gives our belonging to tradition the character of an I and Thou relation.³¹⁴ Tradition, says Gadamer, is not a Thou, but it addresses me like a Thou. A Thou, furthermore, who has authority—who has knowledge—over me and with whom I am already in conversation where I come to know reality. Just as authority is directly proportional to knowledge, tradition’s authority is dependent on whatever is real and true in it. Tradition lives in our attempts to understand and be understood, so that its authority is ubiquitous in every address by another: be it a work of art, a text, or a person. Our response to it—our desire to communicate—is already affected by tradition’s authority, so tradition acts as prejudices do, tacitly being the condition of my understanding. It provides us with the prejudices, with the receptivity to understand through which we may discover new aspects of reality. This makes sense of why Gadamer thinks that translation is also a good model to describe *the phenomenon of understanding*: in translation, what is foreign to myself is made my own as foreign, it is not simply added as one thing among others nor re-constructed with my own language ignoring

³¹³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful: Art as Play, Symbol and Festival,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 49.

³¹⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 366.

the foreignness. In translation, Gadamer writes, “the horizons of past and present merge in a constant movement, like the movement comprising the essence of understanding.”³¹⁵

There is a synonymy between understanding and tradition via the analogy of translation, and the dialogical nature of the process is its core: it has the structure of question and answer. This dialogical back-and-forth, it must be recognised, has *already* been started without me, so that to even touch the cloak of “history” I must understand what it is that has already been started, those effects that are already moving me within history to “history.” Admittedly, the boundaries here are vague. How do I know what belongs to “the present” and what to “the past”? Perhaps here the insight from Gadamer is to be mindful of—that is to be fully present through—the *distance*, temporal or otherwise, between me and what addresses me. We must recognise that historical research happens within the process of tradition so that I am always looking at another part—perhaps a foreign one, shrouded in clouds, but still—of the same ground I am standing on. As I said in chapter three about the distance the notion of *theoria* speaks of—contemplation, participation as in a festival—the distance in historical research is one of “proximity and affinity.” This temporal distance does not assume the present or the past is superior or inferior but a mindful (phronesis) walking of the path. Tradition, prejudices, and authority are always operative in any knowing where reason is operative; they constitute the contemporaneity of past and present that allows reason to be fully effective.

4.3.2: Complexity as a Hermeneutics of Tradition

Prejudices, authority, and tradition are the context of critique; they include it and make it possible. The interest of this thesis lies in how better to integrate historiographical works into wider innovative reflection on issues such as the web of discourses on religion and science. This integrative-innovative goal is rhetorical as it is hermeneutical. Integrating and innovating through the historiographical work in science and religion has a rhetorical dimension because it seeks to attend to the knowledge embedded, assumed, and proposed in the way these historiographical works “speak”—in the way they are telling or narrating “history” and how such ways of speaking affect science and religion discourses. Integration of and innovation through this historiographical work has also a hermeneutical dimension because it seeks to evoke new understandings in science and religion discourses by calling attention to the interpretive dimension of these historiographical works and what this interpretive dimension opens to. A *hermeneutics of tradition* can have this integrative-innovative bent, being mindful

³¹⁵ Gadamer, “Hermeneutik,” 436. Translation my own.

of both rhetoric and hermeneutics. Ricœur used the term to describe Gadamer's hermeneutics and Thomas Pfau has recently used it, based on John Henry Newman and Gadamer.³¹⁶ Pfau notes that genealogical approaches based on critique simply reinstate and are parasitic on what they critique. As was noted with Rita Felski in chapter two—reflecting on the notion of complexity as critique—critique cannot do what it wishes to do; it does not dissolve but propagates whatever it critiques. A hermeneutics of tradition, on the other hand, includes critique, but its encompassing instinct is not critique, but it begins by recognising our belonging to history, even as we move history forwards, creating it and expanding it in new ways. The proposal of “patterns” has to be robustly historically informed but cannot remain a historical exercise (in the disciplinary sense). Brooke's and Harrison's patterns and Harrison's piggybacking on “theories of modernity,” as we saw they propose in the first chapters, are not only necessary but need to be articulated explicitly as ways of *receiving* and *responding* to the past-that-is-now so that we understand ourselves today and where we are going.³¹⁷ They need to integrate “the present” more clearly because it is *already* shaping their work by the very questions they are asking. It might seem unfair to ask the historians to leave their “historical” world. But given that the intellectual boundaries are largely artificial and porous, that the historians are wanting to move away from narratives that are not just “historical” narratives but cultural-metaphysical primeval stories (“myths”), and that their work critiques the work of contemporary “relation-seekers” between “science” and “religion”—it seems that to get some traction beyond other historians they need to articulate their histories in concrete and explicit connection with contemporary culture beyond myth-busting, or at the very least their work needs to be creatively appropriated by wider approaches that concretely make them speak with contemporary issues. One way of appropriating their work is the suggestion of this chapter,

³¹⁶ See Paul Ricœur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), where Ricœur calls Gadamer's hermeneutics a “hermeneutic of tradition” (25), whilst discussing Gadamer's hermeneutics' apparent opposition to Habermasian critique of ideology. Pfau talks of a “hermeneutics of tradition” in a discussion on the Christian use of genealogical thinking, continuing the discussion started in the colloquium “Deep in History: On Christian Genealogical Thinking” held online (<https://youtu.be/PsPFteMVLaw>, accessed February 22, 2021) organised by the Collegium Institute for Catholic Thought & Culture (based at the University of Pennsylvania). See Thomas Pfau, “From Genealogy to a Hermeneutics of Tradition,” *Genealogies of Modernity*, January 5, 2021, <https://cutt.ly/zljp4jO>; “A Humble Genealogy: On Christian Hermeneutics,” *Genealogies of Modernity*, January 20, 2021, <https://cutt.ly/HljaajS>, both accessed February 22, 2021.

³¹⁷ Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) is an example of this. He explores and retrieves “the unique nature of humanistic, interpretive concepts and frameworks enabling our quest of articulate and responsible knowledge in the realm of practical reason, and the distinctive dialectical process whereby such concepts (e.g., will, person, judgement, action, and the Platonic triad of the good, the true, and the beautiful) are received, rethought, and transmitted to future generations” (4).

namely that complexity could be seen as a hermeneutics of tradition, including critique but not reduced to a critical device.

A hermeneutics of tradition aims at discovery that furthers our understanding. In this discovery-oriented process one risks oneself by tacitly relying on what one can of one's tradition, attending to a yet unseen impending reality. It is risky for it is a process in which, as I explore a topic, I exegete my own fundamental prejudices seeking contact with reality. "Our fundamental beliefs are continuously reconsidered in the course of such a process, but only within the scope of their own basic premises," says Polanyi.³¹⁸ These "premises" are what the researcher holds to be true as far as they can tell (and ultimately beyond what they can tell). In practical terms this would involve reading works like Harrison's *Territories* or Brooke's *Science and Religion* less for their reaction against historical "myths" and more for what they provide beyond a strictly "historical" discourse. It involves, in other words, noting that historiographies are *layered*: political, ethical, philosophical and theological reflection (more on this in the final two chapters) happens in them. Recognising these layers as ever-present in "history," and pursuing in our reading to learn not just "what really happened" but (as Gadamer argues) what really happened in such a way that it gives sense to our historical moment, we join in the movement of receiving and sharing that constitutes a culture.

Perhaps the tactical failure of critical historiographies is that the desire to be "strictly historical" *and* simultaneously to affect current discussions on science and religion is contradictory under a historicist paradigm. One cannot remain in an ideal historical world as one inhabits and wants to affect one's contemporary situation. A hermeneutics of tradition involves pursuing an intuition towards what is worth transmitting, but "what is worth transmitting" involves finding appropriate questions to ask. One cannot strictly prescribe in advance with such and such criteria what these questions are. By personally investing oneself in what one feels is the case, one transgresses strictly historical interests on both the past and on one's situation, and this is what is needed for effective integration of and innovation through historiographical work.

4.4: Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to suggest a way forward that includes critique but that is not governed by it. The reason is that, given that the historiographical notion of complexity is being deployed mainly as a critical tool *against* other narratives, this thesis wants to find ways of

³¹⁸ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 267.

appropriating “complexity” so that we accept the fact that it is a rhetorical device against some things, but, importantly, it is also *for* other things. This “for” aspect of complexity is almost totally missing due to its being implicit in the “against” aspect, and this narrowing of complexity is not helpful because, as we have seen, what results from equating complexity with critique is the propagation of the narratives that are being rejected.

The notions of prejudice, authority, and tradition are deemed as important notions in order to understand not only the inevitability of being in and arguing for and against our contexts of thought and community. They serve us also to highlight that given that these are crucial aspects of culture, we need to engage and be mindful of how they already affect us, rather than drowning in critical excess, seeking self-transparency by rejecting “prejudices,” “authority” and purifying “tradition.” There is truth in these aims, namely the judicious use of our reason and our alertness to corrupt prejudices and illegitimate authority. But this truth is sought *through* our prejudices, authority, and tradition because it depends on our knowing. Being prejudice-free, authority-free, and tradition-free is in itself a prejudice that projects a false sense of neutrality, thoughtfulness, and openness that undermines our knowing.

A hermeneutics of tradition is mindful of the possibilities of corruption of tradition and of the inevitability to correct and invent *via elements of tradition itself*, responding to our new historical situations, in conversation with other traditions to learn from our failings and blind spots. Complexity can be interpreted as a hermeneutics of tradition by disentangling the need for arguing against unidimensional narratives of conflict or harmony from what complexity as a historiographical category also points to: creative open-mindedness. This openness is not to “anything”; traditions have their horizons and their limitations. The best we can do is to be formed in and through our encounter with what is passed down to us, aiming to move in directions pointed to by the intimations of discovery within our historically conditioned (and enabled) contexts.

The following chapter deals with the categories of essentialism and anachronism. It expands some of the observations made here, especially on the issue of historicity, which I have touched on here in some places, discussing some of the mistaken assumptions about the kind of distance between past and present these categories tend to assume.

5: Essentialism, Anachronism, and a Hermeneutics of Tradition: Language and Experience as the In-Between of Our Temporal Experience

5.0: Introduction

The previous chapter gave us a glimpse of a way of integrating historiographical works such as Brooke's and Harrison's into extra-historical reflection on religion and science. If complexity as a rhetorical and narrative category is primarily understood as a critical device, its primary meaning is derived from what it critiques, namely progressive unidirectional narratives of "conflict" or "harmony," and thus is unable to overcome them. Instead, complexity can be a way of performing a hermeneutics of tradition: a way of letting "the past" speak to our situation. This "letting speak" of history involves understanding that the distance we experience between past and present is less like the distance between an "outside" and an "inside" and more like the distance between two "insides."

This chapter elaborates on the kind of distance between the two insides of past and present, seeking to hear what the notions of essentialism and anachronism speak about beyond the critical register they also tend to be used in. Essentialism and anachronism as methodological warning notions are short-sighted because they do not help us inhabit our speaking in such a way that through awareness of our speech—within a communal context where speech has its meaning—we may respond mindfully to the address of tradition. Alongside complexity, if essentialism and anachronism act mainly as critique, they inevitably reinstate what they critique in their attempts to overcome it. This chapter's various stops hold together by the twofold goal of showing that there is something important of which essentialism and anachronism speak, and that the scale of the importance cannot be encapsulated by essentialism and anachronism being used in the critical register. By noting that essentialism and anachronism are issues of our speaking and of our (temporal) experience, we delve into Gadamer's discussion on language and experience—exemplified by the experiences of art, reading, and of celebration—in order to point out ways in which essentialism and anachronism can be reinterpreted in the spirit of a hermeneutics of tradition.

The first section of the chapter focuses on the dialogical nature of language. For Gadamer, language is conversation, and the back and forth of conversation is explored through the notion of play or game (*Spiel*). Given that Gadamer deploys the notion of play in the context of the experience of art, the second section uses this aesthetic inflection to speak of temporality

and historicity. To understand Gadamer's view of temporality—in view of including the concerns of anachronism—this section introduces Gadamer's notion of tarrying as speaking of the kind of “presentness” or contemporaneity of past and present. The notion of a joint “now” which is available in the unity of past and present is evidenced through our experience. Section three, given that this thesis is interested in integrating historiographical works in broader reflection, delves into what Gadamer calls the hermeneutical experience, which is concerned with tradition. It draws from the dialogical nature of language to emphasise that the experience of tradition is performed by language and in language past and present are constantly mediated. One is already in “essential” relation with history. History is always effective and already affecting our understanding over and above our consciousness of history. That is what Gadamer's notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* says, and in the fourth and final section we propose the notions of synchronicity and diachronicity of our language and experience to embrace the insights essentialism and anachronism point at.

5.1: On the Dialogical Nature of Language

A question Gadamer received in an interview about a criticism of his work speaks of the importance of language in his thought.³¹⁹ If understanding “happens to us”—for it is an event—are we then merely or mostly “avatars” or “puppets” of tradition and history? Is our consciousness—the “I” that I am aware of and our actual doing and deciding—a secondary and irrelevant aspect of my understanding? The “I” that understands seems to be a puppet of tradition and history. What do we *do*—if anything at all—when we understand something? “My answer is this,” he says: “*through language.*”³²⁰

Gadamer's work is less interested in our “doings”—whatever actions or activities we consciously perform—not because they are irrelevant but because understanding, as the last chapter showed, is made possible by tradition and our prejudgements before we have any self-consciousness. This section turns to language to understand how the experience of tradition happens in and through language—the relationship between understanding and experience in general has language in its centre. The question above squeezes out from Gadamer the concept of language as key to elucidate this relationship. Gadamer addresses some of the characteristics of language directly.³²¹ Here I focus on the structure of language—the back-and-forth of

³¹⁹ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics,” 50-1.

³²⁰ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics.” 51 (author's italics).

³²¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Man and Language,” in Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 65.

dialogue in a conversation. Language, says Gadamer, in philosophy or anywhere else “remains conversation—conversation of the soul with itself or also with the other.”³²²

This section explores first the back-and-forth movement that language involves through the notion of play, which is the same movement we find when experiencing a work of art. It then moves to the mediatory nature of this experience of play as we see in our encounter with a work of art, and then closes with how these experiences describe how language happens. The overall goal is to be able to use these insights about language in the second section to make sense of the temporal nature of understanding. The connection of language and the historicity of understanding (its temporal nature) allows us to observe that both essentialism and anachronism as historiographical categories can be understood as speaking of how understanding is a historical event that is linguistically performed. Seeing these categories as reflecting the historicity of understanding, and how this temporal phenomenon of understanding is performed by language, can shift our focus of attention. From attention to the fixity of words, that is essentialism, or historical-temporal-slicing, that is anachronism, we can pay attention to the rhetorical process of transmission where meaning is carried out. We could focus less on the fact that we are reifying words or that we are not using the “right” words to speak about the past (although this is important and we should be mindful of this) and more on what happens in the process and what this process means. Focusing on “what the process means” means that we are challenged to inhabit more clearly the rhetorical space—the space of us and the audience, together—and to both join and create discussions that speak to concrete cultural concerns, seeing the limited and partial nature of these discussions as opportunities for further conversation and action. Let us now turn to the first feature of language that is relevant for our discussion: the playfulness of language.

5.1.0: The Movement and Manifestation of Reality: Play (*Spiel*) and Presentation (*Darstellung*)

To think of the dialogical back-and-forth of language this section explores Gadamer’s notion of play (*Spiel*). In *Truth and Method* Gadamer delves into the phenomenology of play, showing that play or the game is over and above the self-consciousness—that is the subjectivity—of the players. Showing that play is over and above being conscious of ourselves has implications for what play is and what it may allow us to understand. One of the implications is that if play is not determined by subjectivity, although it includes it, it is a mistake to attempt to understand

³²² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” in *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer’s Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), 43.

it primarily from the point of view of self-consciousness or of subjectivity. Phrases such as “a play on words” or “the piano is being played,” and even phrases like “you played me” or “don’t play with fire,” show us the priority of play over self-consciousness; they speak of the priority of play over players. Play itself is an encompassing reality where either subjects or “things” take part and by being in or taking part in play they are taken by it. Play—and to pay homage to this land let us think of a Ceilidh—has its own “spirit.”³²³ Play, over and above the participants, constitutes its own reality. Gadamer emphasises that *the movement*, the to-and-fro dance that one enters into and that itself rules the consciousness of the participants, is not “produced” by them but comes to presence through them:

Play clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal of purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. The ease of play—which naturally does not mean that there is any real absence of effort but refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain—is experienced subjectively as relaxation. The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence.³²⁴

If one is a sports or theatre fan or has experienced learning to ride a bicycle or play the drums, we see that one joins in “the flow” of the game or of play(ing); the game determines us and not the other way around. To recall Polanyi in the previous chapters, we submit to skilful performance to learn the skill, even before being able to perform it; the skill bodily determines us and not us it, even though we are attempting to perform the skill. Our bodily actions and doings are tacitly defined by the performance—we indwell our bodily actions and know them in terms of the performance or play. Gadamer moves away from focusing on subjectivity—on self-consciousness—because the game is itself more real. Play determines our subjectivity by our participation in it: “The attraction of a game, the fascination it exerts, consists precisely in the fact that the game masters the players.”³²⁵ In speaking of the “fascination” or “attraction” of play, Gadamer gestures to the fact that the spectator also participates in it. The nature of play, or after Polanyi, of skilful performance, is such that it “presents itself.” It happens as a presentation (*Darstellung*) of itself. Even without an audience, play is always “presenting,” it

³²³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 111. Play’s spirit—using the Ceilidh example—is enacted through the coming together and it becomes manifest in the gathering. Ceilidh, etymologically, comes from “companion” and it meant originally a visit, often including a fire, or a session of dancing, storytelling, and music. See *OED Online*, s.v. “ceilidh, n.,” March 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/29391?>, accessed April 14, 2022.

³²⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 109.

³²⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, 111.

is bringing itself to the centre from the periphery, it is open to—that is it invites our—participation.

Play allows Gadamer to describe the encounter with a work of art. The spectator or audience becomes involved in the world the work of art creates, just like one is taken by play.³²⁶ Art speaks to us. It addresses us, it invites us into a conversation—to commune with it. The presentation (*Darstellung*) of play describes how the work of art addresses us, and the work of art's address to us has the mode of being of play, of manifesting or presenting itself. Gadamer says that the work of art comes to its “ideality”—it becomes an encompassing reality of its own into which we are drawn—in presenting itself.³²⁷ This “arrival” of presentation happens when play attains its own sustaining reality over and above the players. Gadamer calls this process a “transformation into structure” (*Verwandlung ins Gebilde*). Structure (*Gebilde*) here means alternatively “creation” or even “pattern.” In later essays Gadamer emphasises the “structural” or “createdness” of the work of art, calling artworks *Gebilde* more than *Kunstwerk* to accentuate that a work of art is a coherent unit, it has a structure, it is an entity in its own right, a creation, a pattern.³²⁸ The ideality of play means that play is an *eidos*—a subsisting reality in its own right—manifested through “parts” (the participants of a dance, their movements, the music, the dance-floor, etc.), but not reducible to the parts, real on its own right. As Polanyi says regarding how we interiorise the skills we learn, skills become a part of our bodies so that our performance of them are entities in themselves. Someone can see them and be drawn, just as when one sees a dance or listens to a catchy tune one is already dancing or nodding or humming the tune. The dance invites you; it presents itself, as Gadamer says. It is not just the performer(s) but the performance, the skill itself, that we recognise and join. Play or skilful performance has an ontological precedence over self-consciousness. Seeing it means that *it* addressed us, it is prior our subjectivity.³²⁹ Works of art have this mode of being—we encounter them as we encounter a skilful performance. Their address is ontologically prior to our self-consciousness, meaning that to “become aware” of ourselves is a response of something that

³²⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 113.

³²⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, 114-5.

³²⁸ See Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 3-53; “The Play of Art,” in Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 123-30.

³²⁹ Daniel L. Tate, “In the Fullness of Time: Gadamer on the Temporal Dimension of the Work of Art,” *Research in Phenomenology* 42, no. 1 (January 2012): 92-4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916412X628766> notes that Gadamer in his later work on art (volumes 8 and 9 of his collected works) emphasises the “performative” aspect, so that Gadamer focuses on *Vollzug*, “performative enactment” (92-4) or as Polanyi says, skilful performance, instead of play. Clearly “instead” means not a rejection of the notion of play but a furthering of what happens in play through the notion of performance.

precedes self-consciousness and which we respond to.³³⁰ Our self-consciousness is a *response* to something more real than our self-consciousness and not the beginning or originating source of reality. Hence when we join a performance—a concert, a tennis match, a play, etc.—if we have joined mindfully, we are taken by it. The world that exists is totally mediated by it.

5.1.1: Play as Total Mediation of the World or the In-Between of Worlds

Joining a performance—let us think again of a dance—is to be in it fully. Play (the performance) mediates completely the “where” of where we are, and it has its own “when.” Another feature of play that describes the work of art that is relevant to speak about language is this mediatory role. Entering into play means that play mediates completely our reality. Like a child imitating a superhero is committed to *being* the hero seriously—playing fully the part—play comes to mediate completely what “reality” is for the player. Play happens in-between, mediating “reality” completely for the player so that there is no world “outside” play when playing. Gadamer writes:

The world of the work of art, in which play expresses itself fully in the unity of its course, is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that that is how things are.

Thus the concept of transformation characterizes the independent and superior mode of being of what we called structure. From this viewpoint “reality” is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up (*Aufhebung*) of this reality into its truth.³³¹

Transformation into structure, as was mentioned above, is play’s attainment of its own sustaining unity, and in our participation in play it comes to mediate what “world” is for us, to the extent that there is nothing outside of it. Reality would be the untransformed—what was left before play’s transformation into structure, before play mediating totally what is, which is the “truth” of reality. We can understand this total mediation by when we, so to speak, “snap out” of it. One could be performing a musical piece, be totally immersed as an audience in a musical or theatrical performance, or simply be “in the zone” playing a football match. Then, for some reason, one “snaps out” of play’s total mediation. All of a sudden we are conscious of our movements; if performing or playing football we might make a mistake, a note out of

³³⁰ Acknowledging that skilful performance and works of art address us in such a way that this address is prior to one’s self-consciousness (to one’s subjectivity) involves moving away from reductive accounts of cognition (which end in reductive accounts of life, humanity, culture, and reality in general). See the editors’ “Introduction: The Interplay of Embodiment, Enactment, and Culture,” in *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*, ed. Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes (London: MIT Press, 2017), 1-21.

³³¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 117 (my italics).

the timing, a pass too long or too short; if part of the audience, we start thinking “about” the play we are witnessing or about our feelings, other people, our seat in the theatre, etc. Self-consciousness detracts from partaking fully in play.³³² As Polanyi notes, being conscious momentarily of our fingers when playing the piano paralyses us; it stops us from playing.³³³ Or as Gadamer notes, focusing on our own voice when speaking does the same.³³⁴ Positively, however, snapping out of play shows us how play mediates totally what reality is. The performance has a reality of its own. We join *it*, and in joining, *it* mediates completely what “world” or “reality” mean. This is what Gadamer means with transformation into structure: joining in the performance (a work of art) through the performance’s self-presentation so that we belong to it—it mediates reality completely.

A literary analogy may help us understand play’s total mediation differently. C. S. Lewis’ Narnia is a world one enters in various ways. One of them is through a wardrobe.³³⁵ Entering into the wardrobe is a kind of choice—it requires trusting, that is, responding to the wardrobe’s “calling” us to itself. Once we enter in it, the wardrobe comes to mediate totally what “world” means or what “reality” means. Coming “out” of it, or going further into it, on the other side is to enter a totally new world; the untransformed world that Gadamer speaks of is the one before entering the wardrobe. The wardrobe effects the transformation into structure—Narnia *is* the truth of the world for it supersedes and includes the untransformed. The point here is that an entrance (or exit)—a portal—totally mediates what “reality” means and it supersedes and includes whatever is left behind.

5.1.2: Language Dialogically Mediates and Manifests Reality

Let us summarise both qualities of play to describe the conversational or dialogical view of language according to Gadamer. They are, first, this to-and-fro or back-and-forth movement of play which *invites*, or as Gadamer says, which *presents (Darstellung)* itself, such as it happens in our encounter with a work of art. Second, we noted that play mediates completely what

³³² Play here is being understood as the back-and-forth in which we are taken when fully immersed in it: a tennis rally, a series of attacks in rugby, a dance during a Ceilidh, a scene during a play. Naturally, our participation as players, enactors, or performers might require self-consciousness: to feel ourselves, regroup, stop, revise, try again, and return to full attentive enactment. The point Gadamer is making and which I am emphasising is that play—when it has fully taken us—is phenomenologically devoid of self-consciousness. Play’s “flow” takes my complete attention and to become self-conscious is to stop attending and exiting this flow.

³³³ Polanyi, *Tacit Dimension*, 18.

³³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” in Michelfelder, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 117.

³³⁵ C. S. Lewis, “Lucy Looks into a Wardrobe,” in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 113.

reality is—when we participate in it there is no “outside.” Joining in play is a transformative experience. It is joining a reality with its own coherence, what Gadamer called *Gebilde*. This coherence may be called the “inner consistency of the real,” as Tolkien called what a successful expression of the vividness of imagination attains. A successful expression of an image (imagination) discloses truth—it shows this inner consistency.³³⁶

Both qualities of play—the participatory movement that invites and which we join and its inner consistency which mediates reality completely—are qualities of language. Language, in Gadamer’s view, displays this participatory movement that invites and which we join, through the structure of question-and-answer. When we speak, even when questioning, we are already responding to something.³³⁷ We join language’s movement as soon as we want to communicate something. Also, given that it is something we *join*, speaking is never primarily an “I” thing but a “we” thing: it always involves a to-and-fro movement that precedes subjectivity and transcends it, even when we speak only to ourselves.

We participate in the movement of language, and the movement is something in itself, just like skilful performance is an entity in itself which we recognise and can join. It has the inner consistency that play has, and in joining—in attempting to communicate—language mediates totally whatever world we have, and, *through* this mediation, what things are known: their truth. “Truth” is thus the reality of things in our participation in the movement of communication; we know this truth in our attunement to what is communicated.

Gadamer’s legendary phrase “*Being that can be understood is language*”³³⁸ is not to say that “all that is” is language, but that language, as described above, mediates our experience of the real so that whatever understanding we come to comes through it. Language, in his sense, is not primarily words or sentences of English, Spanish, etc. Language is conversation, question and answer, attempting to communicate and to understand: saying and letting be said. It means speaking and listening, so that understanding happens in this to-and-fro. We do not understand “language” as such, but the truths that come through it. I enter into Narnia through the wardrobe and the wardrobe fulfils its function in mediating the transformation of my world. Whatever understanding of what “language” is also happens through language and is in fact secondary to what is spoken through it, just as whatever the wardrobe means is second to what happens

³³⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” in *The Monsters and The Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 138-9.

³³⁷ See Gadamer’s analysis of the hermeneutic priority of the question in *T&M*, Part Two, II.III.C, 370-97, where he notes the model of Platonic dialectic (370-8) as one of *openness*, displayed by the nature and logic of the question (378-87), which is always already conversation.

³³⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, 490 (author’s italics).

when entering into it. That the wardrobe fulfils its function by mediating by no means reduces or marginalises the function of the wardrobe (language); it rather recognises the wardrobe's proper place—language's proper place—as “portal” to the real. Given that understanding for Gadamer is mediated by language, this chapter moves to exploring what “understanding” means as a phenomenon of language, and in view of the broader theme of historicity, it explores language from the point of view of temporality. This exploration will allow us to have in view, on the one hand, the relation between essentialism and our linguistic descriptions, and, on the other hand, our speech as a temporal event which anachronistically refers to the past.

5.2: On the Celebratory Experience of the Historicity of Understanding

Introducing the Platonic-Aristotelian character of Gadamer's thought in chapter three, followed by his engagements with Kant, Hegel, Dilthey, Husserl, and Heidegger, has already raised the issue of understanding. In this section we explore understanding by discussing it through the lens of temporality, seeking to show why understanding itself, performed through language, has a temporal nature that already mediates between past and present.

Historicity is at the core of Gadamer's *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*. Usually translated as historically effected consciousness or consciousness effected by history, the literal translation of the phrase may detract from seeing what it says. The “sein” of *Bewußtsein* is invisible in “consciousness,” the translation of it. Historically effected consciousness “is inescapably more *being* than consciousness,” Gadamer says, “and being is never fully manifest.”³³⁹ Being, it could be said, overdetermines our situation. Gadamer himself connects the emphasis on being, our finite grasp of it, and the concept of situation. In an interview he notes: “I said very plainly in *Truth and Method* that the consciousness in which history is operative [...] was more *Sein* [Being] than *Bewußtsein* [consciousness].” He continues: “In living one always finds oneself already in a situation that is conditioned by effective history. In the concept of situation, I still firmly hold the view that one can never by means of reflection place oneself in an externalized relation to one's situation.”³⁴⁰ Historically effected consciousness highlights therefore that history is effective in the finitude of every situation. *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*, says *Truth and Method*, “is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical *situation*.”³⁴¹ *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* affirms the temporality

³³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,” in Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38.

³⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics,” 46.

³⁴¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 312 (author's italics).

of our situatedness and suggests that understanding, as a situated event, is also a temporal phenomenon. Understanding is an effect of historicity—it is a temporal phenomenon—in at least two ways: every historical moment—every situation—is different, therefore understanding is different every time it happens; and given the “event” character of understanding, it is this historicity—our situatedness—more than our conscious and explicit knowledge that determines understanding. These two aspects make sense of Gadamer’s idea that “we understand in a *different way, if we understand at all*,”³⁴² and of his emphasis on prejudice or pre-judgements over our judgements in the constitution of understanding. These points are controversial if one departs from subjectivist and historicist premises, assuming that the primary “reality” is self-consciousness and that history is a gulf which self-consciousness must bridge in order to understand. If self-consciousness is not our departing point, and if time is, as Gadamer puts it, not “primarily a gulf to be bridged” but “the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted,”³⁴³ what Gadamer says is graspable. Every step I traverse in the path of knowledge includes every other prior step (ask the shoe soles and perhaps one or two blisters): one single step carries the whole path within it in a new direction, so every time we understand we understand differently; and each step is clearly inseparable from, and in fact made possible by, the miles of steps before it, so my walked path—my “historicity” and pre-judgments—permits understanding, more than my judgements.

The historicity of understanding speaks of the active nature of tacit knowing joined with the fact that to know something is to discover, and to discover something is to experience something as fulfilling. “Fulfilling” is about fullness, not necessarily subjective happiness or a feeling of satisfaction. When Gadamer talks about the fact that history is always effective in coming to know reality, he means that understanding has not only its own temporal nature but that the quality of this temporal nature is one of being fulfilled—of being taken fully by what one comes to know, being filled-with as opposed to lacking the being of that which is understood. All genuine experiences, Gadamer notes, thwart an expectation, so the experience of being fulfilled includes the “negativity” of thwarting or surpassing an expectation.³⁴⁴

Temporality in Gadamer’s way of speaking is almost completely misunderstood if one thinks of linear time, “measured” by a clock or a watch, with the seconds “ticking.” Every

³⁴² Gadamer, *T&M*, 307 (author’s italics).

³⁴³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 308.

³⁴⁴ The “negativity” of genuine experience—experiencing our finitude, our being in history, as encountering limitation—is the thwarting of an expectation, escaping what is inadequate in our expectations. Gadamer, *T&M*, 364-5. An alternative description of this “negative” process is the experience of recognising—and being found in—mystery (not to be confused with the unknowable). See Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), 116-21.

second is “the same” as every other, every minute is also the same, etc. Temporality that is fulfilled is determined by eventuality: events determine what “time” is—measured time being a particular “take” on understanding eventuality, minimising its “fulfilling” aspect. To understand the temporality of understanding and event we could draw on Gadamer’s discussion of the festival.

5.2.0: A Festive Emphasis: Celebration as The Historicity of Art and the Festive

A festival is essentially a celebration. But what does “celebration” mean? Gadamer distinguishes between celebrating as “a break from work” and celebration as a communal gathering. He mentions various aspects of the festival apart from its communal aspect, like its customary form (doing things in a certain way), the festival address, and, above all, a sense of awe-filled stillness.³⁴⁵ This awe-filled stillness is a realisation of a surrounding tranquillity that overcomes us in being a part of a gathering together before something that induces awe. This gathering together is of course intentional. “We celebrate inasmuch as we are gathered for something,” Gadamer says. It is not only gathering together, but that being together for something intentionally, “prevents us as individuals from falling into private conversations and private, subjective experiences.”³⁴⁶ This intentional gathering is a form of being involved that describes also how we become involved in the artistic creation (*Gebilde*).

The celebratory is a form of behaviour. When one says that the “mood” is festive, one is talking about the presence of something one can recognise and join by being in the same mood, by behaving in a certain way with the purpose of celebrating. This renders celebration as purposeless—Gadamer says that there is no “goal” in celebration but the celebration itself, and its temporality “does not dissolve into a series of separate moments.” This lack of “dissolution” of the temporality of the festival speaks of something different than when we speak of “spending time.” This integrative time, as it may be called, is “something that happens in its own time and at the proper time, something that is not subject to the abstract calculation of temporal duration.”³⁴⁷ This kind of time is not pragmatic, at our disposal. “In its temporal structure,” Gadamer says, pragmatic or empty time “is empty and needs to be filled.” Saying that I “spend time” doing this or that, means, according to Gadamer, that the time I supposedly have is empty, for it needs filling with something; time that is “spent” is time that is empty. Gadamer gives the example of boredom: “When bored,” he says, “we experience the

³⁴⁵ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 40.

³⁴⁶ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 40.

³⁴⁷ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 41.

featureless and repetitive flow of time as an agonizing experience.” On the other side of boredom, Gadamer locates “the emptiness of frantic bustle” of always being busy, not having “enough time for anything and yet constantly [having] things to do.”³⁴⁸ These two extremes show an empty time, time that needs spending and that “is not experienced in its own right.”³⁴⁹

On the other hand, the temporality of the festival is not an empty time. It is not pragmatic so that it needs filling or spending but is “fulfilled” or “autonomous” as Gadamer calls it. It is full from the beginning. This kind of time is characteristic of the festival and the artistic creation. It fills the entirety of our experience like “the festival fulfils every moment of its duration.”³⁵⁰ Gadamer explains it thus:

The fulfilment does not come about because someone has empty time to fill. On the contrary, the time only becomes festive with the arrival of the festival. The manner in which the festival is enacted directly relates to this. We are all familiar with this autonomous time, as we may call it, from our own experience of life: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death are all basic forms of autonomous time. We do not calculate here, nor do we simply add up a gradual sequence of empty moments to arrive at a totality of time. The continuity of the uniform temporal flow that we can observe and measure by the clock tells us nothing about youth or age. The time that allows us to be young or old is not clock time at all, and there is obviously something discontinuous about it. Suddenly we become aware that someone has aged, or that someone is “no longer a child.” Here we recognize that everyone has his own time, his autonomous temporality. It is of the nature of the festival that it should proffer time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. That is what festive celebrations means. The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill.³⁵¹

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer connects this temporality of the festive celebration, described above as *tarrying*, to the artistic creation. Both the festive and the artwork have the character of celebration, a “present *sui generis*.”³⁵² This “presentness” can be seen through the repetition of festivals. Gadamer says that the festival’s “own original essence is always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way).” Something “that exists only by always being something different is temporal in a more radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and return.”³⁵³ It is a repetition of what has always been there that has its own integrity, and precisely through repetition it is always unique. Here Gadamer could be read as echoing Kierkegaard’s understanding of repetition:

³⁴⁸ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 42.

³⁴⁹ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 42.

³⁵⁰ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 42.

³⁵¹ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 42. See also *T&M*, Part One, II.I.C, 124-30, where he discusses the temporality of the aesthetic, including further reflection on the festival and the example of the tragic (130-5).

³⁵² Gadamer, *T&M*, 126 (my italics).

³⁵³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 126.

“The dialectic of repetition is easy, for that which is repeated has been—otherwise it could not be repeated—but the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new.”³⁵⁴ The “newness” or “liveness” of things is thus brought about by repetition, which is always non-identical.³⁵⁵

The presence of the celebratory invites participation and this invitation, in Gadamer’s mind, brings the notion of *theoria* to the fore. *Theoria* or contemplation is participation and engagement. The temporality of participation—“filled” rather than “empty” time—is the tarrying that configures and involves us. The kind of involvement and standstill that we experience when involved is precisely what *theoria* or contemplation means—fully immersive involvement.³⁵⁶

5.2.1: The Fulfilled Nature of the Historicity of Understanding

The festive character of time that the work of art manifests helps us speak about understanding as a historical phenomenon, helping us grasp what was said about understanding being an *event* that is historically effected. Something that history influences, or that is imbued with “history,” as was said above, is something temporal. Understanding is a historical phenomenon because it happens as a horizon of before and after; it happens like an arrival, and, like the festival, we join it; it happens to us, we do not will it. It occurs as filled or autonomous time; it happens through *indwelling*. Gadamer speaks specifically in the context of our experience of a work of art about this kind of temporality that he calls tarrying:

in the experience of art we must learn how to dwell upon the work in a specific way. When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal

³⁵⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology by Constantin Constantius*, in *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 149.

³⁵⁵ Repetition is Kierkegaard’s expression for the Greek’s recollection: “this question will play a very important role in modern philosophy, for *repetition* is a crucial expression for what ‘recollection’ was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition.” Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 131 (author’s italics). For an articulation of this idea as “non-identical repetition” see Catherine Pickstock, *Repetition and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁵⁶ Sheila M. Ross, “Event Hermeneutics and Narrative: Tarrying in the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2003), <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/8693>; “Gadamer’s Late Thinking on *Verweilen*,” *Minerva* 8 (2004): 132-68; “The Temporality of Tarrying in Gadamer,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (January 2006): 101-23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406063231>, argues that this notion of tarrying is crucial in Gadamer’s thought to describe the event (*Ereignis*) character of understanding, central in Gadamer’s project of philosophical hermeneutics as a philosophy of experience and finitude. See also David Vessey, “Gadamer’s Hermeneutic Contribution to a Theory of Time-Consciousness,” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 7, no. 2 (September 2007): 1-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2007.11433947>.

experience of art is in learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate to what we call eternity.³⁵⁷

Tarrying is a manner of *listening*—of indwelling—that allows involvement, be it with the work of art or, more generally, with anything that addresses us, allowing understanding to happen. Tarrying is indwelling, it is how the event of understanding is constituted; it speaks of what may be called the duration of play, or the kind of experience of time that one lives when one is taken by play. The historicity effective or constitutive of being is a description of the temporal constitution of that which is understood. This temporality is not “subjective” for it is not to do with self-consciousness; it is not “objective” either because it does not involve overcoming a gap between subject and object, methodically eliminating the resistance of the object (my subjective relation to it) in order to arrive at its “objectivity.” To repeat what I pointed out in chapter three, understanding is not something the subject “does” to attain the object but something that happens to us “over and above our wanting and doing” as Gadamer puts it.³⁵⁸ It is not an “act” of consciousness.³⁵⁹ Understanding is “never a subjective relation to a given ‘object’ but to the history of its effect; in other words, understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood.”³⁶⁰ The effective history (*wirkungsgeschichte*) of being is what we come to share when we come to understand, and it is shared with us *from* that which is understood. This sharing—a *reception*—is the event character of understanding. Historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*) is open to the experience of history; it is “a fusion of the horizons of understanding, which is what mediates between the text and its interpreter.”³⁶¹ It is mindfulness to our situation, which implies the recognition that we are insiders—participants—who attain their horizon from *within* the very thing we are to understand.³⁶²

The process of listening, performing (ritual), and seeing in the Hebrew Scriptures can give us another grammar to understand the historicity of understanding.³⁶³ Understanding something is what happens when we participate mindfully in response to an address. We listen

³⁵⁷ Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” 45.

³⁵⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxvi.

³⁵⁹ Gadamer, “The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century,” 125.

³⁶⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, xxviii.

³⁶¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 386.

³⁶² Gadamer, *T&M*, 311-8.

³⁶³ Gadamer’s view of understanding, temporality, historicity, and event may be translated in terms of listening, ritual, and seeing in Dru Johnson’s philosophical reading of the constitution of knowing in the Hebrew Scriptures and their extension in the New Testament. See Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

to a voice, to anything that addresses us; we participate in it by acting on its meaning—what addresses us involves our active participation; and as a result of listening and participating in what the address requires of us, we come to see—we come to understand what the address says. This notion of listening carries the idea of attention, and it seems that attention has the same resonance of Gadamer’s term of historically effected consciousness. It implies participation and the withinness of understanding.

When we attend to something, it calls for a particular form of attention, but what calls us also changes by the kind of attention we give it (to remember McGilchrist’s observation in chapter two).³⁶⁴ Attending to something invites or opens a form of seeing it, but the way I attend to it affects what I see. This “seeing” caused by attention is a fusion of horizons between myself and what I attend to. This is exactly what the historically effected nature of understanding is: that me and what addresses me are one through the address—through my attention to it—and this unity is temporal: past and present are united whenever I am addressed by a historical artefact, but whatever this unity yields in terms of knowledge is proportional to the kind of address it is, or it is dependent on the kind of attention it evokes, and that I give to it. If a passage of Scripture addresses me as a historical artefact and not through an experiential connection to the truth it speaks of, I understand it—as historical artefact—but do not understand the text; it does not speak to me, so I know about it, but do not know what it says because it does not say anything to me.

5.2.2: The Relevance of Language and Historicity for Essentialism and Anachronism

Having pointed out the celebratory nature of our encounter with the work of art, and having noted also the nature of the temporality that is present in this encounter, this section articulates the connection of these two points with language as follows. To speak is to play along, it is to respond to what addresses us so that this movement of address and response takes us, shaping our experience of the world. Language is thus a form of attention in which I play along with what I attend to, and this has a temporal dimension—in speaking we participate, becoming involved in play, by dwelling or tarrying, as Gadamer says. To speak in such a way that understanding may occur is dependent on indwelling what is spoken—in the way we attend to it—so that our participation in language is fulfilling, permitting the kind of listening that effects seeing, that is, that allows understanding, just as the human being understood their nakedness by “tarrying in” or indwelling the word of the serpent. Tarrying describes the mode of being

³⁶⁴ McGilchrist, *Master and his Emissary*, 133. See section 2.3.0.2 in chapter two.

of language through which understanding happens, and this implies that language itself performs already a temporal act—it fuses past and present by indwelling tradition, by playing along with it. The fusion of horizons that “*takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language.*”³⁶⁵

Given that language achieves this fusion of horizons that understanding is, the notion of experience, embedded in this fusion, shows us also the unity of past and present. Experience and language witness to the connection, always effective, between past and present. Language and experience are means by which we can “tradition” better the old with the new. To “tradition” something is to intuit possible connections to what may be the case and realise them. It involves, therefore, a rootedness in what-was-that-still-is and a sense of what may be to which our present may point. To tradition is, to echo Kierkegaard again, to play with the two sides of the coin which repetition and recollection show: recollection is backward looking, and repetition is forward looking; to tradition is to recollect and repeat, it is backward-forward movement that permits the present’s fulfilment and vitality. The notions of play and celebration connect language and the historicity of understanding in that communicating is a participative movement that fulfils. We participate in the movement of language—it is in-between our experience of the world—and this participation is, just like being in a celebration, fulfilling. The movement of language has the temporality of the festive. We tarry what is spoken, we indwell it, so that whatever may be understood happens in this dwelling-with.

The connection between understanding as a historical phenomenon and language is related to the issues of essentialism and anachronism. Concerns about essentialism and anachronism are historico-linguistic concerns: they attempt to point out that what one speaks now may or may not reflect what one spoke then. They attempt to be mindful of temporal distance—of not being “anachronistic”—which includes being mindful of history and language. A key aspect here is the issue of translation, which as we saw in the previous chapter, is for Gadamer both a model of tradition and of understanding. Essentialism is thus not only a historico-linguistic concern, but it rests on the issue of understanding as a historico-linguistic phenomenon. Essentialism as a problem warns of how understanding may be missed precisely through misguided historico-linguistic instincts and practices. Within this historico-linguistic concern we have the issue of anachronism, but the rejection of essentialism emphasises that temporal-linguistic distance entails a lack of essential referentiality in our speaking. That words shift their meaning over time means, to the anti-essentialist, that the words that I use now to

³⁶⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, 386 (author’s italics).

talk about the past—especially important words like “science” or “religion”—are problematic. Using them projects today’s meaning into the past anachronistically, and besides, the shifts in meaning of words throughout history indicate that there is nothing that “persists” from these words. They have no essence; there is no “thing” called “science,” no “thing” called “religion,” etc.

But how do anti-essentialists know that words change their meaning? If there are no “essences,” how do they recognise that a word has shifted its meaning? Does this not imply that there is something that joins all meaning-shifting words together through which the anti-essentialist can reject the essential unchangeability of concepts? The answer is that language helped them see this. And by language we mean *translation*, which means *tradition*. Their reading of primary sources, either in ancient or modern languages, performs already the traditioning between past and future, so that they can say this or that meant something different. Distinguishing between meanings involves tacit knowing of their unity, of their essential connection. This connection is a presupposition of anyone seeing any difference at all between anything, but as it is tacit, it acts as an enabler of my “seeing”—it is fundamentally a prejudice. Our understanding, which is constituted by our prejudices more than by our judgements, is a historical phenomenon experienced through our prejudices, and since it is mediated by language, we could say that language is our prejudices. Being addressed and responding to this address involves already that I have the capacity to respond, and this is what our prejudices are, our capacity to respond to whatever addresses us. “Essentialism” and “anachronism” as methodological warning notions are short-sighted because they do not help us inhabit our speaking in such a way that through awareness of our speech we respond mindfully to the address of tradition. These notions, as well as “complexity,” tend to act mainly as critique. They are parasitic on what they reject, even though there may be more in parasitic approaches than just critique.³⁶⁶ They tend to reinstate what they critique by attempting to overcome it. We have to follow the truth these notions point at but not necessarily their advice.

Before continuing this analysis and providing some suggestions towards possible alternatives, I bring the notion of experience to bear on the notion of tradition. Experience complements what the notion of language allows us to understand: it also displays the fusion of horizons of past and present. In particular I am interested in the experience of tradition,

³⁶⁶ See Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), for example (40-7). The word “parasite” in French (and in Spanish) has also the meaning of a noise, a perturbation of radioelectric transmissions. See *Real Academia Española: Diccionario de la lengua Española*, s.v. “parásito, ta,” 23.4, <https://dle.rae.es/par%C3%A1sito>, accessed May 19, 2021.

which Gadamer calls the hermeneutic experience. A hermeneutics of tradition is a way of experiencing the process or relation that tradition is. After exploring the notion of experience, and in particular the hermeneutic experience (the experience of tradition), this chapter moves to the final section, joining both the notion of language and experience to provide some hints of the “modes” of a hermeneutics of tradition.

5.3: On the Hermeneutic Experience

The knowledge that tradition facilitates, providing the prejudices that enable understanding, is invisible to an allegedly unprejudiced “pure reason” that pretends to detach itself from tradition. It is by acknowledging our pre-understandings and the authority they have over us that we can think adequately with our reason and experience our belonging to history. The notion of experience (*Erfahrung*), like the notion of language, opens the way to this acknowledgement. Gadamer’s chapter on experience in *Truth and Method* is, for him, the keystone of the whole book: “Experience has the effect of freeing one to be open to experience, as I have said in that chapter on experience—which I do in fact regard as the centerpiece of the book.”³⁶⁷

Experience implies openness. “The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience,” Gadamer writes. “That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only *through* experiences but is also open *to* new experiences.”³⁶⁸ An experienced person knows the truth of experience and that new experience brings new truth along with it; they know the finiteness of their knowing. “Experience teaches us to acknowledge the real,” Gadamer says. “The genuine result of experience, then—as of all desire to know—is to know what is. But ‘what is,’ here, is not this or that thing, but ‘what cannot be destroyed’ (Ranke).”³⁶⁹ The phrase “what cannot be destroyed” (*was nicht mehr umzustoßen ist*) gives a sense of that which cannot be changed, knocked over, or reversed. Gadamer is saying that experience puts us in touch with the essence of things, by at the same time making us aware of our finitude. “Real experience,” Gadamer continues, “is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness.”³⁷⁰

Within the reality of our finitude, we experience what I have been calling “tradition” (*Überlieferung*). The experience of tradition Gadamer calls the “hermeneutic experience”:

³⁶⁷ Gadamer, “Hermeneutics,” 53.

³⁶⁸ Gadamer, *T&M*, 364 (author’s italics).

³⁶⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 365; *GW* 1, 363.

³⁷⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 365.

Hermeneutic experience is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is *language*—i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. It would be wrong to think that this means that what is experienced in tradition is to be taken as the opinion of another person, a Thou. Rather, I maintain that the understanding of tradition does not take the traditional text as an expression of another person's life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou. Still, the relationship to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation must be capable of teaching us something about hermeneutical experience. For tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with Thou.³⁷¹

The previous chapter spoke briefly about this I-Thou relation and it emphasised that tradition addresses us like a Thou—as another with whom we are already in relation and who has authority over us for we are already participating in its knowledge. A way of illustrating the relation between the tradition's address and our involvement in it arises in how “eminent texts” address us. Seeing how eminent texts speak may help us understand tradition's address as an address from a Thou, so we will look briefly at Gadamer's discussion of eminent texts. To repeat, the goal is to observe through how eminent texts address us, the way in which tradition addresses us. The eminent text's address will allow us to understand the I-Thou relation we have with tradition, which clarifies how we experience tradition.

5.3.0: Eminent Texts Address Us Like a Thou: Experiencing Texts, Experiencing Tradition

Compared to a shopping list, for example, always referring us back to a particular shopping trip, an eminent text does not need to refer to the context which gave it birth in order to “stand written.” The challenge brought by these eminent or autonomous texts—or poetic texts as Gadamer also calls them³⁷²—is that they speak to us even when detached from their original address and context.³⁷³ The shopping list demands primarily questions about why this or that was bought, the needs of the consumers, etc. An eminent text, even though allowing for such questioning as well, brings something to presence that arrests us beyond such questions on the intention, the context, etc. An eminent text, therefore, can be thought of as autonomous since it stands on its own, referring us primarily back to itself rather than to external confirmation of its claims. This self-referentiality is what Gadamer sees above all in the poetic word. Therefore,

³⁷¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 366 (author's italics).

³⁷² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth,” in Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 110.

³⁷³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Religious and Poetical Speaking,” in *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 88-9; “Aesthetic and Religious Experience,” in Bernasconi, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 141-3.

a poetic text—Gadamer uses Dostoevsky’s description of the staircase where Smerdjakov falls down in *Brothers Karamazov*³⁷⁴—regardless of whether the text is poetry or prose, is “poetic” by virtue of this self-referential quality. Gadamer notes that, “whenever we are confronted by texts or anything that has been committed to writing,” our “task is to let the text speak to us once again.”³⁷⁵ Autonomous texts, however, are different from other texts in that they do not point back to the original address. “It is certainly true that all forms of writing have to be brought to speak,” says Gadamer, but “the usual function of writing lies in its referring back to some original act of saying, so that in this sense the text does not claim to speak by virtue of its own power.”³⁷⁶ The difficulty comes whenever we have texts—or works of art—that do not refer back to their original act of saying. Such texts or artefacts, it could be said, “speak for themselves.” These are the texts Gadamer calls eminent, autonomous, poetic, or simply, literature.

The detachment of a text from its context is akin to what happens when encountering a work of art, which was described in terms of play’s self-presentation. What Gadamer is saying about eminent texts is that they come to *present* something, just like the original act of narration did. There is an ontological levelling that comes with the detachment of the text or work of art from its original articulation. They become an entity in themselves—just as play is—that does not point to the original but “increases the being,” Gadamer says, of whatever original they came from.³⁷⁷ Attaining autonomy involves a detachment of the original, but in another way, it involves an expansion or *overflow* of the original. A family is a good example. Imagine a daughter who is the “copy” of her father. As she grows up, being her own self further discloses her father. How she walks, what she says, some of her reactions, facial expressions, and tastes, are undeniably hers, and they may be different from her father’s way of doing things. And yet, precisely through these elements she discloses more of her father’s walks, ways of speaking, facial expressions, and tastes. She echoes or resembles him (even if she does not mean or want to), furthering what he is through her own self. She is literally an increase in being, and the same will happen through her children, increasing her and her father’s being, etc. “Being,” in this sense, is as William Desmond observes: “it is overdeterminate in the sense of exceeding

³⁷⁴ Gadamer, “On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth,” 111; cf. *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. D. Magarshack (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1958), Volume I, Book Five, Chapter 7, 329.

³⁷⁵ Gadamer, “Aesthetic and Religious Experience,” 141.

³⁷⁶ Gadamer, “Aesthetic and Religious Experience,” 141-2.

³⁷⁷ Gadamer, *T&M*, 141.

our determination.”³⁷⁸ Being’s “increase” is not linear, even mechanical, cause and effect but an overflow, an excess.

Observing how a work of art (or a text) speaks when detached from the original context of its making, highlights the way of being of tradition. Tradition is not a Thou, “back then.” It is not merely an “original address”—speaking primarily as an expression of a context in the past—and yet it addresses us in the manner of a Thou. It *speaks* with the cumulative authority of “originals,” for it carries with it the increments in being. Because tradition addresses us just like a person addresses us, it is a moral experience. The hermeneutic experience demonstrates the moral significance of the contemporaneity of past and present because it experiences the address of tradition, which addresses us like a Thou. The “I” belongs with the Thou and so we belong in tradition; just like language, tradition implies a “we” with which my “I” is already in communion.³⁷⁹

5.3.1: On the Experience of Tradition and *Phronesis*: Mindful Belonging

Tradition and language embody a communion—the “we” within which my “I” finds itself. Such communion allows us to note the problems that emerge when one attempts to extract oneself from one’s bond with tradition. One way of extracting ourselves from tradition is through “methodological” approaches that seek to eliminate our participation in tradition in order to attain “objectivity,” attempting to be free from prejudices. As the previous chapter discussed, in terms of the “prejudice against prejudice,” these kinds of approaches simply perpetuate the prejudices that shape them.³⁸⁰ The hermeneutic experience is not eliminated—for it is inevitable to be in tradition insofar as we speak and think—but the understanding that is available in our relationship to tradition is reduced to our own unspoken prejudices:

A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. *A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way.* In seeking to understand tradition historical consciousness must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources, as if this preserved it from mixing in its own

³⁷⁸ William Desmond, *The Voiding of Being: The Doing and Undoing of Metaphysics in Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 8.

³⁷⁹ Gadamer says that the I and Thou nature of our understanding involves “the shared interpretation of the world which makes moral and social solidarity possible.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Language and Understanding,” in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, trans. and ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 96. Language, experience, and understanding have a fundamental moral dimension, displayed in our very belonging to what we receive and share (tradition). See also *T&M*, 355-70.

³⁸⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 369.

judgments and prejudices. It must, in fact, think within its own historicity. To be situated within a tradition does not limit freedom of knowledge but makes it possible.³⁸¹

Historical methodology, Gadamer is saying, “must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources,” in order to understand within a tradition. Our judgements and prejudices are mixed inseparably in any and all “methodologies.” We must think within our own historicity, Gadamer says. That our situatedness within a tradition “does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible,” allows a full view of the hermeneutical experience. Being situated within the process of tradition involves realising that history permeates reality—our being is historically effected. This realisation does not entail that I come to understand “tradition,” but that I allow tradition’s “claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me.”³⁸² Anyone open to tradition in this way “sees that historical consciousness is not really open at all, but rather, when it reads its texts ‘historically,’ it has always thoroughly smoothed them out beforehand, so that the criteria of the historian’s own knowledge can never be called into question by tradition.”³⁸³ Historical consciousness—in contrast with historically *effected* consciousness—is the consciousness operative in historicism. It is an objectifying consciousness that approaches history as an object, reflecting itself out of the living relation to tradition and thereby destroying its meaning. Historically effected consciousness—the recognition of the contemporaneity of past and present effective in and through our prejudices—in contrast, lets itself be addressed by tradition, keeping “itself open to the truth claim encountered in it.” Gadamer says:

The hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma. As we can now say more exactly in terms of the concept of experience, this readiness is what distinguishes historically effected consciousness.³⁸⁴

The hermeneutic experience acknowledges our historicity and allows us to move *through* our prejudices within tradition towards understanding, mediating past and present constantly. Gadamer says: “*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating*

³⁸¹ Gadamer, *T&M*, 369 (author’s italics).

³⁸² Gadamer, *T&M*, 369.

³⁸³ Gadamer, *T&M*, 370.

³⁸⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 370.

in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.”³⁸⁵

Prejudices that lead to misunderstanding are of course unhelpful and need discarding, but this means something other than “getting rid of them.” “Discarding” may be the wrong word, although it does speak of their mistaken nature and the desire to make them disappear. But one does not discard or substitute prejudices as we saw in the last chapter. One learns through them something *truer*. Their adequacy (or lack thereof) comes into view when we are addressed by something. The hermeneutic experience—the experience of tradition—is one that in the process forms or cultivates our moral dispositions. This moral cultivation or formation is done by learning to belong and respond—it means learning to listen, best described as participating or receiving. Receiving is never “passive” as opposed to “active.” It is activity focused not on our self-consciousness but on participating itself, like being “fully present” in playing an instrument or experiencing something shocking. The dynamic nature of tradition that may allow us to move beyond unhelpful prejudices can only be listened to by the openness of experience, and this involves recognising our belonging to tradition. This recognition *invites* our mindful belonging, recognising that we always arrive “late,”³⁸⁶ when things are already there. Mindful belonging, however, involves our response. The previous chapter spoke of this response as *trust* or *hope*, and we already partake in such response by moving about in our everyday lives. In humanistic studies, however, one must deepen—not bracket—this response for the sake of “objectivity.” It is through this hopeful and trustful response that we partake and imaginatively contribute to what is shared with others, to our culture. In Gadamer’s thought this experience of listening and responding is called mindfulness, reasonableness, or practical wisdom (*phronesis*), a key element of Gadamer’s thought as chapter three showed. *Phronesis* is non-objective knowledge—it is *moral* knowledge—the knowing that is our personal experience.³⁸⁷ Both our language and our experience join both past and present in what we experience as our “now,” and this unity between times is one in which my knowing happens not by objectification but by personification, by acknowledging our personal involvement in the shaping of past and present as we live our “now.”

³⁸⁵ Gadamer, *T&M*, 302 (author’s italics).

³⁸⁶ Gadamer, *T&M*, 506.

³⁸⁷ See Gadamer, *T&M*, 322-33, for his analysis of the hermeneutic relevance of Aristotelian *phronesis*.

5.4: The Historical and Temporal In-Between of a Hermeneutics of Tradition: Language and Experience

Phronesis is a good point to move towards articulating how the concerns that essentialism and anachronism raise may be included in a wider understanding of reality without falling into the aporias of our words not being able to refer to something “essential,” and us not being able to open our mouth about the past, since doing so is always anachronistic. Phronesis is operative both in language and experience; it can be present in a concrete situation of experience and when reflecting on experience in hindsight as one does in scholarly work.

Gadamer writes in an essay on historicity and truth that his entering into the philosophical scene in the early 1920s was dominated by two problems, one of them being the problem of “historical consciousness with regard to the universal validity and the universally binding nature of truth.” It is the problem of historicism, which “consisted of the question of how it should even be possible at all to raise claims to truth as thinkers, when we are conscious of our own historical conditioning in any of our attempts to think.”³⁸⁸ This problem contains the worries that “essentialism” and “anachronism” talk about. The problem of essentialism raises our awareness of our “claims to truth as thinkers,” because it asks “how come you think that your words can touch what the words of the past touch, when historical and linguistic distance has, at times, even inverted their meaning, but even if not inverted, radically altered them? Furthermore, do words even ‘touch’ anything at all?” Anachronism, on its part, emphasises the aspect of “our own historical conditioning” because it says “remember that historical distance between you and the past? It is stubbornly elastic and always present.”

How is *phronesis* connected to this problem? And furthermore, how exactly are language and experience connected to both phronesis and the issue of “contingency,” which in the historically conditioned situation involves the problem of temporality? I propose two oppositions by generalisation as mindful ways of including the valid concerns of essentialism and anachronism in a wider view.³⁸⁹ As chapter three pointed out, practical wisdom, involves the logos within ethos: it is not theory or practice but reasonable—mindful—being in the world. By now it should be clear that rejecting “essentialism” and “anachronism” is

³⁸⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Historicity and Truth,” in Vandavelde, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy* 13.

³⁸⁹ Christopher Watkin, “Why Michel Serres?,” *Substance* 48, no. 3 (2019): 33, sees this move in Michel Serres’ work and Watkin calls it a hermeneutics of federation; it does not seek to exclude but to include in a wider panorama: “Opposing by generalizing shows that it is also possible to critique and subvert without excluding, without a negative moment. It is one of Serres’ distinctive ‘figures of thought’” (34). See Christopher Watkin, *Michel Serres: Figures of Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

counterproductive: historical evolution of our consciousness (as Barfield points out) as shown through the change of meaning in words does *not* entail that there is no essential nature that the notions express, and it does not entail that one can or should stop applying “current” notions to the past. What the evolution of the experienceable world shows is that reality itself includes temporality (historicity). Our encounter with being is always already containing the effects of history, the historically-effected nature of being. The historically-effected nature of the “to be” is what Gadamer’s *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* is about.

One of the most anti-essentialist works to date—Harrison’s *Territories*—not only shows essential knowledge of the notions of “science” and “religion” (as chapter two showed), but uses some of the current understandings about these notions to navigate between past and present. It is only through whatever prejudices we have that we can see something truer. This is what Harrison and Brooke do: they manage to articulate our contemporary presumptions, and they move between the past and back through these assumptions to challenge us today. But the challenge is left with a “so what?” that is not adequately addressed by critique or historiography. By saying “no” to a host of issues like unidirectional progressive narratives of conflict and harmony, the fixity of reference of words like “science,” “religion,” and others, and the untimely manner of our speech in relation to “the past,” we are left exiled from our own historical situation and our own speech within it. Essentialism and anachronism as problems miss the mark: the problem is not whether we assume an unchangeable entity called “science” or “religion” and then anachronistically apply it to past historical moments. *We do* make this move but the problem is not the move itself, but *how* it is performed and, prior to that, how the move is conceived.

The point of this project is to understand this move, to show that rejecting the version prescribed by the historians is impossible, and to heed to the genuine warnings essentialism and anachronism point at. Rejecting the versions advertised misses the real problem because the notions, as they are deployed, miss it. The challenge is developing a practice of thinking within one’s historicity, in order to experience tradition’s addresses in our historical situation:

*To think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them. To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas and one’s own thinking. To try to escape from one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us.*³⁹⁰

³⁹⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 415 (author’s italics).

Historiographies can have “history” in them only because history addresses the historian and her readers today, in some way or another. Especially if historians are explicitly attempting to shift contemporary narratives or understandings, historiographies cannot claim to be simply “history” (providing “history” with solely or mainly “historical interest”) *and* attempt to affect contemporary discussions. To claim the “strict history” card and the “affecting our times” card (at the same time), is in tension with both “strictly historical interests” and “methodological interests.” The pretention of strict history distances historiographies from current methodological issues, but in doing so the effect of these “histories” in current discussions is undermined, even though these works do have “historiographical” value. Both examples chosen in this thesis, Brooke’s *Science and Religion* and Harrison’s *Territories*, have a historico-methodological bent. But because they do not seem to be clearly “owning” this historico-methodological motif, the effects of these historiographical works on wider science and religion discussions do not reflect the substantial understandings that historiographical works continue to helpfully point towards.

Reeves’ *Against Methodology*, which was discussed in the first chapter, points out and addresses what historico-methodological works like Brooke’s and Harrison’s cannot do due to their genre, rather than due to having any intrinsic scholarly deficiency. But the existence of Reeves’ and Smedes’ work, as the first chapter observed, shows a deeper cultural and metaphysical blind spot. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to provide some theoretical nudging to scholars’ imaginations to think differently about our own (and other people’s) expressions and experience in order to be able to realise more clearly our already existing (temporal) connection to what matters (in past and present).³⁹¹ The productive scholar, Gadamer writes, needs more than mastering all the methods:

The person who never produces anything new has also done that. It is imagination [*Phantasie*] that is the decisive function of the scholar. Imagination naturally has a hermeneutical function and serves the sense for what is questionable. It serves the ability to expose real, productive questions, something in which, generally speaking, only he who masters all the methods of his science succeeds.³⁹²

³⁹¹ An exercise of the practice I am trying to point towards may be seen in Lee Palmer Wandel, “Ranke Meets Gadamer: The Question of Agency in the Reformation,” in *Politics and Reformations: Histories and Reformations: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Brady, Jr.*, ed. Christopher Ocker, Michael Printy, Peter Starenko and Peter Wallace (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 63-78. Her deployment of Gadamer’s thought to rethink agency and temporality as dialogical takes her in fruitful directions with regards to narratives of the Reformation.

³⁹² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” in Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 85.

The following two subsections are very inadequate “traffic signs”; ways of expressing how through our language and experience we are already in translation between past and present. The hope is that they may contribute to a hermeneutics of tradition by motivating in scholars their desire to invent. But invention needs new intuitions. As Michel Serres says in a conversation with Bruno Latour:

Do you want to talk about invention? It’s impossible without that dazzling, obscure, and hard-to-define emotion called intuition. Intuition is, of all things in the world, the rarest, but most equally distributed among inventors—be they artists or scientists. Yes, intuition makes the first move and strikes the first blows.³⁹³

In attempting to even “make sense” of our study and inhabitation of reality, be it through artistic, historical, philosophical, theological, scientific, or any kind of coherent approach, we are *synchronically* and *diachronically* participating in history through our language and experience. The following two wings of Hermes are proposed as theoretical traffic signs for our sensibilities to turn and be attuned to what is real prior to our concepts or ideas and which make them possible. They are merely signs that hope to point to new intuitions.³⁹⁴

5.4.0: Synchronicity of Language and Experience: The Scene

The synchronicity of language and of experience speaks of the contemporaneity of past and present that both language and experience create. A question that puts this creation into use is the following: what kind of experience is this way of speaking, speaking of? What kind of bodily experience does it manifest? This question already makes an immediate connection between whatever the text or historical artefact may say and our own historical situation. To repeat what was said above, we are already performing this connection without even thinking

³⁹³ Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 99, quoted in Watkin, *Michel Serres*, 27.

³⁹⁴ See John Behr, *John the Theologian and his Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 34-36 and 331; David Bentley Hart, “Tradition and Authority: A Vaguely Gnostic Meditation,” chap. 7 in *Theological Territories*, 119; and Simms, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 150. During the final revision of the thesis, I became aware that both Behr and Hart have used synchronicity and diachronicity somewhat similarly to what I suggest below. Behr in his hermeneutical reflections in his work on the Gospel of John and its readers, and Hart in his reflection on the theological notion of tradition. See also David Bentley Hart, *Tradition and Apocalypse: An Essay on the Future of Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022). Simms mentions both diachronicity and synchronicity as two out of the three stages (the third one is immanence) of hermeneutics as described by Hans-Robert Jauss in his literary hermeneutics (reception theory). Jauss develops his work with Gadamer as a starting point, although Gadamer sees Jauss as narrowing the extent of the hermeneutical process to the “history of reception.” Works do have a history of their reception, says Gadamer, “but we do not need to know every use and misuse it has been through.” Gadamer, “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” 123. Gadamer reads both “historical” and “contemporary” works as historically effected artefacts that are continuously speaking—saying something to our hermeneutical situation. My methodological suggestions are more nudges for awakening our listening and less hermeneutical stages (contra Jauss) which could, nonetheless, benefit from Jauss’ work.

about it, simply by reading, by which I mean translating. Simply by trying to figure out the meaning of something we are already oriented to what it *means*, not only to what it “meant.” In fact, to even make any sense of what things “meant,” it has to be connected to some meaning that I can understand now. The question of the kind of experience that expressions speak of is not a forced imposition from the present—what may be called “presentism”—but a way of *listening* to the polyphony of the text, preparing myself to be addressed. Our worries of “imposing” our notions or views on the text or on whatever addresses us are not discarded by the question proposed. Through this question we can begin to be questioned by experiences we might not recognise as familiar. The language we are reading may begin to evoke experiences we did not think possible; it also may leave us puzzled, but never unchanged.

A related question that deploys the synchronicity of language and experience to think within our own historicity is this. What is it assumed that is experientable? This question seeks to avoid “bracketing” what seems obscure. Even empathetic readings of, for example, magic, astrology, alchemy, so-called “miracles” in history, etc., routinely are betrayed by the fact that some readers of today may tend to think that people in the past (or of other present cultural contexts) were superstitious, irrationally credulous, or simply “did not know better.” But this “better” is totally determined by some modern prejudices. If these prejudices are simply left untouched by not asking the question of what people’s actual experience was that is expressed in such and such way of speaking, one is, paradoxically, through empathy, affirming one’s own prejudices about “the past” (or about the other) without really understanding the experiences the historical artefacts witness to. The final chapter will mention examples of scholarship mindful of the inadequacy of some of our modern prejudices and how this mindfulness gives us insight into (contemporary) reality.

But what does “the scene” have to do with this? “The scene,” alluded to in the title, speaks of the mood that the “synchronicity of language and experience” seeks to evoke. The questions proposed seek to find a scene. What *is* a scene? A scene is a moment that belongs already to a unity of performance, to a play, for example. It determines a before and after. It carries all the past within it, and it sets the tone for what comes next. Everyone remembers this or that scene. What the synchronicity of language and experience describes is scenes: happenings that create both “before” and “after,” moments that can be seen as connecting both the past and our contemporary situation. The synchronicity of language and experience encourages a “scenic” approach to reading-telling history: finding resonances and allusions that touch both before and after. To recognise a scene involves recognition of a unity between then and now. If we find the scenes we are at once in the past and in the present; the past is

speaking, and the present can hear it. A scenic approach involves not only paradigmatic “affairs,” like Galileo, Darwin, etc. It highlights the materiality—the material witnesses—of what is already with us through which we can tangibly “travel” between past and present: monuments, architecture, archaeology, texts, technology, etc., all of these are “scenic” because their very existence shows the unity between then and now. The last chapter of the thesis will discuss the work of Bernard Lightman, and in particular his work on material culture, as exemplifying this scenic approach. Monthly quarterlies and magazines, it turns out, show us the synchronicity of language and experience when we recognise them as means of communication.

5.4.1: Diachronicity of Language and Experience: Accompaniment

The diachronicity of language and experience is related to the synchronicity they exemplify, but it emphasises not the contemporaneity of past and present but the fact that one moves *through* the temporal unity of past and present to distinguish what is deemed “historical” and what is deemed “modern” or contemporary. Diachronicity resonates with the genealogical approach in Harrison’s *Territories*, but the difference is that it is not primarily critical but hermeneutic. It places itself clearly with respect to something in the present as its departing point and end, even though in approaching it, the end itself changes due to our experience of tradition. It is what Barfield called a semantic approach to history and it is also found in Gadamer’s notion of historically effected consciousness. Recognising diachronicity is to see how one uses language as a way of reading the experiential transformations that language witnesses to throughout history. The emphasis here is on the unity of language and experience in historical change. The diachronicity of language and experience is thus a reminder to the historian (or deployer) of concepts or ideas that there is a methodological artificiality in merely tracing ideas without at the same time taking a position—that is, without acknowledging that to “trace them” one needs to understand them, and this means to understand how they speak now. One cannot trace them without involvement.

How is “accompaniment” related to the diachronicity of language and experience? The diachronicity of language and experience is an exemplar of accompaniment. Accompaniment is a mood and a movement. It creates a mood, just as the play of lights in a theatrical performance disposes us to an upcoming scene; it is also a movement, since a musical accompaniment is ongoing—it was there from the start and continues as we go. Reading and incorporating “history” in the manner of accompaniment, as the diachronicity of language and

experience suggests, is to recognise that the theatre of human action changes actors and scenery, scores, and tunes, but the theatre is one where we can, precisely through our language and experience, meet all historical times and actors. The diachronicity of language and experience emphasises the unity of then and now, but as accompaniment it recognises that the “now” is in the “then” and that the “then” is in the “now”; the past can only speak when today is seen there, and if today is seen there, the past has insight for the ever-new today.

5.5: Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been to listen to what essentialism and anachronism say by presenting a view of language and of experience that displays the unity of past and present, especially in our encounter and response to tradition, which constitutes the experience of historical artefacts. The first section talked about the all-encompassing nature of language, in the sense that we are found in its movement as a “we” even before wanting to speak or understand anything at all. It highlighted that language not only effects our understanding but mediates our historical nature; in our speech, past and present are united in the “now” of our communicative world. The special nature of the kind of temporality that is manifested—the indwelling or tarrying in what addresses us—is crucial in this union of past and present because it highlights the conversational or dialogical movement that discloses the union of before and after, past and present, through our language.

The notion of experience, and in particular the hermeneutic experience (which is the experience of tradition), was emphasised as the experience of a Thou. One of the implications of experiencing tradition as a Thou is that to objectify tradition is to break the moral bond with it. To treat the translation that tradition is as the description of an object (tradition) by a subject (myself) destroys tradition’s address and meaning. This chapter has sought to discern, through the critical objectification of tradition that essentialism and anachronism are used in, intimations of a real issue. Essentialism and anachronism describe inadequately a real problem—they do observe problematic aspects of how we think and interact with tradition, but the negative solution they propose is inadequate. Rejecting the practices these notions speak of does not address the actual issues. Notions shift their meaning over time, and our speaking is anachronistic. But if I reject anachronism and essentialism, and yet continue to speak anachronistically and use the essential meaning of my words to perform my rejection, there may be a problem with my method. The fact that our speech about the past happens in hindsight speaks of an essential connection between past and present. Rejecting “essentialism” and

“anachronism” does not wrestle with this fact but it avoids it by critique. Essentialism and anachronism, alongside with complexity, miss the goal of awaking us to our truly historical being if deployed primarily as critical historico-methodological categories.

This chapter concluded with the synchronicity and diachronicity of language and experience. These are ways of encouraging positive approaches that allow us to think within our historicity. They are potential wings for a hermeneutics of tradition. The one speaks of the unity of past and present already operative whenever I speak or experience anything at all, and the other speaks of the semantic approach to history, attending at how people have experienced and still experience the world, realising the commonality of past and present.

The following chapter (six) tries to show the various layers that philosophical hermeneutics opens, before, in the final chapter (seven), giving examples of work already available that moves along the lines suggested by a hermeneutics of tradition. Chapter six listens to some of the main critiques of philosophical hermeneutics, showing their validity insofar as they point to real interrogations of philosophical hermeneutics. It shows that philosophical hermeneutics suggests that historiography is a political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological artefact, and that historiography should be understood in such a multi-layered way for it to be an unignorable thread in the web of discussions around science and religion beyond only historical interests.

Part Three

Receiving, Questioning, Sharing: Science and Religion through a
Hermeneutic of Transmission

6: Opening the “Science and Religion” Genre: The Hermeneutics of Tradition In-Between Politics, Ethics, Metaphysics, and Theology

6.0: Introduction

This chapter begins the end of the thesis (Part Three). Given that philosophical hermeneutics has been our conversation partner in the exercise of listening to what essentialism, complexity, and anachronism are saying in the science and religion historiographical literature, it is important to listen to critiques to philosophical hermeneutics. By challenging some aspects of philosophical hermeneutics, the critiques explored in this chapter also challenge in significant ways a hermeneutics of tradition and the way I am seeking to reinterpret the historiographical literature that deploys the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. The goal of this chapter is thus to show that such critiques to hermeneutics do raise questions that need addressing, and that these questions—far from undermining the pursuit for an alternative to a hermeneutic of critique—reveal layers that help us see science and religion historiographies differently. A hermeneutics of tradition is enriched by the critical questions directed towards philosophical hermeneutics, and the layers revealed by the criticisms contribute to an integration of the historiographical literature in discussions beyond the academic discipline of history.

The critiques explored in the first section of the chapter raise good questions for philosophical hermeneutics. Emilio Betti, Jürgen Habermas, and Jacques Derrida point at ambiguities, difficulties, and unspoken “givens” of philosophical hermeneutics. They all help philosophical hermeneutics clarify its universality as Gadamer saw it, alerting us—as Gadamer himself would—not to make “philosophical hermeneutics” anything beyond what it is: an opportunity for mutual understanding, to participate in conversation, and to deepen the paths of experiencing.

The second section locates philosophical hermeneutics in a horizon that opens up to political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological questionings that weave together our experience of tradition. It shows that to take the hermeneutical experience seriously involves recognising that understanding ourselves as historical is a multi-layered exercise, involving political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers. Furthermore, it argues that historiographies of science and religion—as weavers of tradition by being tellers of history—are political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological artefacts, and that they should be understood as such. Such understanding is especially necessary to be able to include these

works' insights in debates on "science and religion" that go beyond disciplinary-confined "historical" debates, and for the contours of the debates themselves to be reconsidered. Debates beyond "historical" literature need to include the actual (geographical) territories of science and religion and the bodies and peoples that give shape to "science and religion." The aspect of the "who" of today and their situation, brought about in section three through an example of the "globalising" of the "science and religion" rhetoric, constitutes an introduction to the final chapter. The next and final chapter gathers various disparate approaches from various disciplinary backgrounds (physics, theology, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, etc.) that are already walking the hermeneutics of tradition, aware of the questions their situations ask, attempting historically-informed answers.

6.1: Betti, Habermas, and Derrida: Questioning Philosophical Hermeneutics

Robert Dostal summarises three waves of criticisms against Gadamer's hermeneutics. The first wave is that of Emilio Betti, Leo Strauss, and E. D. Hirsch, followed by the second wave from Jürgen Habermas or "critical theory," and finally the infamous encounter of Derrida with Gadamer in Paris in 1981. Dostal also highlights challenges to Gadamer's specific interpretations of key figures, such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and finally appropriations of Gadamer's thought in Anglo-American figures, including Richard Rorty, Donald Davidson, John McDowell, and Charles Taylor.³⁹⁵ The criticisms range from charging Gadamer with a lack of "critical" traction of hermeneutics, seeing philosophical hermeneutics as a sort of hermeneutical naivety, to the charge of "relativism," given that a critique of method may support a rejection of "objectivity" (meaning "truth" or "correct interpretation"). Here I only deal with the larger waves Dostal speaks of, meaning Derrida, Habermas, and Betti. This section points out that Derrida, Habermas, and Betti highlight genuine points of difficulty for philosophical hermeneutics and then clarifies why this is so. Such clarifications locate hermeneutics within a multi-layered space that naturally opens up to the political, the ethical, the metaphysical, and the theological, and then to suggest that in the case of history and its writing these natural openings cannot be ignored.

³⁹⁵ Robert Dostal, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," *Oxford Bibliographies in Philosophy*, December 19, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195396577-0281>, accessed March 6, 2021. See Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) on Habermas' critique of ideology (107-38), Hirsch's intentionalism (42-72), and Rorty's new pragmatism (139-66).

6.1.0: Suspecting Dialogue's Tyranny in the Assumption of "Good Will": Jacques Derrida

Derrida's questioning of Gadamer in their discussion in Paris highlighted something that hermeneutics seems to take for granted: the *willingness* or even the putative necessity of entering into a conversation. Is this the case? Are we "naturally" willing to do so, so that the hermeneutical experience Gadamer talks about is "universal" as Gadamer says it is? There is something to this criticism. Derrida, in their encounter in Paris, "criticised" Gadamer by apparently not engaging with him. In Derrida's first response he barely referred to Gadamer's lecture, and then talked about Heidegger and Nietzsche in his second response. One cannot take for granted that "dialogue" is possible, that "conversation" is available, or even desirable. If we cannot take this for granted, what is a dialogical hermeneutics for? Derrida could be read as pointing out a kind of faith in the willingness to understand that is a prerequisite for the hermeneutical experience, or that at least without which it is severely impaired. Derrida's response to Gadamer's opening address started thus:

During the lecture and ensuing discussion yesterday evening, I began to ask myself if anything was taking place here other than improbable debates, counter-questioning, and inquiries into unfindable objects of thought—to recall some of the formulations heard. I am still asking myself this question.

We are gathered together here around Professor Gadamer. It is to him, then, that I wish to address these words, paying him the homage of a few questions.³⁹⁶

Derrida's subsequent three questions go to the core of Gadamer's thought because Derrida could be read as charging Gadamer with covertly perpetuating subjectivism by assuming as axiomatic the will (self-conscious willing) of consensus and arriving at a common understanding. Also, Derrida charges Gadamer with being a covert metaphysician due to Gadamer's focus on what experience discloses in the process of understanding.³⁹⁷ In other words, the openness Gadamer speaks of regarding experience—which effects understanding—in Derrida's eyes has no reason to show what Gadamer thinks it does, namely the truth of the matter in common understanding. Derrida says instead that it is worth asking whether it is the *interruption* of the unity of one and the other, not the continuity or "willingness" to understand

³⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 52. The original title in French was "Bonnes Volontés de Puissance (Une Réponse à Hans-Georg Gadamer)" or "Good Will to Power (A Response to Hans-Georg Gadamer)."

³⁹⁷ This charge may be a critique of an uncritical deployment of a phenomenological approach in philosophical hermeneutics, given Derrida's ambivalence towards phenomenology and his critique of the "metaphysics of presence" in Husserl. See Christopher Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 3-4. Gadamer agrees with Derrida's critique of Husserl's transcendental ego—Gadamer is also critical of Husserl on this point. See Gadamer, "Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language," 33-4.

that is the precondition of understanding. Derrida says: “Whether one speaks of consensus or of misunderstanding (as in Schleiermacher), one needs to ask whether the precondition for *Verstehen*, far from being the continuity of *rapport* (as it was described yesterday evening), is not rather the interruption of *rapport*, a certain *rapport* of interruption, the suspending of all mediation?”³⁹⁸ According to Derrida we should ask whether interruption of apparent agreement or commonality—the “suspension of all mediation”—is a precondition for understanding, rather than what we share in common or what we agree upon.

Although correctly saying that Derrida himself, in asking these questions, is trying to make himself understood,³⁹⁹ Gadamer does not address Derrida’s questioning directly—even though Gadamer is correct about Derrida’s desire to be understood through interruption. Derrida’s poignant comments resonated with me because he seemed to be voicing a familiar experience, namely the experience of being a foreigner. As a foreigner, I cannot adopt Gadamer’s dialogical or conversational mode by default. I am trying to find my own words, *myself*; I am trying not to be erased by the foreign culture and language I am in. I have even found myself *emphasising my foreignness in order to feel at home*, exaggerating whatever is left of myself that is from my culture in order to still be someone I can recognise as myself. Interestingly, I have *found* myself doing this—it is not willed self-consciously. I just realise that I am behaving in that manner, emphasising my foreignness in order to know that I have not been totally swallowed, processed, digested, totally “translated” by the foreign. Emphasising the foreign—interrupting, in other words, the understanding a foreign person or culture might have of me—is the kind of interruption Derrida suggests. It is, furthermore, purposeful and yet unwilling interruption. It does not seek primarily to understand or to be understood but *to exist*. It could even be said that what it seeks is *not* to be understood. For if “understood” then my identity has been mediated, enclosed by the understandings of the foreign, translated, or “tamed.” Derrida therefore poses a question that Gadamer does not address in depth in their meeting. Gadamer’s conversational understanding assumes that “understanding” can happen, and that indeed it is what should happen. For this to be what should happen, however, a different kind of openness may be necessary. In the simplest terms, raising the question “*can we talk?*” not only needs answering before Gadamer’s larger project may be adopted consciously, but it reveals the gradient of conversation—of understanding. By gradient I simply mean the geometrical notion of a slope in a coordinate plane, containing both

³⁹⁸ Derrida, “Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer,” 53.

³⁹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reply to Jacques Derrida,” in Michelfelder, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 55-7.

steepness and direction. A zero-gradient line (a horizontal line) could represent Gadamer's understanding: an equanimity of one and the other, immersed in the back-and-forth of finding an understanding. What Derrida could be seen as pointing out is that no conversation is like that: the gradient is rarely zero; there are always varying inclinations (think of a seesaw). Our personal experiential being is always *not* identical to another—no difference is real if we are all “equal”—so our conversing is inclined and inclining. But inclined in what direction(s)? Gadamer perhaps would say that the direction emerges in relation to coming to an understanding of a subject matter.⁴⁰⁰ The direction is something that happens in-between the dialogue partners, who already, in recognising each other as a Thou, share an understanding.⁴⁰¹ But may the “subject matter” disrupt the dialogic model? Speaking one's native language not to be understood, behaving (purposefully) against common understanding—or, rather, resisting what may be thought of as an imposed “common understanding”—are these not evidence that interruption, disruption, and not commonality, is what births understanding? Or is interruption, in breaking in and breaking up, already saying something?

What Gadamer highlights about Derrida's questioning is this: Derrida is already *asking* something. He is already in the hermeneutic experience, seeking to make himself understood, even if the message is “let the other be other,” which Gadamer agrees with and emphasises. Gadamer does not assume the subsuming of the other in oneself or vice versa as precondition of dialogue: whatever is said “is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors.”⁴⁰² Gadamer agrees with Derrida's broad point but in missing the sticking point of Derrida's remark he does not clarify how interruption also constitutes the hermeneutic experience. Three years after his encounter with Derrida, in a letter to Fred Dallmayr, Gadamer says: “Is there not in hermeneutics—for all its efforts to recognize otherness as otherness, the other as other, the work of art as a blow [*Stoß*], the breach as breach, the unintelligible as unintelligible—too much conceded to reciprocal understanding and mutual agreement?”⁴⁰³ An interruption creates or transforms the context of understanding; it shifts suddenly the focus of the subject matter or even shifts subject matters altogether. The breaking in of something new, the unexpected appearance of the other, however, still *says* something; it transforms the hermeneutic world by coming into it.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 375, and 386-7.

⁴⁰¹ Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem,” in Linge, 7-8.

⁴⁰² Gadamer, *T&M*, 386.

⁴⁰³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Letter to Dallmayr,” in Michelfelder, *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, 97.

⁴⁰⁴ For Gadamer's continuous engagement with Derrida see Gadamer, “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” 102-13; “Hermeneutics and Logocentrism,” 114-25.

6.1.1: Suspecting Conservatism in the Absence of Critique: Jürgen Habermas

Habermas' criticism of Gadamer may be interpreted along lines that are not too far from what Derrida has in mind (and Gadamer recognises this).⁴⁰⁵ Habermas is concerned about Gadamer's emphasis on agreement. Such emphasis seems to give "tradition" a dangerously uncritical authority. Tradition's "truth" may be based on forced and not on genuine agreement. Habermas says, responding to Gadamer's clarification of his own position, that there is "reason to assume that the background consensus of established traditions and of language-games may be a forced consensus which resulted from pseudo-communication, this may be so not only in the individual, pathological case of disturbed family systems, but also societal systems."⁴⁰⁶ Decades after their debate, when commemorating Gadamer's one-hundredth birthday in 2000, Habermas ends his essay thus:

In [Gadamer's] view, philosophical statements, in a non-metaphorical sense, can as little be "true" or "false" as poetic utterances. Philosophical texts and theories are understood by Gadamer as self-referential constructs that "miss" not the facts, but rather "themselves" alone; that is, they can become powerless or "fall into empty sophistry." Thus an image of "genuine" philosophizing arises, according to which the rhetorical power of linguistic disclosure of the world has already outstripped the revisionist power of the better argument.

Must the truth not be given the latitude to make an appeal, if we are to be able to learn something in our dealings with it? When the serpent of philosophy narcissistically rolls itself up for an eternal heart-to-heart dialogue with itself, the world's instructive refutation dies away unheard.⁴⁰⁷

Habermas can be connected to Derrida through Habermas' question of the appeal of truth. This appeal sounds like the rupture Derrida talks about. There seems to be little of rupture, little of refutation in what Habermas refers to as philosophy's narcissism, its eternal dialogue with itself. Habermas is raising his old critique against philosophical hermeneutics.⁴⁰⁸ In Georgia Warnke's words, Habermas thinks that "philosophical hermeneutics lacks an adequate

⁴⁰⁵ Gadamer, "Letter to Dallmayr," 97.

⁴⁰⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," reproduced in full in Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 208.

⁴⁰⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "After Historicism, Is Metaphysics Still Possible? On Hans-Georg Gadamer's 100th Birthday," in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Bruce Krajewski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 20.

⁴⁰⁸ The original critique appeared first in a supplement volume to the journal *Philosophische Rundschau* (which Gadamer founded) in 1967, published in book form in 1970 as *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. See esp. 143-70, and 171-5.

recognition of the possibility of rational deficits in tradition's development."⁴⁰⁹ Given that, as the previous chapters showed, tradition *lives* in language and it is language that performs understanding, Habermas' suspicion amounts to asking about the possibility of language's capacity to "self-correct." Habermas is suspicious of "the capacity of understanding in natural languages to reflect on possible systematic deformations internal to them."⁴¹⁰ Thus, Habermas argues that the social sciences do not have to operate under this "internalist" (to give it a name) view of tradition and language. What is the alternative, however? Habermas critiques Gadamer's emphasis on prejudices and the authority of tradition, although Habermas hears all this with the ear of the Enlightenment. For Habermas, reason and authority are invariably in opposition and this means that reason and tradition are also invariably in opposition since tradition is a source of authority. "If, then, such opposition between authority and reason does in fact exist, as the Enlightenment has always claimed, and if it cannot be superseded by hermeneutic means, it follows that the attempt to impose fundamental restrictions upon the interpreter's commitment to enlightenment becomes problematic."⁴¹¹ Habermas' appeal to psychoanalysis—noting that Gadamer's hermeneutics seems to be unable to escape what could be an "entrapment" of tradition⁴¹²—has the same intent: to show that philosophical hermeneutics cannot secure "enlightenment." But what is "enlightenment"? In Habermas' critique of Gadamer it is emancipation from any form of forced consensus that has been "traditioned." Here, I think, lies the sticking point of Habermas' critique: since tradition can conceal forced consensus, a form of domination which takes shape through pathological communication, then, for Habermas, philosophical hermeneutics needs to be superseded by critique of ideology. Philosophical hermeneutics, Habermas might say, stops in "consensus"—in agreement. Critique of ideology, on the other hand, pierces these seemingly consensual agreements, seeking out "remaining natural-historical traces of distorted communication which are still contained even within fundamental agreements and recognized legitimations."⁴¹³

Habermas' concern seems legitimate: how do we distinguish between insight and delusion in tradition? The problem is that the question is: how do we distinguish between insight and delusion if any measure or "rule" is graspable only through tradition? Even if there

⁴⁰⁹ Georgia Warnke, "Hermeneutics and Critical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Michael N. Forster and Kristin Gjesdal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 246.

⁴¹⁰ Warnke, "Hermeneutics and Critical Theory," 246.

⁴¹¹ Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 208.

⁴¹² Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," 189-203. It can also be found in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1997), 300-312.

⁴¹³ Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," 208-9.

were an “external measure,” the only way for us to “get it” is from within. Habermas is seeking for a “regulative principle of rational discourse”⁴¹⁴ which *a priori* determines or “secures” what *can be truth* in tradition. Critique of ideology—depth hermeneutics, a hermeneutics of structural issues—seeks thus “a theory which would enable us to deduce the principle of rational discourse from the logic of everyday language and regard it as the necessary regulative for any actual discourse, however distorted it may be.”⁴¹⁵ Habermas knows that such a priori regulative principle is connected to tradition: “The right of reflection requires that the hermeneutic approach limit itself. It requires a system of reference that transcends the context of tradition as such. Only then can tradition be criticized as well. But how is such a system of reference to be legitimated in turn except through the appropriation of tradition?”⁴¹⁶ Even if there were such a system of reference that transcends the context of tradition it would need appropriation. It would need to be interiorised. It would need to become an “inside.” Habermas’ “system of reference” that “transcends” tradition implies that philosophical hermeneutics becomes critique of ideology.⁴¹⁷ At this point it is worth saying that Habermas’ reading of Gadamer understands the notion of “tradition” in a very limited way. Habermas says even “linguistic tradition,” connecting his understanding of language to tradition, thereby narrowing the notion of tradition.⁴¹⁸ For Gadamer “tradition” is alive in our language—it is more like a process—and “language” is the dynamic relation of being addressed and responding to what addresses us. Anything that speaks to us is included here: art, culture, institutions, texts, people, our own thoughts, etc. This makes the notion of “language” (and of “tradition”) bewilderingly broad, so to a methodologically interested thinker such as Habermas this notion is perhaps absurd or not useful. Habermas limits language (and hence hermeneutics) to “natural language” which is the words and non-distorted communication we speak through our spoken tongues.⁴¹⁹ “The area of applicability of hermeneutics,” he says, “is congruent with the limits of normal everyday speech, as long as pathological cases are excluded.”⁴²⁰ Gadamer includes Habermas’ “natural language” in what “language” is, but language is primarily conversation—speaking and being spoken to. It is not limited to the words or our mother tongues or “natural language”

⁴¹⁴ Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,” 208.

⁴¹⁵ Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,” 206-7.

⁴¹⁶ Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 170.

⁴¹⁷ Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 172.

⁴¹⁸ Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,” 203. See Stephen Prickett, *Modernity and the Reinvention of Tradition: Backing into the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9-10. Gadamer’s use of the notion of tradition could be better understood if seen to reflect the Platonic *Paradosis*: a matter of oral dialectic, face-to-face question and answer.

⁴¹⁹ Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,” 181-211 uses the term throughout.

⁴²⁰ Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality,” 191.

alone but, we could say, is the play of *attention*: the play between our attention and what evokes it.

It is worth noting that both Gadamer and Habermas are treading metaphysical-theological terrains. They are both seeking to discern what is real, what is truth, etc. In Gadamer's case he thinks that it becomes present through our involvement. By being addressed and responding to an address I come to participate in truth, for example in the experience of tradition through language or in the work of art. Habermas is seeking external rational parameters to ensure the truth, given the risk of breakdown in communication. Both Habermas and Gadamer make use of the transcendent, using the unknown as if known, although both (maybe Habermas more than Gadamer) may be reluctant to admit it.⁴²¹ Habermas deploys it through the need of an *a priori* regulative principle that filters what is genuine consensus (and what can be true in tradition), and Gadamer assumes its immanent involvement and manifestation from within. Gadamer said in fact in one of his last interviews at the biblical age of 102 that philosophical hermeneutics was a search for transcendence.⁴²²

Habermas highlights the critical element into which, according to him, hermeneutics must become. As Richard Bernstein notes, however, Habermas highlights what is already there in Gadamer.⁴²³ Habermas' hermeneutical insights are not at the limit or beyond but possible only through his engagement with and belonging to tradition. How does one gain a "critical distance" if only through engagement and belonging? What is an *a priori* regulative principle if not an agreement on what is or is not emancipatory? Here Habermas confirms philosophical hermeneutics and emphasises something that it takes for granted and which should be kept emphasised, especially in political discourse, which is Habermas' interest.⁴²⁴ At the same time, as Mueller-Vollmer says, echoing other commentators, it must be said that the difference

⁴²¹ See Habermas' subsequent work: Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); *Postmetaphysical Thinking II*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017). In Gadamer's case the transcendent is the *ignoramus*, our not knowing which is our *finitude*, which is our horizon for transcendence, and it involves the recognition of our limitation. Within this limitation he sees beauty, art, and language as ways in which the transcendent or the infinite is within the finite, therefore we may experience it in them. See on the transcendent, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy," in Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader*, 110; "Metaphysics and Transcendence," in *A Century of Philosophy*, 72-80. For his comments on art, beauty, and language see Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 45; "The Phenomenological Movement," 172.

⁴²² Jens Zimmermann, "Ignoramus: Gadamer's 'Religious Turn'," *Symposium* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 203-17, <https://doi.org/10.5840/symposium20026219>.

⁴²³ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 224. Bernstein weaves together the insights of Gadamer, Habermas, Rorty, and Arendt to propose the fostering of dialogical communities (223-31).

⁴²⁴ Gadamer clarifies his position and responds to Habermas' work in his essay "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology," in Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 274-92. Gadamer's essay is also found as "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 18-43.

between Gadamer's and Habermas' positions "in regard to fundamental hermeneutical notions [...] becomes almost negligible once we have penetrated to the roots of the arguments presented in their public exchange."⁴²⁵ Grondin also suggests that Habermas and Gadamer share a fundamental agreement regarding the primacy of dialogical understanding—a key aspect of philosophical hermeneutics—especially seen in their “common front with which both meet the challenge of deconstruction and neohistorical postmodernism.”⁴²⁶

Ricœur's comment on the debate might be a relevant closing. He says that the distinction between hermeneutics and critical theory is important, even though critique is shown to be itself tradition—within the hermeneutic experience, as was just argued. But without erasing the differences between philosophical hermeneutics and critical theory, “it is the task of philosophical reflection to eliminate deceptive antinomies which would oppose the interest in the reinterpretation of cultural heritages received from the past and the interest in the futuristic projections of a liberated humanity.”⁴²⁷ Habermas' critique of Gadamer exposes the difficulties in both Gadamer's hopeful hermeneutics (since it relies at bottom on the existence of common understanding) and Habermas' critical rationality. Habermas' a priori regulative principle deliberates over tradition—thereby objectifying tradition—without realising that any “regulative principle” is also “traditioned” and, therefore, open to the objections it levers against philosophical hermeneutics. Remaining with Ricœur, therefore, assures us productive ground: considering Habermas' and Gadamer's different starting points serves us to note that their collisions show both tensions and deep affinities, useful for reinterpreting their work for the common good. Clearly one can draw from Habermasian critique to emphasise what hermeneutics does not emphasise (but which certainly assumes and endorses), without forgetting one's own embeddedness in the very nature of critique.

6.1.2: Suspecting Relativism in the Absence of Method: Emilio Betti

Emilio Betti's concern may be related to Habermas' critique. It could be called the issue of “external verification” of truth. Truth, in Habermas' (and Betti's) eyes, may be seen as methodologically-arrived-at objectivity, and anything that endangers it is suspicious. By making hermeneutics “philosophical” Gadamer may be seen as challenging the utility or even

⁴²⁵ Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, “Language, Mind, and Artifact: An Outline of Hermeneutic Theory Since the Enlightenment,” in Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, 41.

⁴²⁶ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 135.

⁴²⁷ Ricœur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” 60.

primacy of method in the humanities and social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). If understanding is not primarily “methodological” and thus “method” is not the “measure” of truth, what is? For Gadamer “method” is not the motor of understanding, but he never rejects it as a tool of science (*Wissenschaft*). Betti’s critique is important, however, because it emphasises the question of normativity and objectivity.⁴²⁸ Betti’s concern misses Gadamer’s point about understanding—that it is an event that happens to us. But he misses Gadamer’s point because affirming what Gadamer does might curtail the concreteness of hermeneutics. Although Gadamer is clear that there is no quarrel against method, Gadamer *is* against any alleged methodological primacy for understanding. Legal or theological hermeneutics are no exception because the question of the meaning of texts is always conditioned primarily not by how they are interpreted but by the hermeneutical situation.⁴²⁹ The proper manner of interpretation does not arise solely from the text—even if the question is a “historical” one: “how *were* these texts interpreted” or “what *did* they mean in their context”? Such questions arise in and through a historical moment. The historicity of the questioner cannot be ignored. Gadamer asks: “What is an *historical* fact? It is obvious that an historical fact is not, in the first place, merely something that really happened, but rather, something that really happened in such a way that it has a special signification for an historical question, an historical context.”⁴³⁰ But Betti still has a point:

The obvious difficulty with the hermeneutical method proposed by Gadamer seems to lie, for me, in that it enables a substantive agreement between text and reader—i.e., between the apparently easily accessible meaning of a text and the subjective conception of the reader—to be formed without, however, guaranteeing the correctness of understanding, for that it would be necessary that the understanding arrived at corresponded fully to the meaning underlying the text as an objectivation of mind. Only then would the objectivity of the result be guaranteed on the basis of a reliable process of interpretation.⁴³¹

Betti understands Gadamer as providing a “method,” which Gadamer is not. Still, Betti is not simply misreading Gadamer. Hermeneutics is a *practice*, so Betti could be read as asking “how does Gadamer help the interpreter interpret well?” Betti’s emphasis on the “objectivity of the result” would not be rejected by Gadamer, nor would the idea of a “reliable process of interpretation.” The deeper tension between Betti and Gadamer is, coinciding here with

⁴²⁸ Emilio Betti, “Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*,” in Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics*, 76-84.

⁴²⁹ Gadamer, *T&M*, Part Two, II.II, 318-50, esp. 334-50.

⁴³⁰ Gadamer and Risser, “Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences,” 76 (author’s italics).

⁴³¹ Betti, “Hermeneutics as the General Methodology,” 79.

Habermas' critique, that Betti assumes that what is most real—the truth of the subject-matter—needs to be “guaranteed,” less by continual personal participation and more by correctness derived by methodology. To ask again: how does Gadamer help the interpreter in need of “method”? He helps by noting that whatever “understanding” is available, it happens when the reader deepens her participation (with the text) and recognises her hermeneutic situation and the text as a part of it. Recognising the hermeneutic situation—historically effected consciousness—involves the recognition of what the *right* questions are.⁴³² The situation precedes the methods and gives them their validity. In legal hermeneutics the situation is mostly assumed, but this only makes Gadamer's insight more acute. A legal case is the beginning and end of how the specific texts are to be interpreted: it gives the laws their voice for that specific situation. A text must *address* us if we are to understand anything of it. If the text does not “address” me, there is no understanding, whatever “interpretation” is being attempted. In the legal case the addresses of the text are enabled, oriented by and to, the legal situation.

Admittedly, these observations are not methodological advice to be “applied” in a hermeneutical process. The gross misuse of texts and the urgency of the situation—legal or theological—does press upon us a wish for a “recipe” for interpretation, but this misses the nature of our knowing and understanding. The scholar may know the languages, grammar, and philological tools, the history, archaeology, even ethnology of the texts investigated. He may follow the rules by attending to the kind of text dealt with and exegete it based on these and on the knowledge mentioned. Does this not obtain an “objective” interpretation? It may yield something “objective,” but this does not mean that the interpreter has understood anything of what the text says. He may understand a lot *about* the text, but its meaning may still be beyond his grasp because what has addressed the interpreter has been less the text and more the scholarly objectivised constructions *around* the text. It should be clear that the surroundings of the text matter and they clearly allow insight. But “insight” into what? Given that the surroundings of the text have their own voice, they speak “by themselves” as well. They are a subject-matter in themselves. But if we are talking about interpreting *the text*, the surroundings speak with the text only insofar as the text speaks. The scholarly-constructed interpretation may even be meaningfully related to the text's meaning, to such an extent that if someone else is addressed by the text, this scholarly “objective” interpretation may illuminate and enrich. And yet, the one who understands the text is someone to whom the text has spoken in a

⁴³² Gadamer, *T&M*, 312; 349-50.

particular situation. The scholar may have created a helpful device for others, despite himself not having conversed with, and thereby understood little of, the text.⁴³³ The legal text is again a good example: the understanding of a legal text is proportional to its speaking—its direct relevance—to the legal situation.

6.1.3: Hermeneutics and its Political, Ethical, Metaphysical, and Theological Threads

The critiques seen so far may be summarised as follows. Derrida critiques an assumed trust in the willingness to find common ground and decries the underemphasis of interruption; Habermas is concerned about the communicative malformations that hinder understanding in tradition; and Betti critiques Gadamer due to the underemphasis of methodological concreteness for proper interpretation in philosophical hermeneutics (seen as a “method”). These are important hermeneutical issues. A main connection between them is the problem of truth assuming no external interruption, no external parameters, or no external method—the problem of truth as inevitably traditioned.

The concerns that drive these objections to hermeneutics are varied. For Derrida, the assumption of good will is suspicious—it seems to swallow (so to speak) the otherness of the other in an assumed, putative commonality. Hermeneutics also feels, for Derrida, too much like the metaphysics of presence he critiques in Husserl’s phenomenology. In Habermas’ case he thinks that, as we saw, *a priori* “systems of reference” should impose “rational” parameters for communicating correctly. Critique of ideology is then the goal of hermeneutics. Betti is concerned with emphasising how methodological rigour may yield a correct “objective” interpretation of a text, and how philosophical hermeneutics may be seen as challenging this methodological imperative. The common thread of the experience of communication—of understanding—in its multi-faceted nature highlights, again, the question of tradition. As the previous chapters showed, tradition is language. Tradition is the fabric of our orientation to understand (our pre-judgements) and as language it disappears when it is “working” and it sharply comes to our awareness when otherness addresses us, even though “otherness” addresses us always through what is already familiar to us.

The following section contends that the many layers that seem to be weaved in the notion of tradition may be seen as political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers. For example, with Habermas’ critique I mentioned how philosophical hermeneutics (alongside

⁴³³ See Gadamer’s response to Betti, “Supplement I: Hermeneutics and Historicism,” in *T&M*, 528-67, esp. 532-35.

critique of ideology) is entangled with transcendence, highlighting the metaphysical and theological dimension. Also, given Habermas' suggestion of hermeneutics as critique of ideology, there are clearly political and ethical implications of hermeneutics. Derrida's questioning, impinging on common understanding, highlights both the ethical and political dimensions. Also, by challenging a metaphysics of presence, it is a rejection (and hence a proposal) of a particular kind of metaphysics. Betti's objections can also be read as metaphysical and ethical. Determining a "correct" meaning with a procedure already implies a certain kind of objectivising relation with the (textual) other. In Gadamer's language, if texts—as tradition—speak as a Thou, what kind of address is the address of a Thou? If indeed tradition addresses us as a Thou, textual addresses as instances of tradition are a *moral* experience. Hermeneutics as Gadamer conceives it is a moral experience because it is always personal: and that means ethos-bound-and-born.⁴³⁴

The following section highlights these layers as present not just in philosophical hermeneutics but in the hermeneutic experience—the experience of tradition—that shapes the writing and reading of history. I suggest therefore that historiographies—as agents of traditioning—are political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological artefacts, and that they should be considered as such for them to be integrated in wider interdisciplinary approaches, not reduced to the genres of "history of science and religion" or "science and religion." The experience of tradition—below highlighted through the notion of common sense—is a way of acknowledging the political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological nature of our tellings and retellings of history.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 366.

⁴³⁵ The multi-layered nature of "history" and hence of historiography is no novelty, but we always need reminders. See Donald Bloxham, *History and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) arguing that our moral faculties are never disengaged when studying (and writing) history. For the inevitability of thinking philosophically for historians of ideas see Adrian Blau, "Meanings and Understandings in the History of Ideas," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 14, no. 2 (July 2020): 232-56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18722636-12341441>, even though the distinction Blau makes between intended and extended meaning is hermeneutically questionable. For the deeply metaphysical—and hence experience-bound and personal—nature of "history" and of historiographical practice see Oliver R. Scholz, "Philosophy of History: Metaphysics and Epistemology," chap. 11 in *Explanation in the Special Sciences: The Case of Biology and History*, ed. Marie I. Kaiser, Oliver R. Scholz, Daniel Plenge, and Andreas Hüttemann (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 245-53; David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). For an introduction to the field of history mindful of the multi-layered nature of its subject-matter, which includes the historian, see Kenneth Bartlett, *The Experience of History* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017). See also Donald Bloxham, *Why History? A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), tracing the development of western understandings of the study of the past and the uses of such studies. Aware of the porous and blurry nature of history of ideas and history of philosophy (and of history and philosophy), see Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, "Introduction," in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1-14. For the enmeshed nature of history, philosophy, ethics, politics, and theology see Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism, and Liberation Theology*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Rowman &

At this point is worth reminding the reader how chapter three already alluded to the presence of the political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological in philosophical hermeneutics. It is not just from engagements with Derrida, Habermas, Betti (and others) that philosophical hermeneutics touches on political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological sensibilities. Philosophical hermeneutics in itself is already oriented towards these concerns and it becomes a helpful tool to see the ways in which the hermeneutic experience itself foregrounds political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers. Such layers can then be explored in all intellectual pursuits where the hermeneutic experience is central. Indeed, the goal of the following section is to observe that, since historiographical work arises from the hermeneutic experience, historiography can be fruitfully approached with political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological concerns. The experience of receiving and passing on historical texts, precisely by writing historical texts, is the ground of political and ethical deliberation, and is the ground of metaphysical and theological speculation.

6.2: The Hermeneutic Experience as a Political, Ethical, Metaphysical, and Theological Experience

Philosophical hermeneutics seeks to stay clear of putative metaphysical or theological conclusions, even though it is both metaphysical and theological. If one takes philosophical hermeneutics seriously, metaphysics and theology must be seen as practices that respond to how we palpably and vividly experience reality. Philosophical hermeneutics, therefore, opens a way to a metaphysics that is not what his teacher Heidegger called “ontotheology.”⁴³⁶ Heidegger’s critique of “metaphysics as ontotheology” involved reading the history of

Littlefield, 2003). For the theological and metaphysical nature of “history” and its relevance for reading the Christian Scriptures—and the theological and metaphysical relevance of what he calls the “figural” reading of Christian Scripture to understanding “history”—see Ephraim Radner, *Time and Word: Figural Reading of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016). The whole genre of “political theology” attests also to the enmeshing of politics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology to produce “history” and to how “history” is political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological. Noting the intermingling of conceptions of (linear) time, theology, and politics, see Maxwell Kennel, *Postsecular History: Political Theology and the Politics of Time* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). For a direct challenge to personalistic notions of the absolute—directly challenging certain hybrids between Greek and Jewish thought (that is, currents of western Christian thought)—and the implications for political and ethical thought, see Emanuele Castrucci, *On the Idea of Potency: Juridical and Theological Roots of the Western Cultural Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

⁴³⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Phänomenologie, Hermeneutik, Metaphysik,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Band 10, Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 10, 108 (*GW* 10 hereafter); “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 25, no. 2 (May 1994): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.1994.11007054>. See for an exploration of Heidegger’s dismantling of western metaphysics as ontotheology, Iain Thomson, “Ontotheology? Understanding Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of Metaphysics,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 8, no. 3 (2000): 297-327, <https://doi.org/10.1080/096725500750039291>.

metaphysics as a progressive forgetfulness of being. Ontotheology, in fact, effects the forgetfulness of being. Ontotheology is the name of a particular kind of metaphysics. It is the “metaphysics of presence” that Derrida criticises in Husserl. As Judith Wolfe notes, Heidegger’s ontotheology assigns three interrelated roles to God: God as the *summum ens* or the highest or fullest being; God as the *causa prima* or the first cause; and God as the *summum bonum* or the sum and source of value.⁴³⁷ For Heidegger, Wolfe notes, “this threefold understanding of God” is “pernicious both as a philosophical and as a theological construct.”⁴³⁸ Such “God” is an abstraction, a dead representation of human thought, an idol, and such theological critique of the metaphysics of God has direct effects on metaphysics’ exploration of the question of being.⁴³⁹ Gadamer, it must be said, also wants to leave stultified versions of Greek metaphysics behind;⁴⁴⁰ but since his reading of the history of metaphysics does not depart from the theological problem that Heidegger poses, Gadamer can see his own work as congenial with metaphysics, not against it or needing to overcome it. But what kind of metaphysics could philosophical hermeneutics open the way to?⁴⁴¹ How might philosophical hermeneutics allow us to ask again the question of what it means to be? Through the notion of *sensus communis* we might begin to point towards an answer.

6.2.0: The Unity of Politics, Ethics, Metaphysics, and Theology in Philosophical Hermeneutics: *Sensus Communis*

Philosophical hermeneutics is experiential metaphysics: it is an attempt to elaborate the meaning of the “to be” as we walk the path of experiencing. Akin to William Desmond’s metaphysical thinking, philosophical hermeneutics encourages thinking in and from the “between” of things. “Metaphysical thinking is precipitated in the between,” Desmond notes, since we “find ourselves in the midst of beings.”⁴⁴² Hermeneutic philosophy—as a path of experiencing—is to be mindful of “the continued resistance and persistence of certain flexible unities in the life we all share, unities which perdure in the large and small forms of our fellow-human being-with-each-other.”⁴⁴³ Gadamer’s language of commonality (“flexible unities in

⁴³⁷ Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 140.

⁴³⁸ Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 140.

⁴³⁹ Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 141.

⁴⁴⁰ Gadamer, “Towards a Phenomenology of Ritual and Language,” 34.

⁴⁴¹ See Paul Tyson, “Plato against Ontotheology,” in *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter M. Chandler, Jr (London: SCM Press, 2007), 393-412, for a Platonic answer to this question, mindful of Heidegger’s ontotheological critique.

⁴⁴² William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 5.

⁴⁴³ Gadamer, “*Destruktion* and Deconstruction,” 109.

the life we all share”) and community (“forms of fellow-human being-with-each-other”) echoes the notion of *sensus communis*, and alongside it, the entire humanistic tradition he summons in his first chapter of *Truth and Method* (*humanitas*, from Cicero to the Renaissance humanists and Vico and Shaftesbury). *Truth and Method*’s first chapter, it is worth recalling, discusses key notions of the humanistic tradition such as taste, judgement, *bildung* (culture, formation), and *sensus communis* and their relevance to the humanities. Among others (like Shaftesbury and Oetinger), he reads Giambattista Vico in relation to *sensus communis*, discussing the deeply moral, intellectual, political, and metaphysical nature of the concept.⁴⁴⁴ *Sensus communis*, following Vico in the tradition of classical and Renaissance rhetoric which Gadamer self-consciously draws from, is not simply “common sense.” In the words of John Schaeffer, Vico conceives *sensus communis* as “a consensus of value and meaning that lies deeply imbedded in the culture, institutions, and language of a community.”⁴⁴⁵ Thus, *sensus communis* encompasses the commonality (ethics) of a community and its institutions (politics), and their capacity to communicate (language) meaningfully and coherently (metaphysics and religion).

Donald Phillip Verene, for example, notes that for Vico, providence “is nothing more in one sense than that there is truly a *sensus communis* of the human race—a fundamental structure of the human being that, when fully understood, shows that there is a divine structure present in the human world.” This connection between providence and *sensus communis*, Verene says, is “something that Gadamer ignores.”⁴⁴⁶ Gadamer’s partial response to Verene is that he does not ignore this connection but it is brought to bear in his notion of linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*).⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, if Gadamer does justice to the universal notion of *sensus communis* as applying to the entire human race through his notion of linguisticity, this presumably would indicate that he has subsumed or immanentised providence within his notion of language, and thus, his notion of *tradition* also carries the weight of providence. Verene’s observations and the wider meaning of *sensus communis* allow us to note that philosophical hermeneutics has a clear political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological fabric. The notion of *sensus communis* is an example of a reality that is deformed beyond recognition if considered as political but not theological, ethical but not metaphysical. To re-articulate the kind of

⁴⁴⁴ Gadamer, *T&M*, 18-32.

⁴⁴⁵ John Schaeffer, *Giambattista Vico on Natural Law: Religion, Rhetoric, and Sensus Communis* (Oxford: Routledge, 2019), 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Donald Phillip Verene, “Gadamer and Vico on *Sensus Communis* and the Tradition of Humane Knowledge,” in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 145.

⁴⁴⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reply to Donald Phillip Verene,” in Hahn, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 155.

metaphysics hermeneutics allows: it is a metaphysics that flows from the *sensus communis*; it is a metaphysics that responds to the sense that arises within communities and that continually renews the sense of what is common.

A question, however, arises from Verene's observations and the religious nature of the notion of *sensus communis*. What is the relationship between philosophical hermeneutics and theology or religion? Gadamer's approach to theological matters may be inherited from his teacher's forceful reaction to (and intertwinement with) religion and theology. When he was in his late forties Gadamer even felt that writing was generally "a torment" because "I had the terrible feeling that Heidegger was standing behind me and looking over my shoulder."⁴⁴⁸ Gadamer perhaps inherits the theological nudge from the early Heidegger that philosophy is atheistic,⁴⁴⁹ evidenced in the "method" of phenomenology in the "phenomenological hermeneutics of facticity"⁴⁵⁰ as Heidegger called his early project of a fundamental ontology, inspired incidentally by St. Paul.⁴⁵¹ In the very first document that Gadamer read of Heidegger, Heidegger observes that saying that philosophy is "atheistic" in nature means: "keeping itself free from the temptations of that kind of concern and apprehension that only talks glibly about religiosity. Could it be that the very idea of a philosophy of religion, and especially if it does not take into account the facticity of human being, is pure nonsense?"⁴⁵² This "atheism" is a form of "methodological apophaticism" in philosophy with regards to seemingly "theological" matters, based on puzzlement over and a deep connection to theological language and what it attempts to articulate. It may be that Gadamer inherits this methodological apophaticism from Heidegger, although Gadamer's approach would perhaps be more "traditional." I mean that, being a westerner who does not belong to the Church, he would still understand himself as doing philosophy within the western Christian tradition (in a predominantly Protestant context), without drawing on "revelation" and yet reappropriating the western metaphysical tradition. Such an approach, it must be said, assumes a kind of philosophy and theology that grants the reason-revelation dichotomy.⁴⁵³ This approach can be seen in a relatively early essay

⁴⁴⁸ Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey," 15.

⁴⁴⁹ Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle," in *Supplements*, 193. For Heidegger's theological roots in medieval Catholic theology and his turn to Protestantism and how they pervade his thought and concepts see Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*; S. J. McGrath, *The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁴⁵⁰ Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle," 121.

⁴⁵¹ Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 144-5.

⁴⁵² Heidegger, "Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle," 193.

⁴⁵³ Challenging this dichotomy and the possibilities it opens, see Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For some of the implications of considering the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as philosophical traditions, especially raising questions for biblical studies,

(1941) where Gadamer explores the proofs of God in Kant (as Kant evaluated Anselm’s “ontological proof”):

We will not direct our inquiry within the Christian Church—that is, on the ground provided by revelation—about the possibility of natural, rational knowledge of God; instead, we will pose the philosophical question about being and human Dasein. Our own philosophizing, however, leads us, as historical inquirers, back to the Christian tradition concerning the problem of God. The only philosophy we are acquainted with is that contextualized within the tradition of the Christian West. Even if it consciously divorces itself from the presuppositions of Christian theology, and even if it conceives of itself methodologically as atheistic in that respect, nevertheless its fundamental experiences, as much as the language and concepts with which it interprets them, are influenced by Western Christianity and its spiritual history.⁴⁵⁴

Such an approach would make Gadamer to carry Heidegger’s “apophatic” approach—avoiding glib “religious” talk, especially if such talk ignores human finitude—and at the same time to be committed to it only insofar as it coincides with the wider conversation that the western metaphysical and theological tradition constitutes. Gadamer could be seen as Heideggerian but also as post-Heideggerian by being pre-Heideggerian: the western metaphysical and theological tradition precedes, animates, and transcends Heidegger, and Gadamer is aware of belonging to this tradition that precedes and succeeds Heidegger. Gadamer, precisely through Heidegger’s emphasis on finitude, lets experience direct us to the infinite whenever discernible—for example in the case of beauty—moving thus beyond Heidegger’s own concerns. If metaphysical insight is dis-coverable—if what it speaks of is indeed an experience, as far as he can devise—he moves in this direction beyond Heideggerian shores. This post-Heideggerian vein makes Gadamer both more explicitly rooted in the diversity within the western philosophical and theological tradition and more relevant for reappropriating it in contemporary questionings.

Reflecting on his own phenomenological method and on his hermeneutical philosophy, Gadamer concludes that “Phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphysics are not three different philosophical standpoints but philosophising itself.”⁴⁵⁵ Hermeneutics, although both metaphysical and phenomenological, is not constrained by Husserl’s attempt to reduce

philosophy, and theology, see Dru Johnson, *Biblical Philosophy: A Hebraic Approach to the Old and New Testaments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁴⁵⁴ Gadamer, “Kant and the Question of God,” 4.

⁴⁵⁵ “Phänomenologie, Hermeneutik und Metaphysik sind nicht drei verschiedene philosophische Standpunkte, sondern Philosophieren selber.” Gadamer, “Phänomenologie, Hermeneutik, Metaphysik,” 109; “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics,” 110. See also Jean Grondin, “The Metaphysical Dimension of Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology: Figures and Themes*, ed. Saulius Geniusas and Paul Fairfield (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 125-37.

experience to anything like the transcendental ego.⁴⁵⁶ As chapter three observed, Gadamer thinks that we should dispense with forms of reductionisms, such as reducing everything to the ego or “consciousness,” that is, subjectivity. To reduce or found something on something else is to render, to quote him again, “that which is founded dependent once and for all on what provides the foundation.”⁴⁵⁷ Could we not say, however, that abandoning the pursuit of “foundations” is a metaphysical move? Is there not a “foundation,” in a non-reductive sense, in our very path of experiencing, and in the experience of tradition in particular? Our experience tells us about the world, ourselves, and what is in excess of and constituting both.⁴⁵⁸ The experience of tradition happens in-between our relationships and between the beings who make us who we are. An experiential metaphysics should give an account (*logos*) of this between (*metaxu*): philosophical hermeneutics, it could be said, is *metaxological* metaphysics.⁴⁵⁹ If an entry point for such a metaphysics is *sensus communis*, its practice relies on practical or moral knowledge (*phronesis*), or as chapter three suggested, *mindfulness*. Mindfulness is to be attentive to our experience—it is to be “directly confronted with what [we] see. It is something that [we have] to do.”⁴⁶⁰ *Phronesis* is, fundamentally, mindfulness in and of experience. It continuously hands over our contemplated abstractions to us and judges them as conforming more or less to the actual events of our existence. Carlo Diano, in his exploration of the Greek world, puts it thus: our lives happen as eventual forms, in-between form (*eidos*) and event (*tyche*).⁴⁶¹ Metaxological metaphysics, therefore, articulates the play between what is contemplated (*eidos*) and experienced (*tyche*). What happens to us is always already on the way to conceptuality, and concept is always already shaped and shaping eventuality. By thoughtful reflection on our experience—happening within communal life—we realise the multi-layered nature of the unity between being with one another and our reflection. Recalling the polyphonic nature of the notion of *sensus communis*, we see that from our communal life sense arises, and this sense shapes and partakes from the life of the

⁴⁵⁶ Gadamer, “On the Contemporary Relevance of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” 148-9.

⁴⁵⁷ Gadamer, “On the Contemporary Relevance of Husserl’s Phenomenology,” 148.

⁴⁵⁸ William Desmond, *Is There a Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), speaks of the hyperboles of being, “happenings in finitude excessive to complete finite determination, beyond objectification and subjectification; and yet about which we must think as philosophers, both as intimate and as intimating something universal; and in whose excess our unknowing love of being—and perhaps God—already blindly moves” (13). In Polanyian language it refers to what our tacit knowing “knows,” always in excess of what we can say and yet always already intimating it, being intimately moved by it.

⁴⁵⁹ See Desmond, *Being and the Between; The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

⁴⁶⁰ Gadamer, *T&M*, 324.

⁴⁶¹ See Carlo Diano, *Forma y evento*, trans. César Rendueles (Madrid: Visor, 2020). For an English translation see *Form and Event*, trans. Timothy C. Cambell and Lia Turtas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020).

community. This sense that arises moves from word to concept, but also from concept to word: the life which we share with one another is the context of our conceptual reflection and this reflection shares new life.⁴⁶² By proposing the way of mindfulness, Gadamer is at one with Husserl's notion of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*)⁴⁶³—the world constituted and opened by our experience—and he thinks he does more justice to Husserl's own thought than the reduction to the transcendental ego (encouraging thus a non-reductive reading of Husserl).⁴⁶⁴ Thoughtful practice—as Husserl himself saw—gains a new moral impetus, to be twinned with “the old impetus of a true common sense (*sensus communis*) that supports the praxis of our political humanity.”⁴⁶⁵

6.2.1: Historiographies are a Special Case of the Hermeneutic Experience and Therefore Inevitably Political, Ethical, Metaphysical, and Theological Artefacts

The point of exploring the notion of common sense in its multi-layered nature is to observe that historiographical practice—as receiving, sharing, and attempting to alter our common sense—needs to be considered as a political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological practice. Historiographies encourage or hinder thoughtful practice and shape our common sense, which is why the wider cultural, social, intellectual, and spiritual contexts of historiographies need to be judiciously considered. As the first chapters showed, most of “science and religion” talk and its associated problems have a Eurocentric ring. Eurocentrism is to be expected and needs to be included explicitly in order to open the conversation to wider relevant themes. Awareness of the cultural context, with its political, historical, metaphysical, theological, and ethical layers in writing and reading historiographies aids us to read historiographies from dominant cultures (English being the *lingua franca*) as *from* these cultures and *to* these cultures, but also as potentially helpful for other cultures, provided one understands that the very questions raised need to be seen as question-able. What are the questions that are real questions in cultural and geographical localities that are in the periphery of “western” cultures (or even within western cultures but outside of the mainstream—like indigenous cultures in Europe or Anglo-America)? The awareness of what is questionable—of what is a real question in a particular moment and place—grounds the discussions on what is important in a particular moment and

⁴⁶² Gadamer, “From Word to Concept,” 120.

⁴⁶³ Gadamer, “On the Contemporary Relevance of Husserl's Phenomenology,” 149.

⁴⁶⁴ See Dermot Moran, “Intercorporeality and Intersubjectivity: A Phenomenological Exploration of Embodiment,” in *Embodiment, Enaction, and Culture: Investigating the Constitution of the Shared World*, ed. Christoph Durt, Thomas Fuchs, and Christian Tewes (London: MIT Press, 2017), 25-46.

⁴⁶⁵ Gadamer, “On the Contemporary Relevance of Husserl's Phenomenology,” 149.

location and enriches the more well-known issues discussed in “science and religion” talk, which flow from European discussions of natural theology, natural philosophy, and natural history. Euro-Anglo-American calls for decentring scholarship from a predominantly Euro-Anglo-American-centred perspective—as we will mention below—are valid to the extent that they recognise their own locatedness.

Historiographies are a special kind of metaphysical and theological exploration of reality that speaks to us today with the voice of the past, always already pursuing a future (an *ideal*), even when apparently not giving its opinions on it. Following the comments above on the kind of experiential metaphysics that hermeneutics encourages, it also follows that historiographies are ethical and political explorations of reality. They present a certain ideal of human experience and thus have a certain “tone of voice” regarding the kind of past we seem to need to hear, and the kind of message the present needs now. They are political and ethical in that they arise from and speak to a certain *ethos*. They are rooted in cultures and speak to these cultures’ ways of life.

6.3: An Example of the Political, Ethical, Metaphysical, and Theological Nature of “Science and Religion” Discussions: Globalising Science and Religion?

Chapter one mentioned that to even ask the same question of “the relation between science and religion” more thoughtfully, never mind asking different questions, we need a higher cultural, historical, metaphysical, theological, and disciplinary self-awareness. Given that in this chapter we are emphasising how the process of tradition is inherently political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological, this section discusses an example of how historical and sociological discussions of science and religion are in part already acknowledging these complexities, yet also note that the “global” move of “science and religion” can be problematic if awareness of political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological context is not considered in the very posing of the questions. A move to “globality” is still a local phenomenon. It happens from specific cultural standpoints which determine the kind of universality obtained, and the generalities arrived at speak to this standpoint more than to others. These generalisations speak about their originating standpoint as much as they speak about the subject-matter under investigation. The source of the questioning cannot be neglected; whoever is asking the questions has within themselves a big part of the outcome.

This last section of the chapter discusses two works, one sociological and one historiographical, that show varying degrees of an awareness of a context’s layers in order to

know what questions to ask. The goal is to show that the multi-layered nature of historiographies of science and religion is ripe with possibilities and not only with difficulties. Furthermore, both sociological and historiographical examples introduce us to the impulse of the final chapter. The final chapter seeks to show how there is already scholarship—including but not reduced to historiographical scholarship—that is already performing a hermeneutics of tradition, aware of the multi-layered nature of contexts. Before moving to this section's examples, however, I briefly discuss some recent calls for de-centring religion and science discussions from Anglo-American perspectives. These calls introduce us to the double need of contextual awareness—not only the context of our “subject matters” but the context of the one to whom the subject matter is speaking to.

6.3.0: About De-Centring “Religion and Science”: Discussions from Anglo-American Perspectives

Relevant to awareness of context, some observations about the de-centring of “religion and science” discussions from an Anglo-American perspective may be helpful, especially as the discussions arguing for de-centring are European.⁴⁶⁶ De-centring must mean awareness of one's own located accounts as well as awareness of a plurality of accounts. De-centring always involves re-centring. De-centring might end up only with an unqualified application of already accepted questions to “the world,” as one might decide not to focus on, for example, Anglo-American contexts and actors, and yet be based in these contexts. We can be critical of our own contexts, we perhaps must be, but we cannot abstract ourselves from them, nor criticise them in such a way that we undermine the grounds we are standing on so radically that we cannot even say anything at all. To give an example: can I criticise English-speaking literature, by producing more English-speaking literature, in order to completely undermine English-speaking literature? Is it not the case that this utopic “true critique” should eventually reject being based in English-speaking cultures and perhaps reading and writing in English? When taken to its logical conclusion an excess of “critique” ends up undermining its radicality, although it is motivated by a genuine issue. How do I, from cultures different from Anglo-American ones, communicate with my own culture (and with my host culture if based elsewhere) without losing myself—without being “sucked” into a perspective of myself that is not my own? Radicalising “critique” is not enough because it does not help me answer this

⁴⁶⁶ Jaume Navarro and Kostas Tampakis, “Science and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Non-Anglo-American Perspectives,” *Zygon* 54, no. 4 (December 2019): 1045-9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12551>.

question. To recall Felski, critiquiness (critique run amok), “an unmistakable blend of suspicion, self-confidence, and indignation,” is not fruitful.⁴⁶⁷ Or it may bear the fruit of more critique, but not of understanding constructively different interests from various communities. As scholars we need to recognise our contexts, the cultures we come from, the ones we are based in, and the ones we write to. The goal is for all scholars to fruitfully engage with and contribute to the richness of scholarship, western and beyond, without being dominated or muted by the cultures doing the asking. This might sound deceptively easier than it is. A way forward is then not only to focus more on non-Anglo-American geographical or cultural localities. More important still is to *keep* one’s own identity explicit as one thinks, researches, and writes, so it is clear that I—with my own body, cultural identity, cultural location, and the confluence of these—am the one thinking, researching, and writing about this or that.

Critiques that aim at a non-western centredness might advocate a “plurality” that assumes all cultures are different, but in the end, the same kind of thing. Under whose standards, one might ask. The unexplicit ones set by the describer’s cultural and intellectual background? It is possible to forget that our contextual genesis enables our thinking, and this is an inescapable—albeit challenging and poorly understood—reality that has to be acknowledged for real diversity. As Donna Haraway argues, all knowledge is situated. It is this situatedness and not an artificially constructed all-seeing view from nowhere that allows us to understand and know concretely, tangibly, bodily, personally, and partially.⁴⁶⁸ Haraway points out that the alternative to a “neutral” and “nameless” generalising view from nowhere is not attaining more point of views whilst located on the same point of view, or shrugging our shoulders due to a self-defeating relativism given no “objectivity,” but rather, a radical locatedness or what she calls positioning: the active practice of re-cognising again and again that it is I, my bodily, temporal, cultural, social, political self that is doing the thinking and that is involved in knowing. Incidentally, Haraway’s critique of a “view from nowhere” and her alternative of situatedness, echoes Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics as ontotheology and his alternative: namely, as Wolfe puts it, beginning from “situated moods or attunements.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Felski, *Limits of Critique*, 188.

⁴⁶⁸ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988): 581-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>.

⁴⁶⁹ Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, 143.

6.3.1: Who Am I and Who Are You? Science and Religion Around the World

The practice of re-cognising constantly the contexts and tendencies of thought that “grow” in our particular worlds of existence makes the questions of “who am I?” and “who are you?” important. The question in the title “who am I and who are you?” is Gadamer’s title of a series of interpretations he wrote on Paul Celan’s hermetic poetry.⁴⁷⁰ It connects with the question of science and religion “around the world” in the following sense. As anyone in the field would know, “science and religion” (as a genre) appears to have already gone global.⁴⁷¹ The collection of questions around “science and religion” appear to have already included the question of “who am I and who are you?” The so-called science and religion field, that is, appears to have already become conscious of its own identity and of the need to include “global” voices. But how much is this coming to awareness still assuming an “I” that raises questions that are alien to the “global perspectives” it wants to learn from? Is not the “I” still very much commanded by interests that are foreign to the perspectives it wants to include? This “I,” in other words, might create the “other” it wants to include in the I’s own image. To be clear, the “who am I” and “who are you” questions seem determined by a genuine attempt to consider “global” perspectives. But I wonder about the extent to which the questions themselves are still framed, perhaps unwittingly or even inevitably, using western derived terms with all their unavoidable baggage (like “revelation,” “science,” “scientist,” “religion,” “secular,” “theology,” “beliefs,” “supernatural,” etc.).

There is inevitable and perilous danger in talking about “western,” “non-western,” “European,” “US American,” etc., to refer to more than geographical territories. I am aware that in identifying something one also “others” it—that one participates in the constitution of the “other” by distinguishing it from something else. When the human being names the animals in the garden he *distinguishes*—he is both in touch with what things are and what they are not, and when we speak and name, we do the same. So how then shall I speak? I am using highly misleading terminology that tends to homogenise and differentiate to make a point of cultural and locational self-awareness. Being centred in one’s own culture(s), combined with humble openness—and this is no “common sense” but a prejudice of mine exposed for others to see—seems necessary in order *not* to presume one’s own cultural universality as a hegemonic generality in which “other cultures” fit. Cultures are themselves mixed and impure alchemical

⁴⁷⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gadamer on Celan: “Who Am I and Who Are You?” and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Richard Heinemann and Bruce Krajewski (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 67-126.

⁴⁷¹ See especially *Science and Religion around the World*, ed. John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Elaine Howard Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science: What Scientists Around the World Really Think About Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

realities, resisting simplistic demarcations, and yet one knows when one is in one that is not one's own. My own experience in learning the "science and religion" tradition in a British university has been accompanied by profound fruitful discomfort and inarticulate puzzlement. In a sense, words have only just started to emerge and I hope my stammering is meaningful. My providential encounter with philosophical hermeneutics has aided me to articulate the puzzlement "science and religion" talk raises when one is not from a culture where that talk is constitutive of one's identity.

The two examples discussed below are the work of Elaine Howard Ecklund et al. and the historical work of John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers. Both display the best intentions and the need for further steps to fulfil these intentions: to move cautiously but confidently from talk of "science" and "religion" to themes that underpin them. So far in this thesis we have touched on politics, power, authority, knowing, culture, ethics, theology, metaphysics, to name some of the most prominent. These spaces of thought and the questions that animate them cannot be reduced to either "science" or "religion"—they, in fact, encompass already more fully the questions often underpinning "the relation between science and religion." Expanding the web of "science and religion"—or rather, remembering the web in which "the relation between science and religion" is a possible question—is not unproblematic, but imagining a web dominated by "science" and "religion" can conceal the larger web to the point of erasure. Refocusing the web beyond "science," "religion," and "science and religion" creates a catch-22 situation. Now that the globalising of "science and religion" is happening through the grammar of "science and religion," to move beyond this grammar is to some extent to betray this globalisation (and therefore opposing it may be perceived as "wrong"), and yet *not* to move beyond it is to maintain the straitjacket this grammar seems to impose on us (also in some sense "wrong"). Nonetheless, I think this catch-22 situation is an avenue that is worth pursuing: to move in this catch-22 direction would mean that the concerns of the "traditional" discussions need recalibration and this recalibration could be both creative and integrative, respecting difference and yet also inviting unity.

Given that the next chapter will focus on what I think are potential "ways forward" through "science and religion," here I only comment on aspects of Ecklund et al.'s *Secularity and Science* (2019) and Brooke and Number's edited collection *Science and Religion around the World* (2011). Both sections mainly raise questions, to which I have no clear answers, but that are worth raising and keeping them raised for the conversation to move in new directions.

6.3.1.0: Secularity and Science: Why Care About “Secularity” and of What “Scientists” Think About “Religion”?

The aspect that is most evidently connected to the need of considering the locatedness of the questions in Ecklund’s work is its focus on what “scientists” think about “religion.” Why is “the scientist” at all relevant, and their opinions on “religion” important? Perhaps the question could be, in what contexts would questions like “what do scientists think about religion” be relevant? The questioning in Ecklund’s work seems to be arising in cultural localities where there is a perceived sense of authority of scientists and where there is a vague belief in something called “religion” that seems important, and that somehow scientists have something intelligible to say about it. Also, what is “secularity” doing in the mix? There also seems to be an assumption of a connection between secularity, religion, and science. Why should this be so? I am only pointing out these obvious issues because a question posed in such ways arises not from “nowhere” but from a long history that has permitted the tensions and puzzlements—in a particular culture or cultures—to arise in those terms. One of the conclusions of *Secularity and Science* is that “the idea that science and religion are inherently in conflict is mainly a Western paradigm.”⁴⁷² This is not the same as saying what was suggested in the first chapters, namely that the whole impulse of “relating science and religion” is, similarly, a mainly Western paradigm. The findings that the USA, the UK, and France “are the only nations” in their study where one third of the scientists “support the conflict perspective” and that from the eight regions examined, the USA, UK, France, Italy, Turkey, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, “the prevailing view of the relationship between science and religion among scientists is one of independence,”⁴⁷³ suggest not so much that there are defined things called “science” and “religion” that are “independent” for most scientists and that are in “conflict” for a few scientists. It suggests, rather, that the whole idea of “relating science and religion” seems to set the narrative and cognitive terms in such a way that the very posing of the question in those terms curtails deeper and arguably more important issues, such as what is deemed as real, what counts as knowledge, who or what is a trustworthy source of it, the transmission and dissemination of this knowledge, the role of it in people’s communal life and their contexts, etc.

Ecklund et al. are aware of, for example, the problematic nature of the notion of “religion.” They cite Daniel Dubuisson’s *The Western Construction of Religion* (2003), Russell

⁴⁷² Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 9.

⁴⁷³ Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 9.

McCutcheon's *Manufacturing Religion* (1997), and Timothy Fitzgerald's *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (2003), who argue that "because the concept of religion is a relatively recent invention of Western scholars, and has been used to justify Western imperialism and colonialism, it ought to be jettisoned altogether."⁴⁷⁴ Ecklund et al. side with Kevin Schillbrack, however, who notes that "none of our concepts are free of political baggage," so they "believe it is still sociologically useful to retain the concept of religion." Useful for what? They want to understand "the role of religion in the lives of the scientists we study": "we want to understand and take seriously the definitions offered by these scientists, an approach that we think brings the best tools of social science to the table."⁴⁷⁵ Given that Ecklund et al. say that the scientists whom they study echo the various definitions of religion that sociologists, anthropologists, or philosophers give, it seems that the professionals, both in the natural and the human sciences, not only do not know what "religion" is, but at the same time their ignorance counts as authoritative knowledge. A possible underlying assumption of Ecklund et al. for thinking that scientists' views on religion are in any way relevant is what was mentioned in chapter one, an underlying cultural scientism (Smedes) or modern science culture (Hart), shared especially by the intellectual elites. Ecklund et al.'s work is helpful as a study *for* westerners, perhaps more so for USA westerners but also for western Europeans, all of whom are embedded in this cultural scientism. It is also helpful for non-westerners to understand the kind of frame that will be applied to them and their cultures by westerners. Ecklund's previous work—where she deals with what "religious people" really think about "science"—also alerts us to the character of this cultural scientism, not by the content of the work, but by what it feels it must address—the "myths" assumed about so-called religious people and their relation to "science."⁴⁷⁶

Ecklund et al. show that scientists who do not identify with "a religion" or who do not identify as "religious or spiritual" are "located primarily in Western countries: France, the United Kingdom, and the United States." They are the least willing to engage in dialogue "on the relationship between science and religion" and "represent an important opportunity for dialogue because they are most likely to be purveyors of scientism (the idea that science is the best or only way of knowing)." These scientists "tend to be disproportionately male, at elite institutions, and in advanced stages of their careers. Although powerful now by virtue of their institutional status and career stage, we believe these scientists will not be leaders in the future

⁴⁷⁴ Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 13.

⁴⁷⁶ Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, *Religion vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

science and religion dialogue.”⁴⁷⁷ This may all read as straightforwardly sound, but what if Ecklund et al.’s approach, in attempting to open space for “dialogue between science and religion” is itself more subtly passing on the cultural scientism baton to the public and to other scholars by the very questions asked? Even if Dawkinsian types are the most likely to be loud purveyors of scientism, the unspoken purveyors of scientism—the ones asking for “dialogue”—may be an even tougher crowd because they may be unwilling (or unable) to see how “dialogue” between “science” and “religion” is itself culturally scientific.⁴⁷⁸ Ecklund et al.’s final indictment points towards ways of generating new spaces of commonality: “*It is vitally important that scholars take a distinctively social scientific approach to examining the nature of the relationship between science and religion—on a global scale, taking into account epistemologies, cultural traditions, histories, political agendas, and lived experience.*”⁴⁷⁹ I agree with the relevance of sociological explorations, the scale being global, and the importance of other ways of knowing in different cultures in their own histories, politics, and experience. To agree fully, however, may involve leaving some forms of the “science and religion” brand behind, or at least updating them without fear of raising new questions. The question of how to move through and with “science and religion” to ask new questions, remains open, and a hermeneutic of tradition is a way of sharing this openness.⁴⁸⁰

6.3.1.1: Can (Should) We Contextualise “Science and Religion” Beyond Western Cultures?

Brooke and Numbers are, unsurprisingly, more thoughtful than Ecklund et al. about the historical nature of “science” and “religion” and thus in their edited volume—almost a decade older than Ecklund et al.’s sociological work—essays are more aware of the difficulty of using these terms. Perhaps their conversations with Harrison helped them see the “philological” complications (they mention having helpful conversations with him).⁴⁸¹ They say that we should not generalise “science and religion” but should see the diversity of relations in

⁴⁷⁷ Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 205.

⁴⁷⁸ One of the implications of Harrison’s *Territories* relates to the point of the unspoken purveyors of scientism: attempting to construct any kind of “relation” between “science” and “religion” already affirms the essentialist project and the conditions that make it possible; “science” and “religion” are “things” which, in principle, can have the sorts of relations that the “science and religion” rhetoric seems to promote, and the conditions that enable such rhetoric are quietly affirmed.

⁴⁷⁹ Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science*, 205 (authors’ italics).

⁴⁸⁰ Ecklund’s work, although with the difficulties I have underscored, can be read along the lines of a hermeneutics of tradition. See her latest work: *Why Science and Faith Need Each Other: Eight Values That Move Us Beyond Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020) and Elaine Howard Ecklund and David R. Johnson, *Varieties of Atheism in Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Both works attempt to move beyond reaction against a narrative and towards productive re-framings of a new one.

⁴⁸¹ Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, vii.

“sciences and religions.”⁴⁸² Is this an improvement over Ecklund, et al.’s approach? Perhaps. But it is also possible that “religions” proves to be more problematic than “religion” and that the diversification of what “science” and which “religion” will render any generalisation meaningless.

An example of the inadequacy of pluralising “science” and “religion” is chapter ten in the collection, where Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen write on “African Religions.” As Brooke and Numbers note, writing on the contours of science, religion, and medicine in sub-Saharan Africa, Feierman and Janzen show that attempts to “analyze the accompanying practices through the categories of either ‘science’ or ‘religious belief’ simply fail to do justice to elaborate holistic understandings of the relations between natural and moral order.”⁴⁸³ Feierman and Janzen say that

the notion that African knowledge in the pre-colonial centuries blended empirical discovery with moral legitimation (ancestors, spirits, priests) is pervasive. Sharp opposition of science and religion as we know it in the organization of these fields in the modern university is a reflection of post-Enlightenment assumptions that thoroughly secularize specialized scientific knowledge. Sub-Saharan African history of knowledge should prove very instructive in grasping the character of a way of apprehending the world that while it fosters knowledge of a variety of practical ends, is open to the continuous interaction between visible and invisible, worldly and sacralized realms.⁴⁸⁴

Feierman and Janzen conclude their chapter with the following:

The African scholarly universe appears to be open to acceptance of religion and science in the same framework, all the while many African scientists adhere to the Western separation of science from religion. It would appear that the moral and humanistic envelope of knowledge that integrates science and religion may well be a genuine contribution of African tradition to the world community.⁴⁸⁵

Feierman’s and Janzen’s suggestions notwithstanding, the fact is that these conversations are happening heavily in western or western-laden localities, and thus the message of the book, in Brooke’s and Number’s phrasing, has an important tension. On the one hand they say that “Science and religion dialogues have taken many forms. They have been conducted very differently in different times and places. There is no unique solution to the problem of how best to describe the places of the sciences in, or their bearings on, the world’s religions.”⁴⁸⁶ In

⁴⁸² Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, 5.

⁴⁸³ Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, 5.

⁴⁸⁴ Steven Feierman and John M. Janzen, “African Religions,” chap. 10 in Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, 231.

⁴⁸⁵ Feierman and Jenzen, “African Religions,” 248.

⁴⁸⁶ Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, 19.

saying this they accept western-centredness as functionally “neutral” because they stick to describing the realities in terms of “sciences” and “religions.” This is not explicitly said but it is important to recognise, because it determines the shapes of the dialogues. On the other hand, concurring with Feierman and Janzen, they refer us to David N. Livingstone’s closing essay, which constitutes perhaps the best short articulation of the need to question the very notion of the “relation between science and religion.” Livingstone states:

“What is the relationship between science and religion?” is a question in need of questioning. In different ways, the essays in this collection conspire to trouble the seeming simplicity of the assumption that the task is to map encounters between two realms respectively labelled “science” and “religion.” The global reach of the preceding chapters, for example, forces on us the thought that this whole way of proceeding may be a local Western perspective that is imperiously imposed on the rest of the world.⁴⁸⁷

This view may need to be expanded, however, in the sense that one does not simply “impose” something—even in imperious imposition there is encounter. As Livingstone himself notes in the colonial period in India, European science was not simply diffused but “intercultural encounters were of crucial significance for the growth of knowledge about botany, cartography, terrestrial surveying, and linguistics.”⁴⁸⁸ Livingstone’s deeper point is that we should cultivate “a sensitivity toward the hybrid, the amalgamated, and the synthetic,” in order to subvert the idea of “science and religion as ‘pure’ enterprises.” This impurity “alerts us to the wider context of ‘science’ and ‘religion,’ and thus to the ways in which they may be mobilized in the interests of cultural *politics*.”⁴⁸⁹ Here Livingstone comes to agree with the observations drawn from Brooke and Harrison in the first chapters of this thesis. From versions of Buddhism adopted to pursue a scientific religion (in opposition to “traditional theism”) to Newtonian science and religion being deployed in favour of the monarchy and moderatism (in opposition to republicanism and radicalism), Livingstone notes that we are reminded of the “wider socio-political networks” in which “science and religion” are always embedded, “and their relationship is conditioned by the prevailing cultural arrangements.”⁴⁹⁰

6.3.2: Concluding and Re-Orienting Remarks

The tension between saying that “there is no such ‘thing’ as ‘the relation between’ ‘science’ and ‘religion’” because there are no “things” called “science” or “religion,” and yet continuing

⁴⁸⁷ David N. Livingstone, “Which Science? Whose Religion?,” chap. 12 in Brooke and Numbers, *Science and Religion around the World*, 279.

⁴⁸⁸ Livingstone, “Which Science? Whose Religion?,” 287.

⁴⁸⁹ Livingstone, “Which Science? Whose Religion?,” 287 (author’s italics).

⁴⁹⁰ Livingstone, “Which Science? Whose Religion?,” 287.

to speak with and about these terms is precisely where we should finish this chapter. This tension is what has driven this thesis to the issues it has been exploring in the historiographical and methodological literature through Reeves, Harrison, Brooke, and others. This tension feeds the terms that moved our initial steps. Essentialism is seen as a cardinal mistake because “there is no such ‘thing’ called ‘X’” (X = any historically complex concept). Complexity, attempting to negate “conflict” or “harmony” between “science” and “religion,” also seeks this sort of anti-essentialism in a narrative-rhetorical key. The rejection of anachronism is anti-essentialism in its specifically temporal key—it is anti-essentialism of the present in relation to the past.

I chose the whole issue of “science and religion” going “global” in this section because it shows that there is no way of simply “moving past” or “getting rid of” the words, narratives, or dominant perspectives, neither via critique nor deconstructive motifs. I pointed out in the previous chapters that critique or deconstructive motifs have their use. But something they cannot do is to unite, to build up from deficient narratives, to creatively put together inadequate terminologies and partial understandings that give lights for better discussions. “Better” means at the very least to have an awareness of the questions as questionable, and that such questionability of the questions opens up to the “so what?” question. What are “science and religion” discussions for? What difference do they make, if any? Who might they serve if anyone at all? Are there unexplored directions that we could explore? How might we explore them, mindful of the myriad of complexities we inherit as soon as we articulate our thoughts?

The catalyst for this section is to show that the layers of politics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology constitute the contours of “science and religion” discourses, including science and religion historiographies. Having explored the critiques of philosophical hermeneutics and after showing that these critiques open our horizons to see the political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers in the science and religion historiographies, the example of “science and religion” as a global question sought to underscore that a hermeneutics of tradition cannot be performed without asking again what questions should be asked. The questioning of “the question” is a form of “critical” move, but it is not primarily critical but arising from (metaphysical) astonishment and perplexity.⁴⁹¹ The questioning—whose layers are political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological—arises in my case, to follow Desmond, from the desire to “think metaphysically in such a fashion as to allow sufficient hermeneutical discernment to

⁴⁹¹ See Desmond, *Being and the Between*, 5-13, and his use of both astonishment and perplexity to describe the adventure of metaphysical thinking.

the tradition of philosophy.”⁴⁹² To the tradition of *philosophy*, that is, because I am trying to see science and religion historiographies—and the whole “science and religion” discussion of which they are a part—along the lines of Samuel Loncar’s positive genealogy of science and religion; “science and religion” is, according to Loncar, a thread within the tapestry of the history of philosophy.⁴⁹³ The re-situating of “science and religion” in both historical and philosophical terms may be a step towards resisting the waves “science and religion” tends to create and seeking resonances with waves of issues previously ignored.

6.4: Conclusion

This chapter has used critiques of philosophical hermeneutics to show that the nature of the discussions found in science and religion historiographies opens necessarily to political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers. Derrida, Habermas, and Betti have served us to show that philosophical hermeneutics opens up to these layers, and that they are therefore present in all “science and religion” discussions, including historiographies. The final section showed, in particular, that “science and religion” has become in itself a hermeneutic, and we observed that as a hermeneutic it needs to be re-oriented towards a hermeneutics of tradition. Philosophical hermeneutics—as the register deployed to show that essentialism, complexity, and anachronism do say something of importance, even if their objections do not aim rightly—is also open to be questioned, and rightfully so. For Gadamer, as we saw, language is conversation, so philosophical hermeneutics involves learning to listen for the right questions to reveal themselves—questions that open up to real insight.

This chapter could be read as noting that the insights the new questions may open up to are multi-layered, and that the layers themselves are threads of the same fabric. Essentialism, complexity, and anachronism, even though devised as methodological warnings, are never simply “methodological,” but at the same time—or precisely because they are “methodological”—they are political, because political, ethical, because ethical, metaphysical, and because metaphysical, theological. Another notion I could have added would have been the notion of anthropology. The layers chosen as “highlights” point to the connectedness of figures of the human—of anthropology—in these discussions. What do politics, ethics, metaphysics, or theology do without a figure of the ones doing them?

⁴⁹² Desmond, *Being and the Between*, xi.

⁴⁹³ Samuel J. Loncar, “Science and Religion: An Origins Story,” *Zygon* 56, no. 1 (March 2021): 275-96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12675>.

The following chapter aims to be like a round table for the sharing of a hermeneutics of tradition, in conversation with “science and religion” hermeneutics, aware of the multivalent elements that constitute it. The coherence of the chapter, as we will see, lies in the awareness each of the scholarly projects on display show to the difficulty of partaking in “science and religion” discussions, if they are indeed having those discussions. Some reject “science and religion” (or “science” or “religion”) altogether, and the way the rejection is performed is instructive, as well as the alternatives provided. Some are external to specific “science and religion” discussions, but in dealing either with “science” or “religion,” they also give insight. The final chapter can be seen as suggesting that we can consider elements of “science and religion” hermeneutics as entry points—conversation starters—to wider debates in the humanities and further afield.

7: Discussions in Context: Science and Religion and the Practice of a Hermeneutic of Transmission and a Rhetoric of Involvement

7.0: Closing Reflections, Opening Possibilities

This chapter concludes the thesis by exploring some possibilities that are opened through our exploration of the historiographical categories of essentialism, anachronism, and complexity. At the beginning of the thesis, I approached the cluster of discussions on science and religion by focusing on the historiographical critiques of the discussions through these categories. I argued not only that the historiographical works on science and religion are within the types of narrative spaces they seek to overthrow, but that their attempts to overthrow them in spaces beyond the strictly historical are inadequate because they want to have it both ways. That is, historiography wants to remain in the strictly historical world and at the same time critique issues that are more than “historical,” inhabiting political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers from which they seek to remain “neutral.” This thesis has argued that an overall hermeneutic of critique is an inadequate vessel to attain their goal, given that it is parasitic on—and therefore paradoxically continuing—the same kind of narrative, rhetoric, and discussions on “relating ‘science’ and ‘religion’” albeit by negation. A version of a hermeneutics of tradition has been proposed, noting that the three historiographical categories being explored do effectively point to important issues. But by being articulated primarily as negations, that is *anti-essentialism*, *rejecting* anachronism, and complexity as *critique against* harmony or conflict, these categories and their associated web of possibilities remain captive to the very things they seek to negate. The mostly critical deployment of these categories and the rhetorical moves that such deployment encourages us to make may be a new kind of essentialism; seeking not that narrative, not that word, explicitly setting a negation and leaving the direction of the negation at best thinly veiled and at worst totally concealed, has the effect of crafting a parasitic narrative essentialism on the narratives and words critiqued. Modern historians risk “essentialising” their anti-essentialist critiques and propagate the modes of thought and rhetorical moves they critique.

This thesis has explored historiographical works on “science,” “religion,” and “science and religion,” showing that essential knowledge of some sort—a tacit “yes” to something preceding and succeeding a “no” to something else—is always there and is necessary for us to even be able to differentiate between one thing and another. This essential knowledge is not “essentialist” in the sense rejected by anti-essentialism, but it is always transhistorically present

and available through language. This chapter discusses some possibilities in scholarship to think with and through what essentialism (inadequately) warns us of. There will be little of “comparative definitions,” stating that “religion = a + b + c” or “science = c + d + e” so “the relationship between science and religion is about exploring ‘c’ or the differences between ‘a’ and ‘d’ or ‘b’ and ‘e.’” One of the insights the anti-essentialism of Reeves, Harrison, and Brooke gives us is that “essentialism” assumes that we can capture sufficient features of whatever “science” and “religion” are, so that given that we know these features we now may attempt “dialogue” or see what kind of “relation” science and religion have. The further worry is that an essentialist mode of proceeding may drive scholars to apply their definitions to the historian’s “history” and therefore fall prey to anachronism, distorting history by projecting contemporary notions onto it and missing its rich complexity.

This thesis has highlighted that the historian’s “history” tends to be a “past” that is in the past, as opposed to a historically effected (to use Gadamer’s term) present moment, which should be understood as always already historical. One of the problems with conceiving history as existing temporally separated from the present—and not also (and primarily) temporally in communion with it—is the idea that we can avoid anachronism. Essentialism, under this working assumption, becomes a cardinal fault because it involves, among other things, applying anachronistic contemporary categories to “the past,” assuming our contemporary categories to have been “there” as they are now. What has been pointed out in the previous chapters was that we are all cardinally at fault because we in fact begin with a tacit “essential” knowledge of something and all we can do is to indwell (to use Polanyi’s language) what we are investigating through this tacit knowledge and see where it takes us. Articulations—expressions—attempt to speak of realities that cannot be contained in our expressions and which cannot be defined in advance, and yet, there is undoubtably something “essential” in them, in hindsight of what we speak of. The anti-essentialist does well in rejecting fixed, ahistorical “essences” that are back projected to the past. But in order to reject such “essences” one has to recognise that there are “essential”—fundamental and fundamentally present—transhistorical meanings which can be elucidated, critiqued, and developed, precisely through the words we use. Even if we cannot know the depths of the realities we witness in any exhaustive way—because there are always new situations that require our rearticulation and reflection—we still are and know and act in a world that is amenable to our expression and evokes our communicative efforts. History—temporality—is also a part of that world. This is perhaps the golden thread that became evident through Gadamer’s work and that has allowed this thesis to reflect on the historiographies of science and religion and their methodological

suggestions exemplified in the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. Historicity is always present, always already effective and affecting attempts to judge “the past” in the writing of “history” in the present. To know what expressions (or “events” in general) meant in “the past” is inevitably to let them say something to us now. We hear the testimony of the past today and we learn similarly what these words or events “meant” by them meaning something now. The process, as it may be evident, is incomplete if we say we “know what it meant” but not “what it means” (that is, what it means now). This means we understand neither what it meant nor what it means. The past has not yet been let to speak in its real voice—in the historically effected now—if we do not know or see links between a purported meaning that was and what is real then and now.

The following sections attempt to see the hermeneutics of tradition at work in other works, or at least see the works explored as congenial or contributing to it. The work of Harrison and Brooke is not presented again because they served as the starting points, but the whole point of this thesis is to be able to receive their work within a “post-critical” hermeneutics, appropriating their work in the spirit of a hermeneutics of tradition (see below the work of Bernard Lightman). Noting that their work participates in a hermeneutics of critique is not a proposal to “overcome” or go “beyond” their work, but a desire to receive their work within a hermeneutic that can move us in directions they themselves seem to be groping for.⁴⁹⁴ The title of the chapter calls a hermeneutics of tradition a hermeneutics of *transmission* because it seeks to pass on a sense of critical integration through creative proposals. This impulse is called transmission because it knows itself as actively receiving (being dependent on other scholars), creating something useful and fruitful by wrestling with what is received, and then sharing or passing on the baton for others to continue acting and reflecting, responding to their times and situations. The works, authors, or movements that are explored can be interpreted as wrestling in their own ways with the problems that essentialism, anachronism, and complexity raise. Some bring other categories to bear (like *knowledge, magic, personhood*, etc.) and make explicit the historical fabric within which “science” and “religion” make sense (much like Harrison and Brooke). Others do “histories of the present,” namely, experiential, anthropological, and sociological reflection on what it means to be involved in “science” or “religion.” And others do a rich combination of these through philosophical reflection and even

⁴⁹⁴ As this thesis comes to an end, two works in which Harrison participates as an editor have appeared, both very much in the spirit of a hermeneutic of transmission (which is defined above): *New Directions in Theology and Science: Beyond Dialogue*, ed. Peter Harrison and Paul Tyson (New York: Routledge, 2022); *After Science and Religion: Fresh Perspectives from Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Peter Harrison and John Milbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

poetical expression. The goal is to present these as positive possibilities, threads from which new fabrics are (and are still to be) weaved.

This chapter has three main sections. The first section, heuristically separated from the second one by focusing on “science,” explores an array of works that in various ways (historically, philosophically, theologically, scientifically) conceive “science” with an awareness of its multi-layered nature and its intrinsic polyvalence, both now and historically. The second section, focusing on “religion,” explores various proposals and critiques of the notion, coming to an understanding of the rhetorical spaces within which discourses about “religion” take place. Both sections seek to showcase the works explored as paths that in various ways may be seen as avenues of a hermeneutics of transmission—a practice that involves developing a rhetorics of involvement. The final section is a snapshot of the work of Jason Josephson Storm and his proposal of *Metamodernism*. The spirit of this movement of Metamodernism is one congenial with a hermeneutics of transmission, responding to the question of what to do when critique and deconstruction have evacuated all our concepts, narratives, and modes of thought of meaning. Far from resignation, Metamodernism is a movement of hope, displaying a rhetoric of involvement which a hermeneutic of transmission seeks to emulate.

I turn thus to the first section, focusing on philosophical, historical, scientific, and theological approaches that show the breadth and depth of the contexts of our knowing, and how “science” belongs in this rich and dynamic nature of knowledge.

7.1: Philosophy, History, Science, and the Contexts of Our Knowing

7.1.0: The Dappled World and the Disorder of Things: Nancy Cartwright and John Dupré

Nancy Cartwright, in *The Dappled World* (1999), can be read as mindful of essentialism about “science.” She considers each “science” within its own domain, “laws,” methods, etc. Each science is related perhaps at some points, and for particular reasons, with other sciences but rarely if at all determined by scientific theories beyond their domain.⁴⁹⁵ The patchwork of “laws” or the “dappled world” comes to be because that is what the sciences can deliver: disparate fragments of the world. We could be said to have “one world” through our “empirical” or experiential unity of it all, rather than the unity of our world arising necessarily through one (or two, or three) particular “imperialistic” (Cartwright’s term) sciences that might

⁴⁹⁵ Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

claim to “explain everything,” including whatever other sciences say and do. Cartwright gives examples in physics and economics, and examples from neuroscience, biology, psychology, or any source of “nothing buttery” could also be given.⁴⁹⁶ It is important to call these sciences *sources* of “imperialism” to imperialistically inclined individuals (or groups of individuals); the actual practices, if done in a philosophically aware way (with scientific responsibility), recognise the limitations implicit in a particular scientific context. Recognising scientific contexts’ limitations, however, does not seem to be a prevailing practice (although not absent) in the realm of scientific popularisation. There are working scientists—or former scientists, philosophers, journalists, etc.—who write for popular audiences that turn into science evangelists, usually using “science” as a rhetorical category to buttress their discourses with an authoritative seal that well surpasses their competence and the empirical and theoretical reach of the particular scientific concept(s) discussed, if any.⁴⁹⁷ The rhetorical deployment of the word “science” should alert us to the considerable influence of scientific popularisation as a practice in itself that influences significantly—perhaps more than actual scientific practice—what “science” and “scientists” are and do, what they think they are and do, and what the meanings of related notions like “nature,” “reason,” “explanation,” “evidence,” “knowledge,” etc., are (more on scientific popularisation below).

Cartwright’s dappled world, in a sense, implies the disorder of things in the following sense: “things” as such are not in fact “substances” but give of themselves depending on how they are looked at. This disorder, which could be seen as a form of perspectivism,⁴⁹⁸ is what John Dupré argues for in *The Disorder of Things* (1993), arguing against determinism, reductionism, and essentialism.⁴⁹⁹ Cartwright and Dupré are joined in the implication that the

⁴⁹⁶ Nothing buttery is perhaps the most popular rhetorical manifestation of reductionism: “we are nothing but atoms,” “we are nothing but matter,” “nothing but animals,” “nothing but synapses,” “nothing but capital,” etc.

⁴⁹⁷ Usual examples are the New Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Harris, and Hitchens), but also Jerry Coyne and recently Steven Pinker’s *Enlightenment Now* (2018) and A. C. Grayling’s *The Age of Genius* (2016). See Ronald L. Numbers and Jeff Hardin, “The New Atheists,” in Hardin, *The Warfare between Science and Religion*, 220-38. Numbers and Hardin note that none of these popularisers is a historian, so one may suspect strategic historical ignorance given that the historical narratives available do not fit the populariser’s own. This, however, should give historians pause: the narratives these thinkers have at their disposal are part of the “common sense” of their contemporary western context. Historians should move through the present more explicitly and go beyond “history”—they should connect the dots directly between their “history” and now.

⁴⁹⁸ Michela Massimi, “Perspectivism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Scientific Realism*, ed. Juha Saatsi (London: Routledge, 2018), 164-75, acknowledges the similarity between Dupré’s view and perspectivism, although she argues that Dupré’s “promiscuous realism” is nominalist and perspectival realism (a form of perspectivism) is realist with regards to natural kinds (173-4). “Realism,” however, is defined variously so Dupré’s realism may not be so quickly branded as “nominalist.” Dupré says that a form of natural kinds is defensible (although he does not say how). See John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5, and 18.

⁴⁹⁹ Dupré, *The Disorder of Things*, 2-7.

dappled world or the disorder of things implies a disunity of science in that there is not a “method” or a set of “things” that the sciences (as disciplines) share that makes them “sciences.” Cartwright and Dupré move through the notion of science and what are considered sciences (like physics, economics, or biology) to show how the sciences describe worlds they can see, and their vision is crisp in the exact proportion as their recognition of partiality to what their whole experiential setting allows them to see. Now, if the “scientific world” is a dappled, disordered world, what about the world we experience where everything that the sciences say comes together? Is it the case, as Dupré notes, that with the disunity of science we arrive, paradoxically, at “a kind of unity of knowledge”⁵⁰⁰? Before exploring the works of physicists Andrew Stean and Tom McLeish for a possible answer to this question, this section engages the work of historians studying scientific popularisation and the continuous role of “history.” The goal is to observe that these historians, similar in many ways to Harrison and Brooke, are moving the discussions about science in positive directions by being hermeneutically aware of the limitations of critique.

7.1.1: History to the Rescue? On Scientific Popularisation and the History of Knowledge

7.1.1.0: *New Spaces for Debate: Bernard Lightman*

Bernard Lightman has explored the dimension of scientific popularisation in the context of Victorian Britain and has shown that the success of the scientific naturalists (Tyndall, Huxley, Spencer, and Hooker) as popularisers accounts for the ignoring of scientific popularising as a knowledge activity in its own right, which has very significant effects in shaping the terrains.⁵⁰¹ Today we know so little about the popularisers of the Victorian era because “of the success of the campaign waged by Victorian scientific naturalists to convince future generations that scientists were the authoritative guides to deciphering the meaning of natural things—that they alone gave voice to mute nature.”⁵⁰² Incidentally, the success of the scientific naturalists has

⁵⁰⁰ Dupré, *The Disorder of Things*, 243.

⁵⁰¹ Lightman explores many of the intricacies between scientific popularisers and scientific practitioners, including the moves of popularisers to practitioners and from practitioners to populariser, and the practitioner as populariser in the Victorian era. See *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Lightman mentions elsewhere biologist T. H. Huxley, philosopher Herbert Spencer, botanist J. D. Hooker and natural philosopher John Tyndall as the ones whose narratives won the day. See Lightman, “The Victorians: Tyndall and Draper,” in Hardin, *The Warfare Between Science and Religion*, 65-83; Michael S. Reidy, “Introduction: John Tyndall, Scientific Naturalism and Modes of Communication,” in *The Age of Scientific Naturalism: Tyndall and His Contemporaries*, ed. Bernard Lightman and Michael S. Reidy (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 1-13.

⁵⁰² Bernard Lightman, “‘The Voice of Nature’: Popularizing Victorian Science,” in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. Bernard Lightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 188.

contributed to the so-called “conflict thesis” between science and religion, although Lightman rightly notes, echoing Cantor’s observations, that we should not be essentialists about this either: there is no one single conflict thesis, but various conflict theses that operate(d) in different writers (and even in the same writer) depending on their contexts and geographies.⁵⁰³ Cantor even argues that some versions of conflict are worth revising and keeping for “intellectual health reasons” (not Cantor’s terminology), namely to ask what has made the “conflict thesis” believable and practically ineradicable for the last 150 years, despite a flurry of revisionist historians arguing against it.⁵⁰⁴

A point to underscore about the trajectory of Lightman’s work is that being a historian of science in the midst of the waves decrying essentialism, anachronism, and calling for complexity, his work has been able to integrate these concerns and move through them to suggest relevant practices for scholarship and attend to previously unattended cultural spaces. In some of his most recent work, he encourages historians of science and religion “to integrate more fully the results of the scholarship on print culture into their work.” Why print culture? Lightman says:

Even though we have followed John Brooke’s lead in exploring the complexity thesis over the last few decades, with impressive results, we have tended to stick primarily with the key dramatic controversies, great thinkers, and their books, primarily in order to undermine interpretations of them based on the conflict thesis. Not only has the study of print culture complicated how we should understand what constitutes a book, it has also pointed to the importance of examining various forms of print in addition to books.⁵⁰⁵

Lightman says this in the context of discussing *MacMillan’s Magazine*, which opposed the more established quarterlies like the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, and the *Westminster Review*, established in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. His observation is that to focus “merely on cognitive conflict, or even the complexity of the cognitive dimension of the issue,” misses the revolutionary nature of *MacMillan’s Magazine*, where “audiences, authorship, editorship, political orientation, and philosophy” were aspects that the magazine itself was challenging, expanding, and opening, in opposition to the old quarterlies.⁵⁰⁶ Lightman, by moving beyond complexity as a hermeneutic of critique, is able to see unexplored

⁵⁰³ Lightman, “The Victorians: Tyndall and Draper,” 79-80; Geoffrey Cantor, “What Shall We Do with the ‘Conflict Thesis’?,” chap. 14 in Dixon, *Science and Religion*, 283-98.

⁵⁰⁴ Cantor, “What Shall We Do with the ‘Conflict Thesis’?,” 295-6.

⁵⁰⁵ Bernard Lightman, “Creating a New Space for Debate: The Monthlies, Science, and Religion,” in Lightman, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*, 86.

⁵⁰⁶ Lightman, “Creating a New Space for Debate,” 108.

cultural territories and through them highlight a rich context of interrelated layers, such as the audience, authorship, editorship, politics, and philosophy. Even more relevant for this thesis than missing the nature of *MacMillan's Magazine* as an alternative medium of public debate and education is, therefore, Lightman's interpretive shift from "complexity" as a critical-methodological principle to finding new spaces of debate. The shift is deceptively simple: he can be seen as asking "what exactly are we talking about when we talk about complexity?" In Lightman's introduction to *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion* (2019) he asks exactly that: "what exactly does Brooke, and those who have been inspired by his work, mean by complexity?"⁵⁰⁷ Lightman's answer, considering both Harrison's and Brooke's contributions to the volume, is the following:

A corrective to essentialism and the tendency to impose a priori models on the past, complexity is a heuristic principle that should guide our research so that we are sensitive to how different contexts shape past understandings of science, religion, and their dynamic interface. Brooke's complexity principle, then, is intended to encourage us to undertake rigorous empirical analysis of the past before coming to any conclusions about what theses or models, if any, might apply in a particular period.⁵⁰⁸

Lightman sees how a narrowly construed "complexity" as a methodological principle may constrain rather than open space for discussion if it is not understood positively. He therefore in his introduction spins "complexity" positively, releasing it from any "thesis" and making it, effectively, a part of a different hermeneutic. In Lightman's own case, the "history of science" takes him to the importance of periodicals themselves as cultural artefacts and their effects. Emphasis on these cultural artefacts does not mean a rejection of "science" or "religion" but it does mean their rhetorical repositioning in the discourses. Lightman can say, still in relation to science and religion based on his research on these periodicals, that "only a complex set of economic, technological, cultural, social, and political factors could provide a context for the origins of the conflict thesis."⁵⁰⁹ The factors he is thinking of are not only, nor mainly, "ideas" but, in fact, the arrival of "cheap books and periodicals for a rapidly growing audience of literate Britons," which "began to appear in the middle of the [nineteenth] century." Only after the appearance of these "was there actually a space for deliberating on the merits of the conflict thesis."⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ Bernard Lightman, "Introduction," in Lightman, *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion*, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ Lightman, "Introduction," 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Lightman, "Creating a New Space for Debate," 109.

⁵¹⁰ Lightman, "Creating a New Space for Debate," 109.

Lightman's work thus provides glimmers of new directions by appropriating "complexity" along the lines that have been suggested in this thesis. He, in other words, understands complexity as a *solution* to the problems of essentialism and anachronism, but only because for Lightman complexity is less a critical tool and more a way of seeing how paying attention to, in his case, the very media of debate, the audiences, and the subject-matters discussed, are of more than merely historical significance. Lightman can integrate complexity "post-critically" by understanding it as a creative open-mindedness that sees the supra-historical nature of the discussions. His closing remarks on his introduction to *Rethinking History, Science, and Religion* express the spirit of a hermeneutics of transmission:

The issue with which Brooke, Numbers, Harrison, and the other scholars in this volume are engaged is not merely a subject of historical importance. In our present time we see the reemergence of nationalist politics and other simplistic, conflict-enhancing ideologies. [...] Such ideologies offer oversimplifications of international relations, reducing them to an "us versus them" dynamic, while dismissing the many levels of nuance and complexity. The contributions to this volume are not only exploring the complexities evident in science and religion; they are also upholding an open, critical intellectual tradition that is now unpopular and even under threat in some countries.⁵¹¹

Complexity is interpreted as relevant beyond historiographical works. Its hermeneutical nature highlights the moral nature of Brooke's (and Harrison's) work, and hence the importance of maintaining critique within a wider hermeneutic, "upholding an open, critical intellectual tradition that is now unpopular and even under threat in some countries."

Lightman's focus on the channels or the media through which debates happen opens the notion of "science" beyond a narrowly "cognitive" understanding of it. Or, rather, in opening "science" as inevitably including its rhetorical materiality—that is the means by which it is understood—Lightman expands a narrowly conceived "cognition." *Knowledge*, in other words, by attending to the wider reality of science as a material and social phenomenon, comes to be seen as emerging from the rhetorical contexts in which it is pursued. Could this elasticity of "science," however, be a reason to reject or eschew the category altogether?

7.1.1.1: From the History of Science to the History of Knowledge: Peter Dear and Lorraine Daston

Historian Peter Dear notes that "the very category of 'science' has become historicized" and this involves at least asking more widely the question Dear asks to historians of science:

⁵¹¹ Lightman, "Introduction," 15.

“Should we, in fact, throw in the towel and admit that there is no specifiable kind of activity called science for which a continuous and identifiable history can be investigated?”⁵¹² He answers that science—meaning modern science as an *ideology*, emerging in the nineteenth century as Dear and others note—has no need of an “essence.” Dear observes that modern science (as an ideology) is a very unstable, self-authenticating—even “irrefutable”—mixture of natural philosophy and instrumentality. Modern science is “justified” as natural philosophy by pointing to its instrumentality (methods, instruments, and experimental practices), and it is also “justified” instrumentally by assuming that an actual natural philosophy follows from it. “These two logically distinct ways of representing what ‘science’ is,” notes Dear, “provide one another a sort of bootstrapping, or alternating, mutual support,” but “if they are interrogated side by side, the total picture ceases fully to make sense.” Dear observes that the “basic ideology of modern science” is “a systematic misrepresentation of what science and scientists actually do.”⁵¹³ Incidentally, Dear says that this view of science has never been “natural” and that “much rhetorical work was required to represent it as being unproblematic.”⁵¹⁴ This rhetorical element is crucial for it to be called an “ideology.” This ideology is a culturally axiomatic story, a narrative or discourse of (in this case) what “science” is, what it does, and the domains its “authority” covers through its practitioners.

Dear argues that if “science” is seen as a dialectic between natural philosophy and instrumentality, the larger frameworks and stories that historians manufacture “will tend to display [...] the use of these two different idioms and the ways in which they have been characterized and situationally related by historical actors.” This involves “the ways in which people have constructed this set of material, instrumental, social, linguistic, cultural, and conceptual techniques that have made, sustained, and subverted their tales of natural philosophy and instrumentality.” Dear says that for modern science to have both a premodern and modern history, it “has no need of being an essentially timeless subject, always and everywhere the same kind of thing.” Modern science should be conceived, Dear argues, “as a subject constituted by its temporal story.” What counts as science “constantly requires reestablishing and remaking.”⁵¹⁵ Dear is saying that science not having an “essence”—not constituting a natural kind—means for historians that even though the cultural realities they study under the name of “science” are very real, being aware of the “non-essential” nature of

⁵¹² Peter Dear, “What Is the History of Science the History *Of?*: Early Modern Roots of the Ideology of Modern Science,” *Isis* 96, no. 3 (September, 2005): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1086/447747>.

⁵¹³ Dear, “What Is the History of Science the History *Of?*,” 404.

⁵¹⁴ Dear, “What Is the History of Science the History *Of?*,” 405.

⁵¹⁵ Dear, “What Is the History of Science the History *Of?*,” 405.

science may “liberate our discipline from the twin dangers of hyperhistoricization and essentialist universalism.”⁵¹⁶ Perhaps the most important point here that speaks with clarity about what being mindful of “essentialism” might mean is Dear’s point about the subject being constituted by its temporal story. He is making a Gadamerian point: subject-matters are historically effected. They are their historicity. This is precisely what Dear’s dialectic seeks to address, a way of understanding “science” as a temporally unstable term that through its instability speaks of aspects of the real. Dear concludes by saying that the plural “sciences” might encompass a collection of enterprises of knowledge, which might restore the integrity of other (and by “other” he means “non-western”) culture’s ways of knowing, as they would be included in the “history of the sciences.” “Science” (in the singular), Dear concludes, would refer to this ideological construct which contingently developed in western soils.

The point of following Dear here—and these larger points are articulated as well by Lorraine Daston as we will see below—is that Dear discusses the problem of the notion of “science” as something that one “studies” as a “thing” that once was thought to have always been but that is now known to be a modern (western) invention. Dear deals with the contingency of the notion by noting how it came to form an ideology, that is, to constitute and be constituted by particular discourses, extending itself rhetorically far beyond concrete practices. Another way of saying this is that it came to constitute a particular metaphysics, as Lightman notes regarding the scientific naturalists.⁵¹⁷ The points about the dialectic between natural philosophy and instrumentalism surely aid us in thinking about the sciences and their coming to be throughout history. They also help us in thinking of the way the sciences are always philosophical in their instrumentality and instrument-bound in their theorising or philosophising (and that there is not an aphilosophic strict “empiricism” without any metaphysical and theological intuitions guiding it). When the term “science” is deployed in contemporary usage, it is not talking about merely “methods” or merely “factual” knowledge but referring to a whole culture—a philosophy and a mythology—of alleged instrumental certainty, a culture that is questioned by the contrasts between the sureness of grasp that “science” may seem to have and the uncontrollable reality of nature and human action. The point to emphasise here, however, is not only the dialectic between instrumentality and natural philosophy but the tension between “anti-essentialisms” about (in this case) “science” and

⁵¹⁶ Dear, “What Is the History of Science the History *Of?*,” 406.

⁵¹⁷ Bernard Lightman, “Evolution as a Trojan Horse,” *International Research Network for the Study of Science & Belief in Society (INSBS)*, September 29, 2020, <https://scienceandbeliefinsociety.org/2020/09/29/evolution-as-a-trojan-horse/>, accessed March 1, 2021.

using any other equally historically contingent terms to “explain” it. Terms like natural philosophy, nature, philosophy, instrumentalism, culture—and many more of the surrounding terms that would help us deal with the concept(s) we would like to elucidate non-essentialistically—are similarly complex and historically contingent. Francesca Rochberg, for example, argues that “cuneiform knowledge” (in relation to the Babylonian-Assyrian corpus) had familiar goals of observation, interpretation, and prediction but was not concerned with “nature” or “natural phenomena.”⁵¹⁸ Nature, like science, is a historically contingent term that is understandable in relation to particular times, locations, and cultures.⁵¹⁹ Can western thought do without “nature”? Or is it that “nature,” “science,” etc., have to be heard anew in their historically effected symphony?

Dear’s own analysis drives him to focus on knowledge, which could point to a helpful direction, as contemporary explorations seem to be now speaking of the history of knowledge, as Lorraine Daston says.⁵²⁰ Daston gives us a congenial analysis to Dear’s. She notes that due to globalised perspectives and postcolonial critiques of the past couple of decades, “the history of science began to rethink its geography (and chronology) as well as its subject matter.” She says further that “The classical narrative of the history of science was not just *a* Eurocentric narrative; it was *the* Eurocentric narrative, the one that explained how the West had outstripped the rest by inventing science and thereby winning the modernity sweepstakes.”⁵²¹ Daston observes that due to the global perspectives and postcolonial critiques this narrative and its implicit Eurocentrism (including “the modern” as an ideal—although has the West ever been modern?⁵²²) is untenable. Observing leading publications in the history of science over the last twenty years reveals in Daston’s telling that

the understanding of what science is and who counts as a scientist has broadened and diversified to include household herbalists, imperial adventurers, women computers, Renaissance bibliographers, Victorian pigeon fanciers, artists depicting the flora and fauna of their native Mexico or India, and many other people lacking white coats, horn-rimmed spectacles and a PhD. The sites of science now include not only the laboratory and the observatory, but also the botanical garden, the forge, the library, the field, the

⁵¹⁸ Francesca Rochberg, *Before Nature: Cuneiform Knowledge and the History of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). See chaps. 7 (193-230) and 8 (231-73) in particular.

⁵¹⁹ See Rochberg, *Before Nature*, Introduction (1-14), chap. 1 (17-37), and chap. 2 (38-58) for the historiographical analysis of “science” and “nature.” See also Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) where he proposes alternatives for thought from an anthropological reflection that does not essentialise “nature” and “culture,” “things” and “beings,” or “facts” and “values.”

⁵²⁰ See Lorraine Daston, “The History of Science and the History of Knowledge,” *KNOW* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 131-54, <https://doi.org/10.1086/691678>.

⁵²¹ Daston, “The History of Science and the History of Knowledge,” 141 (author’s italics).

⁵²² Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Note specially chap. 2 on being “amodern,” which aims at an anthropology of science.

ship, and the household hearth. Geography and chronology have also broadened: the Europe (in fact, never more than a few western European countries and then only their leading cities) of the discipline's origins is now dwarfed by a map that embraces at least some parts of all continents and oceans; spectacular recent work on ancient China and Mesopotamia has exploded the discipline's time frame.⁵²³

It seems that the way of using the word matters. Not all uses of the word "science" are as an "object" of study, as it may be for historians or philosophers of science. Scientists that speak of what they do, even when they might also be using the word as ideology or as a tacit metaphysical fabric, use the word to refer to the kind of collection of practices they are involved in. But again, the very idea of "a scientist" may be part of the problem. Arising as a parallel with *artist* in 1834 (proposed by William Whewell)—and catching on around the same time as *physicist* in the 1840s and 50s—the term was originally seen as inferior to the loftier *philosopher*; it aimed at distinguishing from other kinds of knowers, eventually acquiring a mixture of political, cognitive, and moral authority over all knowledge of nature.⁵²⁴ In the case of the historians of science, Daston argues that their subject-matter in fact is knowledge, so that they are (tentatively she says) historians of it. This category is as advantageous as it is problematic. What could be said to be excluded from it (due to its abrasive inclusivity)? Nonetheless the history of knowledge seems to be inherently non-essentialist since it begins by asking what counts as knowledge (and is also interested in ignorance) and how different kinds of knowledge interact, including what may be deemed "scientific" knowledge, whose boundaries are seen as blurry, contested, and porous.⁵²⁵

Through Daston we see that the discipline of history of science is at least aware of the western-laden nature of "science" and focusing on knowledge seems to acknowledge this without eschewing knowledge that is non-western. This acknowledgement in itself is valuable. Another reason, which Daston does not discuss, is that knowledge is experientially connected to people, peoples, and their ways of life (including place, language, and rituals). Things experientially real are connected to our personal and cultural realities, including family, practices, and ancestors which form the contexts of teaching and learning. One therefore cannot

⁵²³ Daston, "The History of Science and the History of Knowledge," 141-2. See Scott L. Montgomery, "Why Did Modern Science Emerge in Europe? An Essay in Intellectual History," *KNOW* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 69-92, <https://doi.org/10.1086/701903>, commenting on the historical and geographical expansion from the initial Eurocentric understanding of "science."

⁵²⁴ See Sydney Ross, "*Scientist*: The story of a word," *Annals of Science* 18, no. 2 (June 1962): 71-85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033796200202722>.

⁵²⁵ Sven Dupré and Geert Somsen, "The History of Knowledge and the Future of Knowledge Societies," *Ber. Wissenschaftsgesch.* 42, no. 2-3 (September 2019): 186-99, <https://doi.org/10.1002/bewi.201900006> notes that the history of knowledge not only expands the history of science but investigates the very boundaries of "science" and other ways of knowing and the interaction between different sciences and others forms of knowledge.

speak of knowledge, teaching, and learning without considering cultures, and the traditions, places, and rituals that constitute them. They are the fabric of knowing.

To summarise, a conduit that is mindful of essentialism's worries is thus the question of knowledge. The history of knowledge makes use of this question by exploring the dynamic relation between what has counted as knowledge and its processes in different contexts. Also, by being predicated on asking again and again what was and is known in particular times and places, the history of knowledge connects with our own contemporary questioning of who knows what and how, what the end of knowing is, and how the end shapes what may be known.

An appropriate understanding of knowledge is important, as we see from the historians, because it involves an understanding of contexts and peoples. We continue our exploration of the relationship between science and knowledge by exploring the thought of two physicists who arrive at describing "science" in the name of an appropriate public understanding of it.

7.1.2: Physicists for the Public Understanding of Science: Andrew Steane and Tom McLeish

Two physicists that in different ways have been challenging reductive views of knowledge by challenging reductive views of what science is and the rhetorical misuses of the word are Andrew Steane and Tom McLeish, both British physicists, in Oxford and York respectively. McLeish himself is the inaugural Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Department of Physics at the University of York.⁵²⁶ Even though their work is not historiography, their geographical and cultural context (Western Europe) makes them wrestle with a host of historical "myths" about both "science" and "religion" to speak about science. Both are mindful of the pitfalls of the terms and this awareness propels them in new directions. Steane in particular will be returned to in the section on "religion," for he explicitly seeks to recover the word as speaking meaningfully about our personal encounter, and the sense of being encountered personally, in the reality we inhabit.

Steane has written two books that could be considered "science and religion" related. He is, however, against any "dialogue between" one and the other because he thinks that this is already a misunderstanding. The same can be said about McLeish as chapter one pointed out. The rhetorical space opened by such a way of speaking already misconstrues the terrains we actually walk. The *we*, is the issue, though. Who is the "we" that is walking the territories? Steane says the following in *Faithful to Science* (2014):

⁵²⁶ Tom McLeish, *The Poetry and Music of Science: Comparing Creativity in Science and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), xi.

The book is not written as an academic treatise on the “science and religion” question, for good reason. I adopt this policy not because it helps to make the book more accessible, but because the best way I can think of to help the reader is to *show* how science looks and feels from a theistic perspective. I don’t pose a question such as “is science in conflict with religion?” because I don’t agree with the question; it is an ill-posed question. If one has a theistic perspective then science falls *within* that perspective.⁵²⁷

Steane is not only challenging a default conflict as a starting question. He is disagreeing with the structure that would allow the question to be a natural one. “The phrase ‘science-religion dialogue’ has been introduced in an attempt to be polite; but it is misconceived. [...] The situation can be called ‘science and religion dialogue’ only by people who disagree with religion but are doing their best to respect it nonetheless.”⁵²⁸ Steane is noting the gradient of “science and religion” rhetoric, and here he is only naming his own cultural context (within which these discussions have mostly taken part). A context that assumes a “we” that thinks of itself as “secular,” or “disenchanted” (Weber), or at least a “we” that does not know what to do, how to speak or understand its own very religious history and culture, which includes in the recent historical past—and still echoes in the present—a religiously anti-religious sentiment. It could be said that the structure upon which a question such as “is science in conflict with religion?” arises is one of secular religious people attempting to speak of “religion” in a religiously secular culture. Again, we are reminded of Smedes in the first chapter and his observation of cultural scientism. What is relevant regarding “science” is that Steane, being a scientist who is religious, is not making a religious case for “science” or a scientific case for “religion.” If at all, just because he is giving an account of how it feels to do science from his perspective, his testimony could count as a religious case for science. What he says though, is that “The heart of the book is not about either theism or atheism, but about the need to distinguish between data and interpretation, and about the crucial step of recognizing *personhood* and what underpins it, such as the broad validity of our truth-seeking and beauty-appreciating aspirations.”⁵²⁹ Steane’s fundamental interest is the manner in which we know the world we are in, how science is a part of that (a crucial part but *a part* nonetheless), and how science fits in this wider picture of knowing—a deeply personal picture. In this respect, he coincides squarely with Gadamer’s and Polanyi’s metaphysics of knowing and with Dupré’s pragmatism.

⁵²⁷ Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 3-4 (author’s italics).

⁵²⁸ Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 5.

⁵²⁹ Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 7 (author’s italics).

At this point McLeish's first book meets Steane's. McLeish's main concern is his sense of a public loss of faith in science. One of the reasons he mentions is the public perception that "science" has made the world seem more and more inhuman and impersonal. Given the phrase "faith in science," McLeish feels that he cannot avoid faith—in its "religious" sense—if only because this resonance speaks of the personal story, the cultural history that weaves our very selves in science. Like Steane's objection to "science and religion" as a starting point, McLeish says that to "unpick and explore the lost currents of faith and wisdom in science it will not do to jump straight ahead into any form of 'science and religion' debate."⁵³⁰ His starting point is the recent (mostly western) historical past: the post-war scientific optimism and the Romantic fear of science's destructive and dehumanising potential, as well as the "new atheist" polemics and the anti-scientific push back from artists in particular. Paralleling also a move made by Steane, performed as well by personal experience and historical narrative but also by biblical exegesis, McLeish wants to show us what it is like to do science:

What does it feel like to do science? We need to experience it through the work of thinkers both today and in the past centuries, before we ought to talk much more about its purpose. Some rolling up of sleeves and "contemplation" of science from within will also prepare us for resonances we will need to be sensitive to in reading wisdom literature from much older cultures.⁵³¹

McLeish's work explicitly recovers a theological-cultural story of "science"—its cultural history needs elucidating for it to make sense today (for good and ill).⁵³² In doing so he aims at proposing a theology of science.⁵³³ McLeish explicitly engages the Biblical tradition (especially but not exclusively the book of Job) to argue for it, locating science within the greater task of the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17) between humanity and the world; "Science is the name we now give to the deeply human, profoundly theological task of participating in the mending of our relationship with nature."⁵³⁴ One of the outcomes of such theology is the mutual belonging of science and theology. They are "of each other" McLeish says: theology grounds and fuels scientific exploration and discovery and scientific discovery

⁵³⁰ McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*, 4

⁵³¹ McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*, 24.

⁵³² For the theological background and present state—in the guise of "secularity"—of science and race see Terence Keel, *Divine Variations: How Christian Thought Became Racial Science* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). He argues that "modern scientific theories of race are an extension of Christian intellectual history" (20-1) and he shows how in a secular guise various strands of biblical and theological thought continue to propel the idea of race as biological.

⁵³³ Such efforts are scant and waiting to be taken on. Carving space for interaction between the claims of the modern sciences, biblical scholarship, and theology—and opening the space for a theology of science—see Mark Harris, *The Nature of Creation: Examining the Bible and Science* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁵³⁴ McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*, 209.

and exploration is in itself a way of seeking wisdom—an attempt to receive all that is which is deeply theological. Such theology gives substance to the idea “that personhood might extend even beyond the confines of physical nature.”⁵³⁵

Steane’s experientially and poetically attuned mode of writing philosophically is a helpful partner in the more explicit theologising found in McLeish. Steane and McLeish continue to develop their thought in different ways, giving a picture of science within knowing and reality that is multi-faceted, contemplative, creative, imaginative, and deeply human and personal.⁵³⁶ Both Steane and McLeish answer the question raised above about our experienced world in the midst of the dappled world that the sciences make available to us: McLeish in *The Poetry and Music of Science* (2019) by showing how the arts and the sciences are faces of one another, precisely through the immanence of creativity, and Steane by showing that the grasping that science allows us to do has always a wider side that is ungraspable and deeply real, knowable through our embrace of the deep value we find in the world. Both Steane and McLeish reflect experientially on the practice of science, showing that transcendence is personally encountered and that science is embedded in this encounter. New approaches in the history of science are also recognising the importance of such an experientially-attuned understanding of science—which includes aesthetics—to get a clearer picture of the effective history of knowledge.⁵³⁷

Relevant to the wider point of this chapter and of this thesis in general, both Steane and McLeish are aware of the rhetorical dimension of all knowing and communicate with attention, humility even, to words and what we try to express with them. In this sense their different works embody a hermeneutic of transmission. Embodying this hermeneutic brings about a rhetoric of involvement, a deeply personal phronetic—that is a mindful—practice.

⁵³⁵ McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science*, 214.

⁵³⁶ See McLeish, *The Poetry and Music of Science*; “Our Common Cosmos: Towards a New Natural Philosophy,” *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2019): 133-47, <https://doi.org/10.1628/ptsc-2019-0015>; Andrew Steane, *Science and Humanity: A Humane Philosophy of Science and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵³⁷ Alexander Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science: Representing Nature in the Royal Society of London 1650-1720* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020) shows the extent to which knowledge, beauty, taste, and judgement are intermingled. He proceeds by making *experience* the main category of analysis. The history of the empirical sciences, he says, “must, in other words, be a history of experience itself” (4). By focusing on experience, many of the categories central in Gadamer’s thought (taste, judgement, common sense, beauty, etc.) gain renewed relevance for the history of science.

7.1.3: Science in the Post-Normal Age: Silvio Funtowicz and Jerome Ravetz

Another non-reductive understanding of science that has been around now for over thirty years is the post-normal science movement (PNS). Silvio Funtowicz and Jerome Ravetz published the now foundational paper “Science for the Post-Normal Age” in 1993, and in it there is a remarkable challenge to reductive and anxious views of knowledge, which tend to be embedded in essentialist views of “science.” This article’s introduction gives us a flavour of the movement:

Science always evolves, responding to its leading challenges as they change through history. After centuries of triumph and optimism, science is now called on to remedy the pathologies of the global industrial system of which it forms the basis. Whereas science was previously understood as steadily advancing in the certainty of our knowledge and control of the natural world, now science is seen as coping with many uncertainties in policy issues of risk and the environment. In response, new styles of scientific activity are being developed. The reductionist, analytical worldview which divides systems into ever smaller elements, studied by ever more esoteric specialism, is being replaced by a systemic, synthetic and humanistic approach. The old dichotomies of facts and values, and of knowledge and ignorance, are being transcended. Natural systems are recognized as dynamic and complex; those involving interactions with humanity are “emergent”, including properties of reflection and contradiction. The science appropriate to this new condition will be based on the assumptions of unpredictability, incomplete control, and a plurality of legitimate perspectives.⁵³⁸

There is much to take from this but at this stage it will suffice, again, to note how the issue is knowledge; how it is constituted, shared, obtained, and revised, and how it is implicitly high-stakes and uncertain, due to its multi-layered nature and its interweaved nature with policy issues (the political and ethical). Especially relevant is Funtowicz’s and Ravetz’s recognition of the inherently political aspect of modern scientific practice and their dissolving of or transcendence of inadequate modes of conceiving knowledge (for example the fact-value dichotomy and the binary of knowledge-ignorance). It is interesting that they see a similarity or continuity between “the classic ‘philosophy of nature’ and the post-normal science that is now emerging,”⁵³⁹ in that uncertainties and decision stakes are high. Religion and science discourses can be integrated in these wider movements such as PNS and learn from them. Science and religion discourses could include more encompassing and messy notions, such as

⁵³⁸ Funtowicz and Ravetz, “Science for the Post-Normal Age,” 739.

⁵³⁹ Funtowicz and Ravetz, “Science for the Post-Normal Age,” 746.

historians of science are doing by moving from science to knowledge, and enrich—by re-connecting our person to knowing—our understandings of knowing.⁵⁴⁰

Having explored broadly various perspectives on “science” that make us aware of its multi-layered nature—its embeddedness in history, philosophy, ethics, politics, theology, etc.—we turn to various perspectives on “religion.” The goal, similar to the goal of this section, is to discern in contemporary scholarship ways in which we can inhabit our speech of “religion” without evacuating its meaning through critical excess. The goal of “inhabiting our speech” amounts to what will be called a rhetoric of involvement.

7.2: Philosophy, History, Religion, and the Contexts of Our Being

Separating the previous section from this one in the manner of “science” and (in this section) “religion” is a sort of statement: there is no “novelty” that comes from nowhere; “newness” is only discernible, visible, or available through what is already familiar. In other words, I am acknowledging the context of the thesis and its most likely readership (Euro-America) by accepting the fact that in western contexts these notions and their “territories” are at the very least rhetorically and intuitively separate and hence constitute a sort of metaphysical starting point. It is a different mission altogether to face contexts where these notions do not dominate the common sense of culture and therefore do not describe “reality” there. Scholars from these contexts face questions they must think contextually without ignoring nor being overcome by louder, albeit less relevant, questions.⁵⁴¹ For such contexts the whole “science and religion” hermeneutic breaks down, as Livingstone observed in the previous chapter—the whole question of the relation between science and religion is not only questionable but inappropriate. However, the fact that the question is not applicable to various contexts may open some possibilities. The question’s inappropriateness “feeds back,” allowing scholars to see how better to ask it in contexts where the question is intelligible (such as in western ones). The

⁵⁴⁰ See Nicolas Kønig, Tom Børsen, and Claus Emmeche, “The Ethos of Post-Normal Science,” *Futures* 91 (August 2017): 12-24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.12.004> for an overview of how the PNS framework allows for an interconnectedness between norms and values. Normative structures arising through the scientific communities are already embedded in and presume a particular “good” or “goods” that are worth pursuing, therefore the normative and the valuable (fact and value) not only are not separable but are shaped in the process of discovery. Federico Ferretti and Ângela Guimarães Pereira, “A New Ethos for Science? Exploring Emerging DIY Science ‘Qualities’,” *Futures* 125 (January 2021): 102653, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2020.102653>, for example, shows how PNS allows for reflection on less mainstream—less institutionalised—scientific practices. The “new ethos,” emerging from practices such as DIY science, shows that normativity and value are always at play from the start in all scientific processes, and that they shape and are shaped in such processes.

⁵⁴¹ Being from a small country with a relatively high degree of cultural diversity—there are 25 different languages in Guatemala, Spanish being the main one—this is acutely present in my mind.

proposal of a hermeneutics of transmission hopes to be an encouragement to find what the common senses in any given context are before approaching them with notions (such as “science” and “religion”) that may not describe their basic concerns or realities.

The work of S. N. Balagangadhara begins our discussion in this section. By noting something like what was said about the hermeneutic brought about by these words and their history, his work “feeds back” some insights that may be useful for western contexts, especially since, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is no fixed “culture” (such as “western”) that has not affected and that has not been affected by what it sees as “others.”

7.2.0: Beyond, Before, and Through Religion

7.2.0.0: Imagining (No) Religion or Can “Religion” Move Past Christianity? S. N. Balagangadhara, Brent Nongbri, Carlin Barton, and Daniel Boyarin

Indian scholar S. N. Balagangadhara argues that “religion” came to be a western-Christian born term which was then applied as yardstick to the whole world, including the non-western one.⁵⁴² Balagangadhara’s work is especially useful and important for he is able not only to account for the western ubiquity of “religion,” but also for the western link to “the secular” and even more for how this link is emic to western Christian cultural assumptions. Religion, notes Balagangadhara, propagates by proselytising and secularising. Balagangadhara, almost twenty years before Brad Gregory’s *Unintended Reformation* (2012),⁵⁴³ suggests also that through the Reformation the West was able to become secularised—but he frames this secularisation as within a larger pattern corresponding to Western Christianity. Roman Christians contrasted their *religio* with the *religio* of the pagans; Protestants contrasted their *religio* with the *religio* of the pagans (Catholics); The Enlightenment thinkers contrasted their *religio* with the *religio* of the pagans (Christians). “The Enlightenment thinkers,” Balagangadhara argues, “not merely reproduced protestant themes but did so energetically. The secular sons of the Age of Reason extended Christian themes in a secular guise.”⁵⁴⁴ Question: How does one understand a culture beyond the western one (as a westerner)? Balagangadhara’s answer: the westerner constructs as axiomatic the religious and secular nature of another culture and whatever they see in these

⁵⁴² S. N. Balagangadhara, “*The Heathen in His Blindness...*” *Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

⁵⁴³ It is worth noting that Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 2, says that his *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) (published only five years after Balagangadhara’s book) already had arrived at the claim developed in *Unintended*: namely that “Incompatible, deeply held, concretely expressed religious convictions paved a path to a secular society.” Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 352.

⁵⁴⁴ Balagangadhara, *Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*, 449.

cultures they assume the religious-secular dualism fits somehow. Even the secular world posited, notes Balagangadhara, is a secularised religious world.⁵⁴⁵ An example of the secular-religious carving of the territories is the “Made in Paris, London, and Heidelberg” stamps which Hinduism and Buddhism wear (a point echoed by Harrison).⁵⁴⁶ The making of these religions, beginning in Paris as the cultural centre of Enlightenment Europe, suggests “that one must understand the creation of religions in India in terms of the compulsion of a culture [Christian western culture].”⁵⁴⁷ Following Balagangadhara here has two purposes: noting that the universalisation of “religion” is a western “mode” of conceptualising reality (that is paired with and even frames “the secular”); and that it is from *within* “religion,” as part of Western Christian history, that western history, including modern science and its complex relations to secularisation and “modernity,” makes sense.

Balagangadhara’s work points us to the case of “religion” being equally, if not even more complex, than “science.”⁵⁴⁸ Brent Nongbri’s work takes us in a similar direction. He notes that “no ancient language has a term that really corresponds to what modern people mean when they say ‘religion.’”⁵⁴⁹ Furthermore, scholars have noted that “terms and concepts corresponding to religion do not appear in the literature of non-Western cultures until after those cultures first encountered European Christians.”⁵⁵⁰ As Nongbri notes, this claim goes back to Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (1963), although Smith still thought that peoples have always been religious, with or without the concept. Like Balagangadhara, Nongbri here follows Talal Asad who notes the Siamese connection between “religion” and “secularism.”⁵⁵¹ Asad expresses the tension clearly:

Religion has been part of the restructuration of practical times and spaces, a rearticulation of practical knowledges and powers, of subjective behaviors, sensibilities, needs, and expectations in modernity. But that applies equally to secularism, whose function has been to try to guide that rearticulation and to define “religions” in the plural as a species of (non-rational) belief... Secularist ideology, I would suggest, tries to fix permanently the social and political place of “religion.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁵ Balagangadhara, *Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*, 450.

⁵⁴⁶ Harrison, “‘Science’ and ‘Religion,’” 23, and 30-5.

⁵⁴⁷ Balagangadhara, *Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion*, 449.

⁵⁴⁸ See Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Harrison, *Territories of Science and Religion*.

⁵⁴⁹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 2.

⁵⁵⁰ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 2.

⁵⁵¹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 4.

⁵⁵² Talal Asad, “Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith’s ‘The Meaning and End of Religion,’” *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (February 2001): 221, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3176697>, quoted in Nongbri, *Before*

Nongbri notes his (independent) congenial conclusion with William Cavanaugh's conclusion in Cavanaugh's *The Myth of Religious Violence* (2009). Although Nongbri does not engage with Cavanaugh's work in detail, Cavanaugh's work alerts us of the need for historical and cultural contextualising:

there is no transhistorical or transcultural concept of religion. Religion has a history, and what counts as religion and what does not in any given context depends on different configurations of power and authority. [T]he attempt to say that there is a transhistorical and transcultural concept of religion that is separable from secular phenomena is itself part of a particular configuration of power, that of the modern, liberal nation-state as it developed in the West.⁵⁵³

With Cavanaugh, Nongbri concludes that "Religion has a history," and it is not "as natural or universal as it is often assumed to be." "It was born out of a mix of Christian disputes about truth, European colonial exploits, and the formation of nation-states."⁵⁵⁴ The importance of the political comes to the fore, as it is the case for talk about the "relation between" religion and science. In Cavanaugh's context, he is arguing against people who want to argue for "religion" as a particular and especially dangerous (perhaps the most dangerous) source of violence. Cavanaugh's response is to say that "religion" does not exist as a generality abstracted from specific peoples, times, and traditions. In any case, the issue here is also the non-essentialist nature of "religion." Cavanaugh notes that "the reason that essentialist definitions have failed to meet with agreement is not lack of scholarly ingenuity but the fact that there is no essence of religion such that 'we all know it when we see it,' as Charles Kimball would have it."⁵⁵⁵

For the interests of this project, Nongbri's final thoughts on what to do with the category are especially helpful. He observes that the questions of *who* is determining what the word means, and *why* are fundamental. That is to say that whoever determines what is or what is not

Religion, 162. Asad's point—aside from Nongbri's use of Asad's emphasis of the Siamese nature of "religion" and "secularism"—is worth quoting in full: "Secularist ideology, I would suggest, tries to fix permanently the social and political place of 'religion' on the basis of a number of metaphysical beliefs about 'reality': (1) that 'the world' is a single epistemic space, occupied by a series of mutually confirming sciences—ranging from astronomy and nuclear physics to sociology and psychology—that not only employ something called 'the scientific method' but also confirm it as the model for reason; (2) that the knowledges gained from these disciplines together support an enlightened morality, that is to say, rules for how everyone should behave if they are to live humanely; and (3) that in the political realm this requires particular institutional separations and arrangements that are the only guarantee of a tolerant world, because only by compelling religion, as concept and practice, to remain within prescribed limits can the transcendent power of the secular state secure liberty of belief and expression" (221). Asad observes the political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological nature of the rhetorical spaces that position themselves, one way or another, in some form of relation with "religion."

⁵⁵³ William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59. See chap. 2 (57-122) for the genealogy of *religio*.

⁵⁵⁴ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 154.

⁵⁵⁵ Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 58.

“religious” is in fact a good candidate for us to focus on. In other words, “who is doing the narration?” becomes a crucial, primary question. It is along the lines of this determinative act that the meaning lies, and not in a timeless definition of it. Tellingly so, consolidating the anti-essentialist drive, Nongbri says that “Such an approach means giving up on the essentialist project of finding ‘the’ definition of religion.” Nongbri says further that:

Such a reorientation in the study of religion would also allow for a more playful approach to second-order, redescriptive usages of religion. Religion could be deployed in nonessentialist ways to treat something as a religion for the purposes of analysis. Such a move would shift our mode of discourse. We would no longer ask the question “Is phenomenon X a religion?” Rather, we would ask something like “Can we see anything new and interesting about phenomenon X by considering it, for the purpose of study, as a religion?”⁵⁵⁶

As an example of “shifting our mode of discourse,” Nongbri considers, as a critical exercise, capitalism as a “religion.” He does not ask “is capitalism a religion?” but the problem is that he still assigns, even for the purposes of a critical exercise, Christian, even Catholic, properties to capitalism.⁵⁵⁷ This critical exercise, at least as he presents it, simply equates religion to some form of Christianity (perhaps knowingly so) in order to reveal new perspectives on the subject-matter—capitalism. What is more relevant for this thesis is that he is proposing the use of the category as a hermeneutic for things other than what it is thought to be. To make “religion” a hermeneutic, however, does not make it less complex to work with, but uses its (already complex) mould to attend to other realities apart from the usual suspects (so called “religions”). The benefit of religion as a hermeneutic, if any, is that it may reveal concealed things of the realities under investigation. The downside is that “religion” continues to work as what its historically effected nature says it is: western Christianity’s take on other cultures. Perhaps there is something to be said about looking at the varieties of Christianity throughout history (western and non-western) and how this language of “religion”—carrying with it politics, ethics, metaphysics, theology, anthropology, etc.—came through western Christian history to shape much of the world, including the creation of “the secular.”⁵⁵⁸ Nongbri’s suggestion, the difficulties notwithstanding, remains helpful: to shift our mode of discourse.

⁵⁵⁶ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 155.

⁵⁵⁷ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 156. Not that the approach cannot bare fruit. See Eugene McCarragher, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

⁵⁵⁸ See David Lloyd Dusenbury, *The Innocence of Pontius Pilate: How the Roman Trial of Jesus Shaped History* (London: Hurst, 2021), Part Four (121-68) on the origins of secularity. See also *Formations of Belief: Historical Approaches to Religion and the Secular*, ed. Philip Nord, Katja Guenther, and Max Weiss (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), highlighting the unity of spiritual, ethical, and political threads in these debates. Terence

For ancient times things get even more complicated. According to Nongbri's analysis, there are no ancient peoples who lived according to or even implied the modern notion of religion. Should we stop using the term for speaking about ancient peoples? Here Nongbri notes that the difficulty is (as I have already pointed out when discussing "science") that all meaningful words will have, when explored, such complex histories that no word would be "pure" enough to describe any other. The "solution," perhaps deceptively modest, is "a greater degree of self-consciousness about the words we use."⁵⁵⁹ Harrison would agree: "those who rely on these terms need to deploy them with a renewed sensitivity to their limitations and to the inherent distortions to which they inevitably give rise."⁵⁶⁰ Such renewed sensitivity implies awareness of the scholar's own conceptual tradition, embedded in their culture of learning. It seems that religion could be seen as a notion that does not speak of something directly experientially manifest but as a second-order concept that speaks about other concepts that *are* closer to direct cultural-experiential manifestations.⁵⁶¹ Seeing religion this way could prevent us from assuming that there is a contrasting "secular" space that happens to be the neutral, rational, even objective, space where both the "religious" and the "non-religious" may gather. Interestingly, and rightly, Nongbri notes that the problem of using concepts that did not exist or that do not map to the past is not anachronism. This is unavoidable given that the actual past did not have these terms. Instead, "The problem is that we so often suffer from lack of awareness that we are being anachronistic."⁵⁶²

Can we even imagine "no religion," however? An extension of Nongbri's work is Carlin Barton's and Daniel Boyarin's *Imagine No Religion* (2016). Here they practice complete avoidance of the word "religion" unless it is there on the texts for the purposes of understanding the cultures under study (Tertullian's and Josephus' worlds). Following Edwin Judge, they say:

When one encounters the word "religion" in a translation of an ancient text: First, cross out the word whenever it occurs. Next, find a copy of the text in question in its original language and see what word (if any) is being translated by "religion." Third, come up with a different translation: It almost doesn't matter what. Anything besides "religion."⁵⁶³

Keel's *Divine Variations*, noting how the secular concealment of religion continues theological motivations for the biology of race, is also a good example.

⁵⁵⁹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 157.

⁵⁶⁰ Harrison, "'Science' and 'Religion,'" 39.

⁵⁶¹ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 158.

⁵⁶² Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 158.

⁵⁶³ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 1.

Aligned with Nongbri’s observations, the idea is that if we force ourselves not to use the word, we will be forced to think outside our usual categories:

We hope that our study of *religio* and *threskeia* might encourage the production of books, not on “Athenian religion,” the “Jewish religion,” or “Roman religion,” but rather books that will link what was conjoined in ancient cultures, and will explore the question of *why* the categories and boundaries of other cultures were drawn differently from our own.⁵⁶⁴

This “why” could be the driver of anti-essentialism for it does necessarily drive to “what was conjoined,” as Barton and Boyarin put it, in (ancient) cultures. Anti-essentialism, seen thus, can become—although badly named because it would not be primarily against something but for something—less an aversion to definitions and more of an attentive practice of listening carefully at what the speech itself is getting at. This practice forces us to follow the lead of language; not to re-describe without first seeing how things are actually described in the language in which they have been described—seeing the accounts, the reasons, in the lives that language brings forth. We are, in the end, telling a story—to someone—of what we have seen and heard. We tell of what is the case, as best we can, of other peoples, other places, times and worlds—peoples, times, places, and worlds with whom we are already in conversation.

I have suggested a hermeneutics of transmission as a way of recognising that our descriptive attempts are inscribed in normative and testimonial attempts to speak and live. To follow the lead of language is to participate in the impelling force of a witness who is telling us something. A hermeneutics of transmission, with its “wings” of synchronicity and diachronicity, is what happens when, despite the complexity and fluidity of reality, there is an understanding of the sharing of the whole together, a sharing that happens through our participation and thus a sharing we must learn to perform and to speak. John Arthos, building on and extending Gadamer’s work, allows us to say then that a hermeneutics of transmission might encourage a practice; a mode of being that is lived in our communal speaking and understanding, that is in our rhetorical world—the world where logos, ethos, and pathos are together.⁵⁶⁵ A hermeneutics of transmission is the roots of a rhetoric of *involvement*—hence its inclusion in the title of the chapter. A rhetoric of involvement, to echo Arthos, may “return and extend the discussion of hermeneutics to its role as a perspective for a humanist practice.”⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁴ Barton and Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion*, 1 (authors’ italics).

⁵⁶⁵ See John Arthos, *Speaking Hermeneutically: Understanding in the Conduct of Life* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011).

⁵⁶⁶ Arthos, *Speaking Hermeneutically*, 11.

7.2.0.1: Classification, Religion, and the Superempirical: Kevin Schilbrack

But how can scholars follow the lead of language? How do we practice a rhetoric of involvement? There are scholars who want to be aware of the genealogy of the term “religion” and yet want to continue to use the term as a descriptor of wider cultural phenomena that has little to do with the specific realities it arose from and thus apply it to different ones. Might not the scholar, inevitably, start to use words as technical terms, and not as ways of communicating an experientially real phenomenon? To remember Gadamer, the scholar may be good at moving from word to concept, but not so good at moving from concept to word, which is also needed.⁵⁶⁷

Kevin Schilbrack, for example, claims that we can use the term “religion” in a more chastised way to speak of non-western and non-Christian cultures, bearing in mind the baggage it comes with.⁵⁶⁸ How so? The myriad of correlated meanings associated to words, and especially to important (or at least widespread) words such as “religion,” are more implicit than explicit. When words become primarily tools for the scholar, they might lose touch with “reality,” which means losing touch with how they are used in regular conversation. A term like religion carries existential, political, and cosmological significance and it surpasses its academic confinement. To deem something “religious” in political discourse could mean to make it an individual, even private “slice” of people or of peoples, practicable to a certain confined extent in opposition or in contrast with purportedly “non-religious” (secular) public spheres, sprinkled with an unusual level of commitment. So-called religious commitments in public discourse can then be seen as subjective, irrational even, potentially clashing with and ultimately interpreted from the side of a putative “secular.” This characterisation of “religion” is a stereotype of religion with a secularist history.⁵⁶⁹ I am not saying that that is what religion is, but the problem, for example, for cultures that are non-western, is that entire ways of life could be branded “religious” or “a religion,” and thus from thin air fabricating a “secular” to which they (at some point) must come to terms with to enter into “neutral” dialogue, in order to find their place in the established (secular, neutral) political orders. Moves such as these

⁵⁶⁷ Gadamer, “From Word to Concept,” 120.

⁵⁶⁸ Kevin Schilbrack, “Religions: Are There Any?,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, no. 4 (December 2010): 1112-38, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfq086>; “What Isn’t Religion?,” *The Journal of Religion* 93, no. 3 (July 2013): 291-318, <https://doi.org/10.1086/670276>.

⁵⁶⁹ Propelled by Englishman George Jacob Holyoake. See Phil Zuckerman and John R. Shook, “Introduction: The Study of Secularism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, ed. Phil Zuckerman and John R. Shook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-18; Michael Rectenwald, *Nineteenth-Century British Secularism: Science, Religion, and Literature* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-15, and 71-106.

already negate and narrow said ways of life.⁵⁷⁰ “Religion” as an analytic tool belongs more in a special toolbox and less in everyday speech, but since it *is* in everyday speech it is primarily what it speaks about, not primarily a tool of the scholar. Schilbrack’s definition of religions as “forms of life predicated upon the reality of the superempirical”⁵⁷¹ raises the question of what is experienceable. People of different cultures experience the world differently. Someone might “experience God” with their senses, untroubled by their own “beliefs” about it. A puzzled observer, or worst, a reader of testimonies with no experiential context to make sense of this, posits that the God-experiencer must have (odd) “beliefs” that allow “access” to the “superempirical.” But the experience is “superempirical” for the puzzled observer or reader, not for the one empirically going through the experience. There are, one could say, realms of experience that are open for some and closed for others, depending not only on “beliefs” but on the outlook these beliefs entail, oriented (as we saw through Gadamer’s thought) by prejudices, which are our readiness to understand. The point I am making is that any “definition” is also an element of discourse—it belongs to a rhetorical situation—where the one who is defining is trying to say something. What this “something” is gives the definition its full meaning. If the point is merely classification—saying this *is* or this *isn’t* such and such—then we should ask “who wants to know?” and “what for?” The reasons for our wanting to know direct our knowing.

Before moving to someone who is trying to re-own the word to speak of something real, not just or even primarily in academic classificatory discussions to categorise entire cultures with their history and tradition, it is worth emphasising that the past two subsections show how there is a hermeneutical move happening with the very notion of “religion,” similar to the ones happening with “science.” There is an understanding of the fluidity of the word—of its historically effected nature which includes anachronistic uses of the word. Such understandings give rise to either rejections or critiques of the term, redefinitions to continue to use it to point at “religions,” or using it as a hermeneutic tool to see aspects of reality (alongside interconnected “others” like “the secular”). One of the points this thesis is making is that these are attempts to deal with the history and contemporary realities carved by the words and, from these attempts, ways forward are being suggested. A hermeneutic of

⁵⁷⁰ That is the case for the various Mayan cultures in the Guatemalan “secular” (*laico*) state. Their whole identity, from a political point of view, has to be framed as “religion” to have some form of identity that is freely exercisable. Unsurprisingly, some leaders of these communities reject this whole framework: they are not a “religion” but a people. Things get even more complicated given that most of these peoples would call themselves Christian. What is their “religion” then?

⁵⁷¹ Schilbrack, “What *Isn’t* Religion?,” 313.

transmission is a way of raising our awareness to the hermeneutical nature of these suggestions, and a nudging towards participating and receiving such attempts within a rhetorical space of involvement—a space of discourse that promotes a humanistic practice which is not detached but embedded in such discourse space.

7.2.1: Renewing the Rhetorical Spaces: Andrew Steane and Bruno Latour

As mentioned in the section on “science,” Steane’s dealing with the notion of “religion” is important, not only because he himself does not like the term but feels that we have to rescue it as an experiential and existential category. Steane’s work is about science and knowing—what science is and what is not, what it can and cannot do, and what this means for us in our deeply personal being in the world. He writes within a theistic perspective and shows how science can sit comfortably there and how it can and has flourished there. His dealings with “religion,” therefore, are to put forward a credible version of what “religion” could be, as he himself understands it, critiquing unintelligent and immoral versions—such as the ones assumed at times by science popularisers and religious fundamentalists—which tend to undermine the personal reality of humanity and its being in the world.

“I am uneasy about religion,” Steane says. “I cannot even say or write the word ‘religion’ without a certain level of discomfort, because I think religion has been, is, and always will be a thoroughly compromised human activity which has to be objected to as well as celebrated.”⁵⁷² His motivation of thinking this way is a Christian one: “In this I am following the lead of one of the chief critics of religious hypocrisy that one can find in human history, namely Jesus of Nazareth.”⁵⁷³ Steane cautions further the use of the phrases “a religion” or “my religion”: they “should always be treated with caution, and they are usually best avoided.” He notes that the first phrase is usually dismissive and the second one “often prefaces something that has not been thought through.”⁵⁷⁴ In his second book, *Science and Humanity* (2018), he says in a footnote that “Religion (in its good forms) is an effort to recognize correctly what we truly depend on, and to seek what can properly be aspired to, and to respond appropriately to what we find. Bad religion is an abuse of this.”⁵⁷⁵ Attempting to articulate what science can and cannot do—which is the goal of the book, alongside understanding science as within a

⁵⁷² Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 11.

⁵⁷³ Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 11-2.

⁵⁷⁴ Steane, *Faithful to Science*, 12.

⁵⁷⁵ Steane, *Science and Humanity*, 6.

wider picture of our engagement with reality—Steane notes that there is a sense in which science contributes richly, but only partially, to what merits our attention and action:

The widening-out which is involved when we look beyond science is very much about discerning what is valuable and what is not; what merits our attention and action and what does not. It is also about receiving our aesthetic experience and allowing it to mould us appropriately; also about grappling with our sense of justice and injustice. All these are to do with the notion of *meaning*. We need a word which we can agree signifies the attempt to get meaning right, and live accordingly. For a long time, the word “religion” was that word, but historic and cultural currents have coloured the connotations of “religion” so heavily that it is now all but lost to us under the baggage of religiosity. Nevertheless I included it in the subtitle of his book [*sic*] because I think it is better to try to rescue the word, rather than abandon it.⁵⁷⁶

Why try to rescue this word? Why not abandon it due to its associations with religiosity, “faith” as blind commitment, and with sheer superstition and irrationality? In a footnote to the prior quote he says:

This footnote is addressed to the modern practice of distancing oneself from the word “religion” in order to say that we don’t need religion in order to find meaning. The problem with this practice is that it assumes some unstated definition of the word “religion” which usually amounts to little more than a prejudice. If “religion” is by *definition* something other than wise, intelligent, and careful about rationality, then really the word has become a form of name-calling. But if by “religion” we mean that form of spirituality that is grown-up enough to take on serious intellectual work, and other work, to question its own assumptions and to put into practice its better conclusions, then we have a fair use of language. The demonization of “religion” is suspect because such demonization is, all too often, a ploy whereby one assessment of meaning gets to assert itself as the prior or natural or default or only objective assessment, or one that “reasonable” people must find. This encourages people to indulge in ways of thinking that judge others not by how they behave but by what one suspects are their motives. This is a serious issue, one which leads to much injustice. However, a lengthy analysis would be required to present this properly. This footnote merely signals that such an analysis would, I think, do us all a service.⁵⁷⁷

If not a lengthy analysis, at least a map of the territories, Benjamin Schewel’s *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion* (2017), could be a place to start. Schewel outlines seven narrative frameworks, which he describes as *subtraction*, *renewal*, *transsecular*, *postnaturalist*, *construct*, *perennial*, and *developmental* narratives.⁵⁷⁸ There is no space to discuss Schewel’s narratives in any detail, but I want to note that his work is a project of rhetorical classification: he identifies narratives, patterns of discourse in the study of religion, which may structure

⁵⁷⁶ Steane, *Science and Humanity*, 122 (author’s italics).

⁵⁷⁷ Steane, *Science and Humanity*, 122 (author’s italics).

⁵⁷⁸ Benjamin Schewel, *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion: The Major Narratives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 3-6.

Steane's observations. For example, Steane's observation that religion can be a form of name-calling fits within Schewel's "subtraction" narrative: "that religion is a way of coping with the conditions of ignorance, powerlessness, and cultural passivity that plagued early human existence."⁵⁷⁹ I bring Schewel into the conversation to suggest that Steane can be read as pointing at the rhetorical spaces that "religion" occupies and Steane is concerned with the spaces where the word is used to put everything a speaker or author considers immoral and irrational. In this sense and in these kinds of rhetorical spaces, one could raise the question of how both "science" and "religion" are used or belong to the metaphysical: that is moral and theological, stories—the myths—cultures tell themselves about the central nature of a given cultural "common sense."⁵⁸⁰ Steane wants to keep the word and place it in a rhetorical space that has a basic openness to experience the world as it is, with its pain and glories and mysterious beyondness in the midst of our astonishing capacities to apprehend some of it. This rhetorical space, interestingly, has to do with what is considered reasonable, or in Gadamerian terms, with what *phronesis* is all about. A hermeneutics of transmission, rooting a rhetoric of involvement, aims precisely at reasonableness. It means to refuse to close our selves in our paths of experiencing and seek with whichever language we can to speak in such a way that we embrace this openness.

An approach that enters the "science and religion" debate, precisely by repairing, reframing, and expanding, the rhetorical space in order to speak about the experience implicit in "religion" and "science," is Bruno Latour's. In an edited volume called *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience* (2005), Latour's essay performs precisely a movement along the lines of what Steane recommends: seeking a rhetorical space where experience is let to speak, without "essentialising" or, as Latour calls it, without "freeze-framing," without isolating "an image out of the flows that only provide them with their real (their constantly re-realized, re-presented) meaning." Truth, Latour says, is found "in taking up again the task of *continuing* the flow, of elongating the cascade of mediations one step further."⁵⁸¹ He sees both science and

⁵⁷⁹ Schewel, *Seven Ways of Looking at Religion*, 3. I do not know if Steane's positive proposal can be characterised as a narrative, but it can be characterised as narrating. See below the coincidence between Steane's and Latour's suggestions.

⁵⁸⁰ A similar observation about the moral nature of the rhetorical space and the use of "science" and "religion" is made by Peter Harrison, "That Religion Has Typically Impeded the Progress of Science," myth 14 in *Newton's Apple and Other Myths About Science*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Kostas Kampourakis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 201.

⁵⁸¹ Bruno Latour, "'Thou Shall Not Freeze-Frame,' or, How Not to Misunderstand the Science and Religion Debate," chap. 2 in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, ed. James D. Proctor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46 (author's italics). Perhaps not directly relevant to the points in this section but directly relevant to the thesis as a whole, see John Hedley Brooke's essay in the same collection, "Darwin, Design, and the Unification of Nature," chap. 9 in *Science, Religion, and the Human Experience*, 165-84. Here Brooke delves

religion as having a flowing character, and it is by continuing or extending the flows in our contemporary situation that we meet or miss the mark. To recall Gadamer's discussion on the temporality of the festival and Kierkegaard's observation about repetition in chapter five, Latour here can be heard as echoing them: it is by repeated telling, again and again, as a lover continually repeats "I love you," that what is most unique and new happens. As Gadamer said, what is repeated is radically more temporal because it has its being in becoming and return. A repeated "I love you," Latour notes, is a repetition that at once makes alive again, bringing the lovers "close and present anew."⁵⁸² Latour may be seen as suggesting an *agapeic* approach to science and religion, precisely by suggesting rhetorical spaces that are almost absent from methodological considerations. On "religion," Latour observes that reconfiguring the rhetorical spaces implies seeking to "obtain enough common experience that it can be analyzed afterwards." The experience he refers to is love-addressing: a form of speech that "is concerned by the transformation of messengers instead of the transport of information," and is "so sensitive to the tone in which it is uttered that it can abruptly shift, through a decisive crisis, from distance to proximity—and back to estrangement—and from absence to distance and, alas, back again."⁵⁸³ This form of talk, Latour notes—and here he coincides with Gadamer's observation about the experience of art, language, and festive time as re-presenting—presents anew "what it is to be present in what one says." This way of speaking, Latour opines, "is at once completely common, extremely complex, and not that frequently described in detail."⁵⁸⁴ As a response to what Steane says is needed, Latour here is not giving "narratives" in the sense we see in Schewel, but he is rhetorically involved in a new hermeneutic by way of attending to extremely common ways of speaking that speak of experiences that are less commonly considered in science and religion discussions.

Latour's piece in the edited companion *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art* (2002)—accompanying a major art exhibition at the Centre for new Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany—goes into more detail about why Latour focuses on the image as the paradigm of the experiences between iconoclasts and iconophiles in the domains

into Darwin's work and his *theological* background to show how "ideas about the unity of nature have mediated between scientific and religious discourse" (166). Brooke follows the scientific, ethical, and theological spaces as suggested by the idea of the "unity of nature" to observe the rhetorical work that it has performed as mediator between scientific and religious discourse. Brooke's work here does not promote a critical historico-methodological frame (the "complexity thesis" as critique) but creatively suggests innovative directions, such as following the rhetorical spaces that the "unity of nature" has occupied.

⁵⁸² Latour, "'Thou Shall Not Freeze-Frame'," 46.

⁵⁸³ Latour, "'Thou Shall Not Freeze-Frame'," 31.

⁵⁸⁴ Latour, "'Thou Shall Not Freeze-Frame'," 31.

of science, religion, art, and politics.⁵⁸⁵ Here I merely point, again, to what was raised through Steane’s work: namely the reconfiguration of the rhetorical territories in order to have a reasonable discussion. In Latour we also see the intermingling between the domains I mentioned in the previous chapter—politics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology—and Latour adds *art* to the list, opening an avenue of dialogue between his thought and Gadamer’s, since Gadamer himself takes the experience of art as a key conversation partner.

At this point, Josephson-Storm’s work becomes relevant to close the section of the chapter and the thesis. His work connects directly to the reconfiguration of the rhetorical spaces. He points out a couple of rhetorically and dialectical “others” through which common ways of speaking about science and religion are birthed, and which are worth noting: the notions of magic and superstition. After exploring how these notions co-create the territories of science and religion, the chapter concludes with a nod towards Josephson-Storm’s latest work and his proposal of Metamodernism.

7.2.2: Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm and the Illusion of Disenchantment: The Magic and Superstition of Science and Religion

Josephson-Storm’s work will help close this chapter, precisely through the rhetorical spaces of “religion” that Steane makes us aware of. *The Myth of Disenchantment* (2017) is relevant at this point because much of the “science and religion” literature has tended to work, as has been pointed out several times, within the myth of a secular culture. Josephson-Storm shows this disenchanted secularisation to be a myth—it is a story, a myth of mythlessness—and that our response to it will also be mythical. There is no “exodus into a mythless future,” he argues (*contra* Lyotard), “I see no end to metanarratives. But I also see no reason to flee from them. Reason is historical. Thought is narrative.”⁵⁸⁶ Stephen Prickett would take what Josephson-Storm is saying and ask, “but what *kind* of narrative?” Given the turn to story-telling of scientists, philosophers, and theologians, Prickett says, “we must start by trying to understand a little more about narrative itself.”⁵⁸⁷ Schewel’s work on narratives of religion would also benefit from an answer to this question.

⁵⁸⁵ Bruno Latour, “What is Iconoclasm? Or Is there a World Beyond the Image Wars?” in *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 16-40.

⁵⁸⁶ Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017), 316.

⁵⁸⁷ Prickett, *Narrative, Religion and Science*, 13.

Categories that need consideration, since they are in some contexts used as dismissive descriptions of unreasonability and irrationality (functioning as important characters in our myths or narratives), are the categories of *superstition* and *magic*. They are, as Josephson-Storm says, a “third term” through which both “science” and “religion” come to be:

It is my contention that tracing the genealogy of the notion of a conflict between religion and science will give us clues to both the appearance and occlusion of enchantment. While I will explain disenchantment in many levels, I will argue that *one* of the mechanisms that both makes magic appealing and motivates its suppression is the reification of a putative binary opposition between religion and science, and the production of a “third term” (*superstition*, *magic*, and so on) that signifies repeated attempts to stage or prevent reconciliation between these opposed discursive terrains.⁵⁸⁸

Josephson-Storm is saying that both religion and science have emerged as rhetorical and dialectical opposites (as we know from the nineteenth-century) through a rhetorical and dialectical relation with magic and superstition. Also, Josephson-Storm is saying that the science-religion binary exists by critiquing—and being critiqued by—what is seen as superstitious or magical (from the perspective of “science” or “religion”). “Both concepts of religion and science came into existence by being distinguished from ‘superstition,’ understood as the false double of religion and later as the false double of science or scientific knowledge (in both humanistic and naturalistic modes).”⁵⁸⁹ The result of this rhetorical and dialectical relation is that

once “religion” and “science” are formulated as opposing discursive terrains, religion-science hybrids become both threatening and appealing. They are threatening because they risk destabilizing the system’s points of closure and because they suggest pre-hybrid and therefore supposedly premodern systems. But also they are appealing because they promise to heal the split between the two notionally opposed terrains. Moreover, the more “magic” becomes marked as antimodern, the more it becomes potentially attractive as a site from which to criticize “modernity.” Finally, for all the polemical attacks against superstition and magic, disenchanting efforts were only sporadically enforced within the disciplines, such that notions of magic and spirits keep resurfacing as redemptive possibilities.⁵⁹⁰

It might be unwise to come out and suggest we all turn to superstition and magic (or divination, the occult, the paranormal, etc.) in order to be reasonable and sensible about the real world. What I am doing here by bringing Josephson-Storm is suggesting that the third term—which “science” and “religion” are seen as opposing and thus through which they partly garner their

⁵⁸⁸ Josephson-Storm, *Myth of Disenchantment*, 13 (author’s italics).

⁵⁸⁹ Josephson-Storm, *Myth of Disenchantment*, 14.

⁵⁹⁰ Josephson-Storm, *Myth of Disenchantment*, 15-6.

status as much as from each other—is a rhetorical and dialectical position from which they *still* are defined and therefore is still doing work. Because this is the case, awareness of this wider rhetorical play is propelling rich discussions through these categories, displaying the unity of social, cultural, scientific, philosophical, theological, metaphysical, political, and ethical threads.⁵⁹¹ A “lesson” hidden here is to move from a primarily classificatory mode of scholarship towards letting the words *speak*, however they are used, aware as much as possible of their rhetorico-historic polyvalence within contexts of discourse and communication. Ricœur articulates the move towards letting the words speak poignantly, referring to the avenues of thought available in modernity:

The same epoch holds in reserve both the possibility of emptying language by radically formalizing it and the possibility of filling it anew by reminding itself of the fullest meanings, the most pregnant ones, the ones which are most bound by the presence of the sacred to man.

It is not regret for the sunken Atlantides that animates us, but hope for a re-creation of language. Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again.⁵⁹²

Ricœur voices what a hermeneutics of transmission seeks to encourage. Not to undervalue the need for classification but encourage scholars not to, as Sørensen and Petersen argue, “become so focused on terminological issues that they are at risk of losing sight of the very phenomena they set out to investigate and for which the categories served as instrumental for the analysis.”⁵⁹³ The critique of essentialism terminates either in complete silence and the evacuation of meaning of all our categories or fostering a new essentialism, creating an illusory sense that categories are, in fact, static and timelessly well-defined.⁵⁹⁴ Once we accept historical effectedness as part and parcel of our wor(l)ds—that categories are not static but dynamic and time-bound, and that our speech knows this—essentialism as a worry dissolves. We are not trying to “fix” something to see it (so there is no need to unfix it), but to speak with it and about our involvement in it. We seek to be called again by the fullest of meanings, beyond the desert of criticism; we hope for a re-creation of language.

⁵⁹¹ See for example the work of Paul Tyson, particularly *De-Fragmenting Modernity: Reintegrating Knowledge with Wisdom, Being with Truth, and Reality with Being* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017) and *Seven Brief Lessons on Magic* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019). Josephson-Storm himself has applied a trinary model to consider religion, superstition, and secularism in “The Superstition, Secularism, and Religion Trinary: Or Re-Theorizing Secularism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (January 2018): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341409>.

⁵⁹² Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 349.

⁵⁹³ Jesper Frøkjær Sørensen and Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Manipulating the Divine – an Introduction,” chap. 1 in *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations of Divination and Magic: Manipulating the Divine*, ed. Jesper Frøkjær Sørensen and Anders Klostergaard Petersen (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 2.

⁵⁹⁴ Sørensen and Petersen, “Manipulating the Divine,” 8.

7.3: *Metamodernism: When Critique and Deconstruction Devour All Our Concepts, What Happens Next?*

Josephson Storm's work is rich and increasingly difficult for a reason.⁵⁹⁵ This section merely notes the progression from his *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (2012) to *The Myth of Disenchantment* (2017), and *Metamodernism* (2021), the most recent, in order to highlight that his work wrestles incrementally with the very problems that "essentialism" entails. Broadly speaking, his work is an extended meditation on what happens when you follow the consequences of the complete fluidity of our categories via relentless deconstruction and critique—and then raise your head and ask something like: "how then shall I speak? What then shall I think and feel, given that all has been critiqued and deconstructed? Is continual devouring of the fragments the next step or is it zooming more and more into them without any sense of a long-abandoned whole?" Josephson Storm's *Metamodernism* can be seen as a work of hope, moving past the impasse of scholarship that "endlessly repeats and valorizes the act of deconstruction, and that which narrowly focuses on irrelevant and microscopic case studies."⁵⁹⁶

Josephson Storm articulates the interests of a hermeneutics of transmission in the sense that a hermeneutics of transmission wants to move through these types of scholarship. A hermeneutics of transmission does not want to undervalue critical, deconstructive, and increasingly fragment-oriented scholarship. A hermeneutics of transmission recognises, however, that a wider intuition of discovering the whole—within which the scattered is able to appear disconnected—is necessary, and to receive a more encompassing intuition requires extending the hand from the scholars of the past to the ones of the future. There is no way to summarise Josephson Storm's book or work here. I merely signal to scholars that are enticed by critique and critique of critique (of critique...) or that in the abhorrence of generality turn more and more to the disconnected particular, that Metamodernism aims to be a *movement* that is responding to problems that are seen in this thesis. Josephson-Storm is proposing a metaphysics (Metarealism), a methodological framework (Process Social Ontology and Natural Kinds), an orientation towards meaning (Hylosemiotics), a spirit of critical creativity

⁵⁹⁵ His last name is not hyphenated in his latest book and will possibly be only "Storm" in the future. See Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, "About," *Absolute Disruption: Theory after Postmodernism*, n.d., <https://absolute-disruption.com/about/>, accessed September 4, 2021.

⁵⁹⁶ Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2021), ix.

(Zeteticism), and an ethical framework (Revolutionary Happiness).⁵⁹⁷ With this proposal for the future of theory, Josephson Storm is aware of the layers that we saw in the previous chapter—politics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology—and as such a hermeneutics of transmission is congenial with his proposals and can be furthered by every one of Josephson Storm’s suggestions.

7.4: Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to close the thesis by engaging with various thinkers and movements that in their own ways are opening the territories of science and religion beyond critique of the terms or narratives in which they appear (without being *uncritical*). From moving to categories like knowledge, magic, superstition, the secular, and others, to noting the kaleidoscopic nature of science itself, and noting the material and rhetorical spaces and the creative and uncertain nature of these spaces, this chapter has suggested that these and other moves are being performed in a manner that coincides with a hermeneutic of transmission. Attempts are being made to move beyond critique, raising questions that are directed in an array of directions, displaying the necessary unity of multiple disciplines and modes of thought. In a sense, a hermeneutics of transmission, which I said encourages a practice of rhetorical involvement, is nothing other than an attempt to nudge a type of scholarship that understands itself as more than disciplinary without denying that there is specialisation. In other words, it is a way of noting that the sciences (*Wissenschaften*) that we are involved in are always already *human* sciences, be them “natural” or “human.” Scholars are, above all, not specialising in their disciplines, but doing so within a personal space that permits our scientific knowing and to which we are responsible. The originating issues—essentialism, anachronism, and complexity—are thus shown to be in touch with real problems but the “solution” to the real problems is indicated not by listening to how these issues pose the problem, but by listening nonetheless to the problems they do touch (but are posed inadequately). Alongside this listening comes a desire to do more than genealogy and critique, recognising our methodological imaginings as within wider and very real and present worlds that need more than our disciplinary allegiance.

⁵⁹⁷ Josephson Storm, *Metamodernism*, 21. The book is divided thus: Part I. Metarealism (29-48); Part II. Process Social Ontology (49-148); Part III. Hylosemiotics (149-208); Part IV. Knowledge and Value, which contains the epistemological posture of Zetetic Knowledge (209-35) and the ethical goal of Revolutionary Happiness as a critical virtue ethics (236-75).

8: Conclusion

This thesis' overall goal has been to propose a hermeneutics of transmission: a way of integrating recent historiographical work on science and religion into contemporary science and religion scholarship. A hermeneutics of transmission is a lens to read the historiographical work; a lens which is both mindful of the critical hermeneutics within which the historiographical work has tended to operate and not confined by this critical hermeneutics.

The proposal of a hermeneutics of transmission, over and above a hermeneutics of critique, is, however, the outcome of a deeper difficulty—that the historiographical work contains within itself barriers to the desired integration. The desire to integrate more fully the historiographical work into contemporary science and religion scholarship was met with resistance from within. The historiographical work itself, as the thesis showed, “resists” easy integration—the difficulties of integration are partly arising from the critical hermeneutics that tends to frame the historiographical work’s rhetoric. These two areas of concern, namely the concern for integration of the historiographical work and the concern for the difficulties against integration that such work poses against itself, elucidate more fully what this thesis addresses, and what a hermeneutics of transmission is a response to.

Essentialism, complexity, and anachronism—the hermeneutical principles used to frame the historiographical work—served as starting points and main conversation partners. These hermeneutical principles are, so to speak, the legs on which the critical hermeneutics that frames the historiographical work stands. Through Hans-Georg Gadamer’s work, especially in Part Two of the thesis, these three historico-methodological moves acquired more relevance, especially since the critical hermeneutics which they constitute points to the issues these categories misconceive. These categories misconceive the way in which language moves throughout history to help us think and speak today, in history, about history. Essentialism, complexity, and anachronism, especially as they are used methodologically by historiographical work, misconstrue how we inhabit history in and through language. To be clear, observing the failings which these categories produce in the framing of historiographical work is a sign of the success of the historiographical work. The historiographical work on science and religion has been successful enough that it has established clear hermeneutical friends and foes throughout the historiographical guild: essentialism is bad, complexity is good, anachronism is bad. This thesis has endeavoured to propel the success of the historiographical work beyond the historiographical guild, mindful of the assumptions in, and ambiguities and pitfalls of, these three historico-methodological categories.

By proposing a hermeneutics of transmission—effectively a different lens to read the historiographical work, mindful of, but not confined by the critical approach that the historiographical work tends to have—this thesis aimed at reconceiving the historiographical works on science and religion. According to a hermeneutics of transmission, what can encourage us in the field to move beyond the issues critiqued relentlessly in the historiographical literature is not more critique, but something like “passing the baton.” Critique cannot carry the message without being embedded in a wider process of transmission which enables critique and makes it possible. Integration of the historiographical work, in other words, can happen best when the method is not “critical” but “transmissional.” Scholars should not receive the historiographical work as if “the past” is in the past. Scholars should receive the historiographical work creatively, orienting themselves towards the discovery of the past for the present, a present we all belong to and which we are passing down to the ones who will come after us.

The suggestion of a hermeneutics of transmission that embodies a rhetoric of involvement, as the last chapter suggested, is an attempt to integrate critique, motivated by the desire to appreciate the scholarship that has come before and through which we are able to think and wrestle with our own past in our own present for our own future. Such integration is therefore a movement of reception, participation, and sharing. It is an attempt at receiving and passing the baton, a recognition of our dependence to one another and our existence for one another.

With a concretised understanding of what the thesis has achieved and how it contributes to science and religion scholarship, it is worth concluding with how each chapter contributed to the thesis’ overall goal.

Chapter one investigated some of the main difficulties that arise from outright rejections of essentialism, from positing complexity as an antidote to linear narratives of conflict or harmony between science and religion, and from strict attempts to avoid anachronism. It noted that historians themselves know that a negative approach is not enough—a parasitic approach tends to propagate what it critiques—but that without a clear understanding of what essentialism, complexity, and anachronism do as historico-methodological categories, an alternative approach is not in sight and is in fact prevented by the way in which historiographies deploy these categories.

Chapter two brought into focus the specific issues raised by essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. It argued that some essential knowledge—not essentialist, but still, fundamental, transhistorical, and given to us through our language—is necessary and assumed

by all negations of essentialism. This was shown by how Harrison and Brooke both use their own essential knowledge to reject essentialist notions of “science” and “religion.” This chapter also argued that historical complexity is narrowed and becomes parasitic on the narratives that it seeks to reject if it is attached primarily to a rhetoric of critique. Since critique is also a rhetorical and narrative structure, complexity comes to be defined by what it critiques, thereby becoming a carrier of the narratives of harmony or conflict between science and religion it seeks to counter. Finally, chapter two argued that to single out anachronism as a problem—the problem of uttering words whose realm of meaning was different in the past—is, at best, equivalent to mindfulness about our speech about the past, and at worst, an impossible task of communication in the present since most important words continue to shift their meanings through time. This chapter argued instead that reality is imbued by history and therefore one cannot oppose anachronism but only find appropriate anachronisms, precisely by historically-informed approaches which recognise that history is brought upon us through language and experience.

Having exposed the main problems with essentialism, complexity, and anachronism, and having set the scene regarding what needs addressing—the nature of our communication about history given that we are beings within history—chapter three explored three main facets of Gadamer’s thought in order to show how philosophical hermeneutics is an appropriate tool to unpack the multisided nature of historiographical work. Chapter three observed that philosophical hermeneutics can help us engage with the ethical, political, and practical dimensions, the theological and metaphysical dimensions, and the historical and existential dimensions implicit in how historiographical work uses the categories of essentialism, complexity, and anachronism. These dimensions became especially relevant for chapters six and seven, since these chapters make use of these dimensions in order to elucidate how historiography foregrounds political, ethical, metaphysical, and even theological recommendations and ideals.

Chapters four and five delved into Gadamer’s thought in order to propose that complexity can be best understood as a hermeneutics of tradition instead of a hermeneutics of critique (chapter four), and in order to show that both essentialism and anachronism pose inadequately a solution to a real problem—the problem of our language and experience being embedded in history (chapter five). By observing that complexity can be fruitfully interpreted as an approach beyond (but not without) critique, and that such approach can be mindful of the historicity of our language and experience, a hermeneutics of tradition—called in chapter seven a hermeneutics of *transmission*—becomes a way of undoing the pseudo-problems contained

within the rhetorical negations that essentialism, anachronism, and complexity represent. In undoing or in clarifying the nature of the pseudo-problems, the actual problems came into view, and with them, the possibility of integrating scholarship tied to them. The “actual problems,” as it was shown throughout, are the issues of the historicity (temporality) of reality and our attempts to speak in a way that is mindful of this fact beyond (but not without) a critical register. Anti-essentialism, the rejection of anachronism, and complexity as the rejection of narratives of conflict or harmony, are understood usually as critical elements that deal with fixity of categories or narratives and their (historically) untimely deployment. Through Gadamer’s thought I have suggested that it is best to see the anachronistic nature of speech as a rhetorical issue since our language and experience order our experience of time. I cannot avoid historical transposition of present concepts to the past since by my very thinking and speaking I am already doing it. This rhetorical turn—focusing on the manner of speaking and on what is assumed when we speak in a specific historical situation—allowed the thesis to observe in chapters six and seven that these seemingly methodological negatives (anti-essentialism, rejection of anachronism, etc.) conceal layers that are not usually acknowledged. These layers are political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological origins and ends; they are either unconscious or unacknowledged starting points and guiding principles whose concealment can hinder the appropriation of the insights that historiographical works are helpfully bringing to science and religion discourses.

Finally, chapters six and seven sought to move science and religion scholarship towards an understanding of how a hermeneutics of transmission can function as an integrative paradigm for historiographical work on science and religion. Chapter six used Derrida’s, Habermas’, and Betti’s critiques of philosophical hermeneutics as ways of showing how the layers uncovered in chapter three (politics, ethics, metaphysics, and theology) are present in science and religion historiographies. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that “science and religion” as a historical entity, just as historiographical work on science and religion has pointed out, is indeed in need of questioning and the avenues of new questions are precisely political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological.

Chapter seven concluded the thesis. It explored scholarship within and outwith science and religion scholarship. This scholarship is becoming more and more aware of the political, ethical, metaphysical, and theological layers of “science,” “religion,” and “science and religion,” and through this growing awareness it is moving beyond a critical hermeneutics. From philosophers, to historians and scientists, a postcritical move is growing. The thesis’ articulation of a hermeneutics of transmission seeks to give this move a name and therefore to

propose it as an alternative way of directing one's scholarship, aiming at thoughtful creativity in and about our contemporary concerns, concerns that ultimately motivate and propel our continual questioning about science and religion, including the historiographical work which has been the main focus point of this study.

Appendix: A Biographical Introduction and an Overview of Gadamer's Collected Works

Biographical Introduction

Hans-Georg Gadamer was born on 11 February 1900 in Marburg, Germany, exactly 250 years after René Descartes' death,⁵⁹⁸ and in the year Friedrich Nietzsche died.⁵⁹⁹ *Truth and Method*—Gadamer's magnum opus—was published in 1960 and it is the work that brought the equation of Gadamer with philosophical hermeneutics.⁶⁰⁰ The word “method” in the title echoes Descartes' *Discourse de la Méthode*, and here Gadamer challenges many of modern philosophy's assumptions on the nature of knowing, including the very ideal of “method” as the mark of true knowledge. Gadamer retired from his university professor role in 1968,⁶⁰¹ although he continued writing and speaking in Germany and around the world until his death on 13 March 2002 in Heidelberg.⁶⁰²

Gadamer's philosophical path was not immediately evident. He had no idea that he was going to end up in philosophy. In 1902 Gadamer's father, Johannes Gadamer, accepted a call for a professorship in Breslau which he held until 1919 (when he returned to Marburg), so Gadamer grew up in Breslau not in Marburg. Gadamer's mother died when he was four years old and his father remarried soon afterwards.⁶⁰³ In 1918, at the twilight of the first world war, he graduated from the Holy Spirit Gymnasium in Breslau (modern day Wrocław, in southwest Poland).⁶⁰⁴ When enrolling at the university in Breslau in the spring of 1918, Gadamer was of his own account, a “bashful, clumsy, inwardly turned kid.”⁶⁰⁵ He loved Shakespeare, the

⁵⁹⁸ Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (London: Routledge, 2003), 1. Grondin also wrote Gadamer's biography, published in German before Gadamer died as *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie* (1999) and translated as *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Grondin's *The Philosophy of Gadamer* and Karl Simms, *Hans-Georg Gadamer* (London: Routledge, 2015) are accessible introductions to Gadamer's thought.

⁵⁹⁹ R. Lanier Anderson, “Friedrich Nietzsche” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2021 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/nietzsche/>, accessed March 29, 2022.

⁶⁰⁰ I will be using *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), *T&M* hereafter.

⁶⁰¹ Robert J. Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13; Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 18-25.

⁶⁰² A short chronology can be found in Etsuro Makita's comprehensive site, which expands Makita's *Gadamer-Bibliographie (1922-1994)* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). The site has lists of all of Gadamer's published works, including translations into different languages, a list of his former students and a list of the awards he received throughout his life (https://www.rs.tus.ac.jp/makita/gdmhp/gdmhp_d.html, accessed March 29, 2022).

⁶⁰³ Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” 14.

⁶⁰⁴ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 3.

⁶⁰⁵ Hans Georg-Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. Robert R. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 3.

ancient Greeks and classical German writers, and he was particularly interested in lyric poetry. Gadamer's father, a successful pharmaceutical chemistry professor—very strict but well intentioned—was disappointed at Gadamer's lack of interest in the natural sciences. Gadamer says that his father never approved of his interests but still let him have his way.⁶⁰⁶

Young Gadamer was, to echo Kant's reaction when reading Hume, awakened from his dogmatic slumbers by Theodor Lessing's *Europa und Asien* in his first year of university, although he had read Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in his final year of secondary school.⁶⁰⁷ Lessing challenged Gadamer's entire cultural, familial, and experiential background to such an extent that Gadamer says that “for me something like *thinking* began.”⁶⁰⁸

Kierkegaard's second part of *Either/Or* also came into his hands, although he later came to see Hegel as having the upper hand. It was neo-Kantian Richard Höningwald's seminars and his lecture course that prepared Gadamer for Marburg, where he moved to from Breslau in 1919 as his father had been called back to the University of Marburg (becoming rector in 1922).⁶⁰⁹ It was in Marburg that Gadamer was influenced by neo-Kantians Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann, the circle of the poet Stefan George, the writings of Nietzsche, Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard, and the problem of historical relativism from the works of Wilhelm Dilthey and Ernst Troeltsch.⁶¹⁰ In 1920, even though he had read Husserl and had attended some seminars on phenomenology with one of Natorp's students, he had his first real encounter with phenomenology through the dazzling power of Max Scheler,⁶¹¹ matched only by (as Gadamer was to discover) Heidegger's.

In 1921 when a student was giving a passionate speech, “marked by an unusual mode of expression,” Gadamer asked the seminar leader, Moritz Geiger, about such a way of speaking. Geiger said flatly “he's been Heideggerized.”⁶¹² This was the first time Gadamer encountered Heidegger's name. The following year in 1922, Gadamer wrote his dissertation on Plato and pleasure and received his doctorate.⁶¹³ That same year, after writing his dissertation, Gadamer received from his teacher Paul Natorp “a forty-page Heidegger

⁶⁰⁶ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 3; “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 3.

⁶⁰⁷ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 5; “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 4. In the former he says that he was in his first year at the university and in the later he says that he was in his final year of secondary school.

⁶⁰⁸ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 4 (author's italics).

⁶⁰⁹ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 4-5; Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” 15.

⁶¹⁰ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 5; *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 7-19.

⁶¹¹ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 27-34.

⁶¹² Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 37.

⁶¹³ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 7; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 5.

manuscript to read, an introduction to an Aristotle interpretation.” It “affected me like an electric shock” Gadamer recalls.⁶¹⁴ A couple of decades later *Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle: Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation* was to disappear (one of only two manuscripts). Gadamer lost it in an Allied air raid in Leipzig in 1943.⁶¹⁵ Heidegger’s penetrating questioning and novel way of speaking “broke through to me,” Gadamer says. “This was no mere learned doing moved by a historical problematic.”⁶¹⁶ Aristotle suddenly became alive for Gadamer. After suffering an attack of polio, Gadamer went to Freiburg in 1923 for a semester to study with Heidegger, and he also took some lectures and seminars with Husserl.⁶¹⁷ There Gadamer met Paul Friedländer, who was later to make a classical philologist out of Gadamer.⁶¹⁸ Heidegger left Freiburg for Marburg after the semester Gadamer was there in 1923, and in the winter semester of 1923-4 Gadamer became his assistant in Marburg.

Heidegger’s ascendancy as a professor was dazzling but also overwhelming. Due to Heidegger’s criticisms the demotivated assistant decided that if he had no future in philosophy, at least he could be a good classical philologist and teach Greek and Latin in a secondary school. Gadamer was to devote himself in the following years under the tutelage of Friedländer to the classics on poetry, tragedy, and rhetoric, paying special attention to Plato and Aristotle.⁶¹⁹ In 1927 Gadamer passed his state exams (*Staatsexamen*)—Heidegger and Friedländer being two of the three examiners—becoming a certified classics teacher. Later Gadamer did his *Habilitation* in philosophy—under Heidegger, surprisingly at Heidegger’s request—in 1928-9,⁶²⁰ writing a phenomenological interpretation of Plato’s *Philebus*.⁶²¹

⁶¹⁴ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 46-7.

⁶¹⁵ See Michael Baur’s translation of Heidegger’s manuscript, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle,” 358-93. One manuscript was sent to Marburg (by request of Paul Natorp) and another to Göttingen (by request of Georg Misch) due to vacancies in both places. The one Natorp received is the one Gadamer read and which Gadamer lost in Leipzig. The Göttingen copy Misch gave to Josef König in 1964, forty-two years after Heidegger had applied for the job in Göttingen, and König shelved it and forgot about it. It was only re-discovered later and published in 1989 (356-7); Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 6. A more recent translation is John van Buren’s “Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle: An Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation,” in *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond*, ed. John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 111-45.

⁶¹⁶ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 47.

⁶¹⁷ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 35.

⁶¹⁸ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 37, 43.

⁶¹⁹ Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 9.

⁶²⁰ Jeff Malpas, “Hans-Georg Gadamer,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2018 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/gadamer/>, accessed April 15, 2021; Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 12; “Gadamer on Gadamer,” in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13.

⁶²¹ Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 10.

Most of Gadamer's main influences were already in place. His love for the Greeks and the truth spoken by literature and art in general (meaning that a narrowly conceived "science" has no monopoly on knowledge), the relevance of phenomenological description that challenges "systematic" tendencies of abstraction or mere historical categorisation of philosophical problems, and Heidegger's hand to direct him in the path of what we now call philosophical hermeneutics through the course Heidegger gave in 1923 on "hermeneutics of facticity." Gadamer's most vivid memory of Heidegger was not this course, however, but Heidegger's introduction to the "magical word" of *phronesis* in the sixth book of *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶²² These influences sent Gadamer through the entire western philosophical tradition. He would keep his ear on the Platonic and Aristotelian corpora, on the unity of practical and theoretical as exemplified in *phronesis* and practical philosophy, and on the arts. He would say later that the arts, taken as a whole, literature, visual arts, architecture, music, etc., "quietly govern the metaphysical heritage of our Western tradition."⁶²³

Gadamer taught in Marburg as a lecturer (*Privatdozent*) from 1928 onwards (with a stint at Kiel in 1934-5) and attained his professorial title in 1937.⁶²⁴ There have been attempts to show through Gadamer's work in the National Socialist era an accommodationist attitude and political savviness (and intellectual collusion) to salvage his livelihood and career. These attempts have been ignited not only due to his friendship with Heidegger, who was a member of the party, but because he signed a statement of allegiance of professors to Hitler and the state in 1933, for a conference he gave in 1934 on Plato and the Poets, and because in 1936 he registered voluntarily to a political "rehabilitation" camp.⁶²⁵ These attempts to show Gadamer's

⁶²² Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey," 9; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 7.

⁶²³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!'" in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, trans. and ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 195.

⁶²⁴ Gadamer, "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey," 13; *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 80; Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer."

⁶²⁵ Gadamer talks about registering to the 1936 camp to find further employment in *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 79. See also Gadamer's 1989 radio interview (by Dörte von Westernhagen) on the Nazi era, "The Real Nazis Had No Interest at All in Us...," in *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary*, ed. and trans. Richard E. Palmer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 115-32. The reader can see Richard E. Palmer, "Introduction," in *Gadamer in Conversation*, 19-27 to decide whether to follow up further on this debate. For the claims of Gadamer's collusion through his few written pieces of that time, see Teresa Orozco, *Platonische Gewalt. Gadamers politische Hermeneutik der NS-Zeit* (Hamburg: Argument, 1995); "The Art of Allusion: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Interventions under National Socialism," in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Bruce Krajewski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 212-28. See Catherine Zuckert, "On the Politics of Gadamerian Hermeneutics: A Response to Orozco and Waite," in *Gadamer's Repercussions*, 229-43 for a response to Orozco, and Orozco's response, "The Protection of the Philosophical Form: A Response to Zuckert," in *Gadamer's Repercussions*, 244-55. For a review of two collections of Gadamer's essays and of an edited collection engaging Gadamer's thought see Richard Wolin, "Untruth and Method: Nazism and the Complicities of Hans-Georg Gadamer," *The New Republic* 222, no. 20 (May 2000): 36-45. Wolin suggests that Gadamer's philosophy entirely colludes with the spirit of Nazism and is

complicity show how a given historical moment (post second world war Germany, for example) frames any so-called “historical questions” to texts, historical periods, or people; all questioning is situated and affected by its historical context. Any critique of “history,” to echo Heidegger, is always critique of the present.⁶²⁶ The very attempts of linking and accusing Gadamer of complicity and collusion due to his avoidance of politics, minimising his attempts to be loyal to his many Jewish friends (however timid these attempts may have been) exemplify that historical contexts allow questionings through which “history” takes shape.

A year after attaining his professorial title, Gadamer was offered a chair in classical philology at Halle in 1938. But shortly thereafter he received another offer to a post in philosophy in Leipzig, which he decided to take.⁶²⁷ There he had to teach everything throughout the western philosophical tradition because he was the only specialist in philosophy, so he could not focus on his work.⁶²⁸ In 1945, after National Socialism had collapsed, Gadamer became the rector of the university in Leipzig under Soviet occupation, as he was seen as uncompromised. After two years as rector, he received a call to work in Frankfurt am Main in West Germany in 1947 and he took it, devoting himself to both teaching and research.⁶²⁹ He would not stay in Frankfurt for long because two years later he was called to succeed Karl Jaspers in the chair at Heidelberg. This meant for Gadamer that in 1949 it was “the beginning of a truly ‘academic’ career in an academic ‘world.’”⁶³⁰

Gadamer would devote himself to teaching and rebuilding the educational culture of the university in Heidelberg. In 1953 he founded, along with Helmut Kuhn, the journal *Philosophische Rundschau*, dedicated entirely to critical thinking. Notably, in the supplement of this journal in 1967, what was to be Jürgen Habermas’ *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1970) was published. Habermas voiced there an agreement with Gadamer’s philosophical

against Enlightenment “reason,” “modernity,” and “autonomy” (using Orozco to support his conclusions). For a response to Wolin see Richard E. Palmer, “A Response to Richard Wolin on Gadamer and the Nazis,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 4 (2002): 467-82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672550210167432>. For a comprehensive treatment of Orozco’s and Wolin’s claims see Facundo Bey, “El debate sobre *Plato und die Dichter* y su inscripción en el contexto de Alemania Nacional-Socialista: una discusión con lecturas de la teoría política” [The Debate on *Plato und die Dichter* and its Inscription in the Context of National Socialist Germany: A Discussion with an Interpretation from Political Theory], *Ekstasis* 8, no. 1 (2019): 138-63, <https://doi.org/10.12957/ek.2019.42786>.

⁶²⁶ Heidegger says: “The *critique* of history is always only the critique of the present.” Baur, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle,” 360 (author’s italics).

⁶²⁷ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 13; *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 81, 95; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 11. Grondin locates this in 1939 but I am following here Gadamer’s own dating.

⁶²⁸ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 15; *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 117-8; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 11.

⁶²⁹ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 16; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 11.

⁶³⁰ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 16.

hermeneutics and a critique of what Gadamer called “the universality of hermeneutics.”⁶³¹ Most notably, in this period Gadamer published his first substantive conclusions of his various research projects in *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), which would give him world recognition. Eight years later Gadamer retired from his post in Heidelberg and began in 1968 what he calls “a life of travel,”⁶³² which was like “a second youth.”⁶³³ Gadamer would learn to speak and lecture in English, regularly lecturing in Canada and the US, and also in Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Holland, and Scandinavia, among other places.⁶³⁴ English translation of his works started to appear in the late 1960s, *Truth and Method* being published in 1975.⁶³⁵ During the 1980s and 90s he would edit his ten volume *Gesammelte Werke* and would continue to have important encounters, notably a 1981 discussion with Derrida in Paris which was somewhat disappointing for Gadamer.⁶³⁶ Gadamer was to pass away in Heidelberg on 13 March 2002, having lived through two world wars and with his life spanning the end of the nineteenth century, the entire twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Gadamer’s Collected Works: Between Greece and Germany, Classical and Modern.

Focusing now on Gadamer’s work, surveying the ten volumes of Gadamer’s *Gesammelte Werke*—which he himself supervised and which do not constitute everything he wrote but represent what he thought was important work—may give a further glimpse of the breadth of his engagements.

The first volume I already talked about briefly. *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)* is the “trademark” of philosophical hermeneutics. It has three parts. It begins with the question of the place of “method” in determining knowledge via an analysis of the experience of truth in art prior and beyond subjectivity (self-consciousness) and objectivity. The second part follows with a historical and philosophical preparation to the question of understanding as it emerges in the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The human sciences share with art their basis on *understanding* and not (what Gadamer saw then as) the tendency to *objectify* in order to know of the natural sciences. Gadamer came to see later that his own treatment of the

⁶³¹ See Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), esp. 143-70, and 171-5.

⁶³² Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 18.

⁶³³ Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 158.

⁶³⁴ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 18-9; *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, 156-8; Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 14-5; Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” 26-32.

⁶³⁵ Malpas, “Hans-Georg Gadamer.”

⁶³⁶ Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 13-5; Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Work,” 27-8; Palmer, “Introduction,” 14.

natural sciences was a bit one sided. The hermeneutical dimension in all knowledge, including all the sciences (all systematic knowing as in *Wissenschaften* not in the narrow English sense), is based on understanding.⁶³⁷ His third part was to be more of an introduction to the *Sprachlichkeit* (which gets translated as the *linguisticity*) of understanding, namely what he called an ontological shift of hermeneutics guided by language. Here he was to speak of the universality of hermeneutics (criticised by Habermas as I mentioned above). Language, for Gadamer, is not this or that “language” (English, Spanish, German, etc...) nor this or that word or set of words. In Gadamer’s thought the universality of hermeneutics is mediated by language because language is our dynamic back and forth with a world that *speaks*—that communicates and addresses us and to which we respond and shape as we act in it. Volume two, as Grondin reminds us, is also called *Wahrheit und Methode*. In the final assembly of Gadamer’s collected works volume one was the original *Truth and Method*, now with the original title Gadamer had given it as its subtitle (*Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*)⁶³⁸ and volume two with the subtitle *Ergänzungen Register*—clarifications and expansions, including responses to criticisms of the original *Truth and Method*.⁶³⁹

Volumes three and four are titled respectively “Modern Philosophy I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger” and “Modern Philosophy II: Problems and Paradigms” (*Neuere Philosophie I: Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* and *Neuere Philosophie II: Probleme, Gestalten*).⁶⁴⁰ More than half of volume three is devoted to Heidegger and volume four engages with a wide variety of paradigmatic issues or problems such as the role of concepts in history; the enigma of time; the problem of ethics; the problem of anthropology; and various influences for modern thought (like Nicholas of Cusa, Oetinger, Herder, Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Dilthey, Ortega y Gasset, and Nietzsche).

Volumes five, six and seven are all devoted to Greek thought: volume five, “Greek Philosophy I” (*Griechische Philosophie I*); volume six, “Greek Philosophy II” (*Griechische*

⁶³⁷ Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey,” 40-1; “Hermeneutics,” in Palmer, *Gadamer in Conversation*, 40-3, and see paragraph on volumes 5-7 below.

⁶³⁸ Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2006) notes that the original title was “The Fundamentals of a Philosophical Hermeneutics” but the publisher thought it too obscure (95). Grondin, *Philosophy of Gadamer*, 13, notes similarly that “Major [or Great] Themes of Philosophical Hermeneutics” (*Grundzüge einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik*) was the original title but Mohr, the publisher, suggested a change, and *Wahrheit und Methode* was the outcome, *Truth and Method*.

⁶³⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 1, Hermeneutik I. Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990); *Gesammelte Werke, Band 2, Hermeneutik II. Wahrheit und Methode. Ergänzungen Register* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993) (*GW 1* and *GW 2* hereafter).

⁶⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 3, Neuere Philosophie I. Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987); *Gesammelte Werke, Band 4, Neuere Philosophie II. Probleme, Gestalten* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987) (*GW 3* and *GW 4* hereafter).

Philosophie II); and volume seven, “Greek Philosophy III: Plato in Dialogue” (*Griechische Philosophie III. Plato im Dialog*).⁶⁴¹ Volumes five and six begin with a section of essays or treatises (*Abhandlungen*) and then move to a section of reviews (*Rezensionen*), mainly of works on Greek thought. Notably, volume five begins with his 1931 book on Plato’s dialectical ethics, which is a phenomenological reading of the *Philebus* arising from his *Habilitation* in 1928. Volume seven begins with four essays “on the way” to Plato, focusing on Parmenides, Hegel and Heraclitus, Heraclitus studies, and Socrates’ piety (*Frömmigkeit*) of unknowing. The second section is broadly on the Socratic dialogues and Platonic dialectic (including his book on the idea of the good in Platonic-Aristotelian thought) and the third one deals with Platonic threads such as the Socratic question in Aristotle, Aristotle and imperative ethics, friendship and ethics in Greek thought, Plotinus between Plato and Augustine, and the hermeneutic dimension in the knowledge of nature (*Naturerkenntnis*) and in systematic knowledge of nature (*Naturwissenschaft*). His essay on the hermeneutic dimension of the natural sciences expands what he deemed later as a one-sided treatment of the natural sciences in *Truth and Method*.

Volumes eight and nine are devoted to aesthetics: volume eight, “Aesthetics and Poetics I: Art as Statement” (*Ästhetik und Poetik I: Kunst als Aussage*); volume nine, “Aesthetics and Poetics II: Performing Hermeneutics” (*Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug*).⁶⁴² Volume eight deals with various problems that circle around the way art, poetry, the word, and the beautiful speak, and how what they say is true (and how we hear this truth). This volume’s seeds are already present in Gadamer’s treatment of art, the work of art and its truth, in the first part of *Truth and Method*. This volume also includes his long essay on the continual contemporaneity—the actuality (*Aktualität*) or “relevance”—of the beautiful; sections on aesthetics and truth, the actuality and transcendence of the beautiful (including the essay mentioned) and the transcendence section dealing with aesthetic and religious experience, the relation of religion and science, myth, reason, and speech, mythology and revealed religion, and myth in the age of science; a section on the boundaries of language; and the final section, “on the way” to a hermeneutical philosophy, has two essays, one on the artwork’s vividness and truth and the last section on a phenomenology of ritual and speech. Volume nine, as the

⁶⁴¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 5, Griechische Philosophie I* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); *Gesammelte Werke, Band 6, Griechische Philosophie II* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); *Gesammelte Werke, Band 7, Griechische Philosophie III. Plato im Dialog* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991) (*GW 5*, *GW 6*, and *GW 7* hereafter).

⁶⁴² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 8, Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993); *Gesammelte Werke, Band 9, Ästhetik und Poetik II. Hermeneutik im Vollzug* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993) (*GW 8* and *GW 9* hereafter).

title indicates, has mainly interpretations of various writers, artists, and poets (Hölderlin, Goethe, Stefan George, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Paul Celan, among others).

Finally, volume ten is hermeneutics looking back (*Hermeneutik im Rückblick*), focusing on Heidegger; responses to criticisms of hermeneutics (including critiques from Deconstruction and the Dilthey school); hermeneutics and practical philosophy; the state of philosophy in society; and philosophical encounters (with Paul Natorp, Max Scheler, Rudolf Bultmann, Karl Jaspers, Hans Lipps, Paul Friedländer, Karl Löwith, and Emilio Betti, among others).⁶⁴³ A kind of “postscript,” roughly half the size of the other volumes, could be considered volume eleven, even if it does not belong to his collected works. It contains hermeneutic sketches—its title is *Hermeneutische Entwürfe: Vorträge und Aufsätze*—and as its subtitle suggests, the sketches are essays and lectures. It has five parts, relating to hermeneutics as philosophy (part one), the world history of thought (part two), the transcendence of art (part three), truth (*Aletheia*) (part four), and glosses (part five).⁶⁴⁴

Taking Gadamer’s collected works as a substantive portion of his thought, classical Greek thought receives undiluted attention in at least three of the ten volumes, and its themes are mentioned in every single volume. The rest deal with modern philosophical topics arising from the western tradition, and Gadamer focuses on his own, German tradition.

⁶⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke, Band 10, Hermeneutik im Rückblick* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1995) (*GW* 10 hereafter).

⁶⁴⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutische Entwürfe, Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2000).

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