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THE HABERMAS-GADAMER DEBATE IN HEGELIAN PERSPECTIVE

David J. Depew

In this paper I will comment on the now concluded debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas.¹ In that debate, conducted in various forums over the better part of a decade, Habermas accused Gadamer of universalizing a hermeneutic theory which tends to uncritically sustain existing cultural norms. Gadamer, for his part, thought that Habermas' project of "critical theory" yields only an abstract and illusory liberation from untranscendable conditions of cultural understanding. I shall not review point and counterpoint in this exchange, but will, for the most part, take much higher ground.² Both Gadamer and Habermas are conscious of formulating their general views in the long shadow of Hegel.³ By reconstructing each of their positions as opposed responses to the Hegelian legacy, I hope to point to how their disagreement might be adjudicated.

I begin by setting forth three principles which I take to lie at the heart of the Hegelian enterprise. First, Hegel takes it to be a matter of principle that (P1) human individuation depends on the opportunity of the person to see himself mirrored in others who are his equals. Man thus only comes to himself and becomes himself in the midst of his fellows, in a social environment of reciprocity whose conventional paradigm is the ancient *polis*.⁴ Secondly, Hegel believes that social reciprocity, and so human individuation, makes possible and in turn is sustained by an ontology which manages to find a distinct conceptual niche for every discriminable segment of the real — most notably, and with most difficulty, for man himself. Negatively, then, incomplete ontology entails a distorted perception of the self; positively (P2) adequate social reciprocity and self-constitution entail a complete ontology. Finally, where (P1) and (P2) have found realization we may speak of (P3) a "unity between theory and practice." This needs some explaining. In conditions where social inequity makes it impossible, by the conjunct of (P1) and (P2) to grasp the distinctive ontological status of humanity — where, for instance, rulers are conflated with gods and the ruled with beasts — the sort of discourse which informs social life must be counterdistinguished from a discourse which prides itself on its rationality. For under such conditions reason will seem to see itself reflected back to itself more adequately when it focuses on non-human, cosmological objects — on substances rather than subjects — than when it focuses on socially constituted and mediated objects. In contrast to the virulent irrationalities of social life, the non-human universe will appear as a model of intelligibility to which rational persons will conform themselves. Rational persons — philosophers — will thus extrude themselves from participating in social life in order to foster their penetration into the intelligible, deigning at best to give the normal social world mostly unheeded advice from a position beyond it. However, when social *praxis* comes of itself to recognize human reciprocity, the situation changes radically. In such a condition, philosophers will be obligated to ratify, articulate and foster a rationality which they recognize to be developing within a social life with which they themselves identify. This is the fundamental point of Hegel's unity of theory and practice. Within such a world not only does practice meet the criteria of rationality traditionally demanded by *theoria*, but *theoria* attains for the first time its own goal. For by (P2) the reciprocity built into the social world entails that the completion of an ontological apparatus which comprehends the totality of being without gaps or confections is at last attainable.

It is a crucial fact that for Hegel these three principles find instantiation for the first time in the world opened up by the French Revolution. For the revolution had the effect, by its very inten-

sity and ubiquity, of saturating social *praxis* with a notion of *rational autonomy* which had previously been the province of a philosophical discourse which set itself apart from actual social life.⁵ This fact, however, comes steadily into view for Hegel only at the end of the intense and painful learning experience through which the revolutionary era passed. Only after the dissolution of *apriori* models of social revolution in the Terror, and only after the energetic and rationalizing impetus of the Napoleonic period had settled itself within the stabilizing remnants of a traditional culture which it itself purified and relegitimated, could one recognize the accomplishment of reason, and only then could philosophers truly refrain from fruitlessly “giving the world instructions as to what it ought to be.”⁶ Finally, only then could the promise of a complete ontology be redeemed in Hegel’s own *Logic*. But, once achieved, the combination of a completely articulated ontology and a socio-political sphere assumed to be opened up to rational penetration and participation suggested to Hegel a project whose very possibility had scarcely been dreamed of before. This is to produce a philosophical history of humanity. Philosophical (rather than fideistic)⁷ categories are to be used to draw up an account of the true shape of human history — its continuities and breaks, its projects, culminations and resolution. For Hegel what this history reveals is the progressive eruption of rationality and reciprocity into the social sphere to a point where, after the individual has painfully reenacted the steps through which the species has attained its present perspective, he can peer limpidly into the dynamics of human constitution, and so espy a future which need no longer be dominated by processes occurring behind the back of consciousness.

Against this background, the first point which I should like to make is that it is at least the intention of both Gadamer and Habermas to remain firmly Hegelian in their acceptance of (P1). At the conceptual level, human individuation and human socialization are the same thing. Thus, in principle, participation in social relations does not stunt the individual, nor is society a set of relations which can be defined independently of relations among a set of meaning-bestowing individuals. There are, of course, empirical conditions best described in terms of a split between self and society (“alienation”). It would be a mistake, however, to think that these conditions provide the basic data for formulating the concepts of self and society. They are, rather, situations properly described in terms of defects that do not obtain where the concepts are paradigmatically instantiated and realized.

Gadamer’s attitude toward Hegel’s (P2), however, which ties human self-penetration and self-constitution to a complete ontological vision, is more critical. This skepticism is by no means unique, for Gadamer, no less than other twentieth century philosophers, acknowledges the collapse of Hegel’s ontological project. Gadamer’s response to this, however, is not an abandonment of ontology, and certainly not of its relevance to human self-penetration. Rather, Gadamer argues, on the basis of Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*, that achieving an ontology of human existence is not a matter of finding an ontological niche for man *alongside* all the other sorts of things which are. Human existence lies in a different plane altogether. It is not, therefore, a question of articulating and completing a *system*. The categories in which human existence (*Dasein*) comes to recognize itself are notions which allow us to interpret our lived and shared experience to ourselves and to one another in indifference to theory in this sense. What is ironic is that this view is, as we shall see, set forth on the basis of a radicalization of the very historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of human life first brought into view by Hegel.⁸ For his part, it would seem that Heidegger had been impressed by Kierkegaard’s appropriation from the tradition of Augustinean Christianity of a number of such basic interpretive categories, all of which center on notions of human limitation and finitude. Kierkegaard had invoked these notions to repudiate Hegel’s ontology, on the grounds that they were constitutive for a subjecti-

vity which was definable independently of its social relations. For Kierkegaard to show that these categories still had validity counted against Hegel precisely because the latter thought that the horizon of finitude was precisely what Christianity would lose when it fulfilled itself in social reality and allowed the self to acknowledge its social constitution. What is interesting about Heidegger and especially Gadamer, then, in contrast to both Kierkegaard and Hegel, is that they treat these notions of finitude as *conforming* to (P1), as defining and interpreting a shared social reality in which and through which the individual comes to himself as an individual.⁹

On this basis, Gadamer argues along the following lines. First, shared human finitude implies that our self-reflection never reaches the kind of limpid penetration postulated by Hegel. For part of what finitude means is that our self-reflection always takes place against a submerged background of unfocused presuppositions which are cognitively embedded into the tradition in which we live, within whose boundaries we reflect. These give us fundamental access to self, other and world.¹⁰ This finitude, then does not serve, as it traditionally did, to bring into relief a dimension of subjectivity whose cognitive claims are so fragile that they break into solipsism, skepticism, relativism and fideism at the slightest touch. On the contrary, finitude is precisely what underlies objectivity. For it shows that the very idea of a self who falls out of tradition and makes truth claims from that Archimedean position is incoherent. So too, then, is the consequent doubt which is raised about how to get others to accede to our claims across empty social space. Thus Gadamer acknowledges Hegel's view that participation is a condition of penetration. But he draws from this view a conclusion which Hegel would find distressing. Participation and penetration demand acceptance of many global presuppositions which must of necessity remain permanently inaccessible to the inquirer if he is to make basic referential contact with his subject matter, as well as to descriptively and evaluatively bring it to articulate human speech. This does not, Gadamer argues, foreclose the possibility of criticism. It only requires that the critic locate himself within a dialectic between tradition and innovation.¹¹ It does, however, strongly imply that Hegel's project of philosophical history is misconceived. The accentuated curves in terms of which Hegel rounds off the past and from which he extrudes a future which can cultivate limpid self-penetration is a piece of illusory philosophical engineering. Thus as Gadamer thickens the continuity between past and future, he somewhat flattens out once more the pattern of historical process, though without reducing it to a dumb succession of events in neutral time. If Hegel had not been seduced by his Alexandrian picture of a complete ontology he would perhaps have seen this alternative. He would also perhaps have been able to more consistently maintain what he himself recognized as the true lesson of the revolutionary era, a lesson massively confirmed by the experience of the twentieth century. That lesson is that rationality comes to itself only when it is firmly embedded into social *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel's ontological project, however, which ties self-recognition and self-stabilization to absolute comprehension, leads him to obscure this insight and to embed into it an element of the Enlightenment's prescriptive rationalism. This results in the incoherent notion (P3) that there is a practice which is theoretical and a theory which is practical. To the extent that we can recognize a rationality in practice, Gadamer argues, it can never be a matter of applied theory, or as Gadamer calls it, "Method." It is rather a matter of adjusting meaning within a tradition by means of communicative processes which can never be calculatively or otherwise antecedently guaranteed. Gadamer thinks, moreover, that it is just such a false ideal which guides Habermas' theory and leads him to sustain, in the particularly distressing version first adumbrated by the young Hegelians, the illusion of unity between theory and practice.¹²

For his part, Habermas, like Marx, believes that Hegel's deepest insights into human self-constitution depend on his recognition of the *role of work* in carrying out socialization and

individuation.¹³ It is along these lines that Habermas approaches Hegel's (P1). To stress, then, as does Gadamer, Hegel's conservative views about social integration without noting their relation to the opportunities and limitations which Hegel sees in the world of labor is to take up an inherently reactionary position. For to ignore the complex relationship between social integration and social production is to blind oneself to the fact that changes in the latter sphere may make objectively possible forms of liberation inconceivable at previous times. For Habermas we post-revolutionary humans have already broken with the past more than Gadamer can acknowledge just because we can plausibly entertain theses about how to reveal the workings of the "self-constitution of the species" as it goes on below the misleading surface of social discourse.¹⁴

For Marx himself, this ability to throw off ideological blinders is a matter of replacing ontological reflection in the classical sense with empirical scientism. That this pose could be counted on to galvanize the newly illuminated into self-liberating activity may have been a natural assumption at a time when scientism tended more often than not to unmask ontological pretensions which gave cover to illegitimate domination. For Habermas, however, time and experience have shown that this assumption is uncritical. In the world of late capitalism, science has allied itself with power and has erected in positivism broadly conceived an ontology which obscures its own connection to these interests by presenting itself as the fulfillment of classical *theoria*. The basic cause of this conjunction is that late capitalism can stabilize itself only by coopting the world of reflection.¹⁵ The result is that the deep connections between "knowledge and human interest" go undetected. It is imperative, therefore, to break into the englobing intellectual structures of late capitalism in order to reveal its irrationalities and to discern possibilities of liberation which it is in the interest of that capitalism, and coopted science, to foreclose. This is the task of Habermas' critical theory. In these conditions Habermas acknowledges, much to the scandal of the traditional left, that the "weapon of critique" may be wielded to much greater effect than the "critique of weapons."¹⁶ What is required now is not the crude force of honest but untutored men, but, on the contrary, an extraordinarily subtle sensitivity to the ontological commitments of contemporary thought as well as to their practical implications. In this sense Habermas resumes the kind of critical attention Hegel paid to ontology in the *Phenomenology* rather than the system building of the later Hegel. In this respect his attitude toward Hegel's (P2) is no less negative than Gadamer's, though his alternative is markedly different.

In articulating this alternative, Habermas retreats to what may appear, and to his opponents has continued to appear, as the inhospitable terrain of Kantian transcendental argument.¹⁷ Thus with the neo-Kantians, Habermas asserts that the conditions governing the possibility of natural science differ from those governing the social sciences (in the sense of *Geisteswissenschaften*). This difference is not only a matter, however, of incongruent methodological or conceptual schemata, but more fundamentally of the material fact that the former sciences have their roots in technical mastery of the environment by way of coordinated social labor, while the latter have a constitutive interest in the maintenance of communicative integration in society.¹⁸ What is especially noteworthy is that, in spite of the Kantian project of transcendental analysis envisioned here, the subject of the cognitive acts under study is not a Cartesian self, but precisely the socially constituted self which appears in Hegel's (P1). On this basis, Habermas is able to responsor a sophisticated version of Marx's historical materialism, in which the transformative-innovative tendencies of production move against the conservative-integrative tendencies of social relations.¹⁹

Habermas' view of the interpretive sciences as aimed at the preservation by adaptation of tradition differs so far forth but little from Gadamer's.²⁰ But the latter's *universalization* of

hermeneutics into the sole constitutive discourse has the effect, according to Habermas, of sealing that discourse and its sphere of objects into a world of its own and identifying that world with the horizon of *the* world. It thus deeply obscures the relation of this world to that brought into existence and view by socially mediated labor. Universalized hermeneutics must, then, no matter how critical it becomes, fail to adequately grasp the complex relations *between* the two spheres. It is accordingly prevented in principle from diagnosing possible conditions where the maintenance of tradition, even across innovative adaptation (*applicatio, Anwendung*), contributes to sustaining degrees of aggregate repression which are inherently unnecessary given the current state of the productive forces. This is Habermas' basic objection to Gadamer.²¹ Habermas believes, on the other hand, that his own critical theory is capable of recognizing these facts and achieving these breakthroughs because it can appeal to a third distinct constitutive interest, unattended to or undermined by Gadamer, which we all can be presumed to have in liberation from unnecessary domination. The first object of suspicion from such a viewpoint has always been the delusions and cooptations of social tradition. This perspective and its concomitant suspicion first arose, as Hegel saw, within the philosophical tradition, but in the Enlightenment and subsequent Revolution it sought to assert itself within, rather than in opposition to, the social world. Thus Habermas, in writing that "mature autonomy," (*Mündigkeit*) is the principle idea which we have at our disposal from the philosophical tradition," harks back to and seeks to advance Kant's approval of the *tropes* of the Enlightenment as the source of critical theory.²² This linkage, however, unaccompanied as it is by Hegel's recognition that the reign of virtue can become a reign of terror, has given rise to Gadamer's suspicion that Habermas has forgotten the political lessons of the twentieth century and reverted to dangerous slogans about putting theory into practice.²³

In this context, Gadamer has sought to paint Habermas as a latter day Robespierre²⁴ and to accuse him of the sort of subjectivism which we associate with those who take their own perceptions and behavior to be exempt from the social conditioning which dominates others.²⁵ Gadamer has pounced in particular on Habermas' perhaps unfortunate invocation of the psychoanalytic situation as an example of liberating discourse, by stressing that in that situation there are massive power and knowledge imbalances between patient and therapist, as there presumably would be between Habermas' enlightened cultural critics and the rest of mankind.²⁶ Whatever the fate of this particular quarrel, we may say that in general Gadamer wishes to suggest that Habermas, by according to Enlightenment ideals a much higher place than Hegel gave them and certainly than they deserve, has either failed to recognize or to remain consistent with Hegel's (P1).

Yet from the outset Habermas has also charged Gadamer himself, from another direction, with subjectivism. Gadamer's notion that we cannot make fully clear to ourselves the sources and the tendencies of our meaningful acts, and that we must be forever content with a dimly lit penetration into culture and its discourse, rests, according to Habermas, on a hidden fear that any greater ability to objectify these matters would pull them down into the nomological maw of positivist scientism. Driven by this secret fear, Gadamer is said to pay secret homage to a positivism which on the surface he categorically rejects. Moreover, he remains unaware of this complicity because his categorical insistence that *Dasein* has nothing to do with traditional ontology blinds him to the possibility that subterranean tendencies to reification lurk within his thought. On this basis, Habermas ascribes to Gadamer equally subterranean tendencies toward a subjectivism of the sort which we associate with positivist emotivism and radical perspectivism.²⁷

A disturbing quality of this argument, however, is that it appears to derive its force and amplitude, if not its basic opportunity, only when the views of its proponent are themselves subtly overlaid onto Gadamer's. To say that Gadamer is a secret positivist and subjectivist, if only

because in his dullness he does not know what ontological sins he is committing, persuades us only when Habermas' own extreme sensitivity to ontological assumptions, and his techniques for eliciting them, are assumed. Yet Gadamer himself is not free of similar defects. To conclude forthwith that claims to insight into the natural and social mechanisms governing human self-constitution are delusory, because they assume a knower who steps out of the bonds of meaning which tie us together and give us access to ourselves, is to intimate with Christian Fideism that our community is a community of weakness to which knowledge claims can be more of a threat than ignorance.

In view of the fact, then, that the arguments by means of which Gadamer and Habermas seek to convict each other of subjectivism are dubious, or of roughly equal validity, it seems to me unproductive to pursue this point further, and unfortunate that so much of the discussion between the principals has centered on it. It will be more useful to recognize, as I have tried to do, that the rooted intention of each theory is to abide by Hegel's (P1), which ties individuation to socialization, and to wonder how this stipulation affects the scope of our cognition when we are deprived of Hegel's ontology. That ontology made (P1) attractive because it linked progressive acknowledgement of our total social embeddedness to increases rather than to decreases in knowledge. From this point of view, Gadamer appears to think that the collapse of Hegel's ontological vision, together with continued adherence to (P1), means a darkening of the window into historical process which Hegel thought was, for the first time, open to us. The remaining task is to deprive relativism and subjectivism of the foothold which such darkenings conventionally afford them. Meanwhile, Habermas argues that the window is still open to us if only we exploit unused potentials of Kantian transcendental argument which Hegel, and after him Marx, too quickly rejected because they thought that transcendental arguments were inseparable from Cartesian subjective egoism. To put the issue this way allows us to presume that each theory is reasonably faithful to (P1), though under different but initially equally plausible interpretations. The admittedly radical disagreement about (P3), then, does not turn most basically on the issue of subjectivism, but on that of historical limpidity or opacity. It is, of course, a natural temptation for each disputant to try to *preclude* the other's view of historicity, and consequently of the relation between theory and practice, by convicting him of subjectivism. But failure of these efforts will throw the problem back to the issue of how far the dynamics of historical process are, or can be, open to our inspection, and whether therefore our practice must be based on a dominantly prospective or dominantly retrospective attitude if it is to be rational.

This suggests that reflections of the sort engaged in by Gadamer and Habermas are at the root diagnoses of the historical situation of a modernity which exists in the wake of a revolutionary impetus which cannot be said to have either unambiguously succeeded or failed. From this perspective it would appear that Gadamer and Habermas are in about equal parts right and wrong. Gadamer fails to consider that a hermeneutics which professes to interpret in the light of later events (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) can hardly ignore the possibility that with the onset of the revolutionary era the species did cross an important line, since that very possibility forms the basis of our discursive tradition. Indeed, the stress which Gadamer himself lays on our "failure" and "finitude" presupposes this very horizon of possibility. Gadamer may well be justified in suspecting that for several centuries we have engaged in far from harmless poses about rationality, liberation and enlightenment — what Heidegger called inauthenticity. But even on his own principles he can hardly foreclose these ideals.²⁸ Meanwhile, Habermas cannot treat the mere possibility of revolutionary breakthrough as an actuality just because we have accustomed ourselves to speak, sometimes glibly, about it, and to act as if we could bring it about or advance it. More positively, however, there is something persuasive about both of these visions which

Tactility and tactuality are similarly at the core of an existential elucidation of social behaviors attributed to early hominid creatures. Pair-bonding, mother-child relationships, peer play, and extended family groupings are at the forefront of these kinship patterns. As treated by most paleontologists, however, these patterns are imagined in the light of a rigorous political, economic, and/or social formalization of roles. Thus, for example, a noted anthropologist (Pilbeam, 1972, p. 78) writes of pair-bonding that, "Possibly, it is relatively easy for humans to form close affectional relationships with one other adult of the opposite sex, these ties being sometimes intense and frequently of relatively long duration. But in hunting society other factors are involved, and it can be argued that economic and political factors are what maintain the relationship by enforcing such biological determinants as there are." If one juxtaposes this kind of view with studies in primate psychology having to do with a deprivation of touch — whether via surrogate mothers, glass-partitioned cages, or whatever — one notices a peculiar and disturbing discrepancy. On the one hand, affectional ties as mediated by touch are seen to play a major role not only in the immediate but in the long range course of a primate's normal development. For example, infant macaque monkeys deprived of the touch of a maternal body suffer not only immediate trauma, but depending upon the kind and extent of deprivation, fail to develop affectional, reassuring, or other kinds of positive other-avowing social behaviors (Harlow, 1958, 1965). They are unable in later years to take part in the normal social relationships typical of play or grooming. They are also incapable of normal sexual activity and thus of mating. In this context it might be noted that peer relationships were adjudged to be of the greatest importance in the development of normal social and sexual behavior in the same experimental monkeys and that it is bodily contact play which is most crucial. As Harlow wrote (1974), "No other single form of play is more important to basic socialization in the monkey than physical free play." There is, in effect, no survival in a biological sense, i.e., no passing on of one's genes, if tactile/tactual relationships are to some extent deficient or abnormal. On the other hand, as the quoted example suggests, affectional ties are to be discounted within a scientific account of human origins, presumably because they are considered too flimsy to bear the burden of survival: political and economic factors weigh in much more heavily. It might also be that affectional ties are too suggestive of "emotional behavior," of which to judge from the literature on experimental animal research, only certain kinds are allowable and those only as defined within strict experimental limits. Such behavior could only interfere or be distracting to lives thoroughly ordered by hunting behavior.

The inconsistency between the two views is exacerbated the more detailed the evolutionary picture presented. For example, if year-round sexual activity is regarded as "a major bonding factor within the [early hominid] family," (Wolpoff, 1980, p. 153) that is, if the change in female sexual receptivity was a principle factor in the evolution of pair-bonding (which among primates is an almost uniquely human kinship pattern), then either exclusively economic and political enforcers of pair-bonding would seem to fall by the explanatory wayside or they must be part of a larger constellation of factors which contributed to pair-bonding but which have yet to be fully plumbed. Short of these two alternatives, early hominid sexual activity must itself have been a purely political-economic event. Yet it is difficult to see how political and/or economic factors could continue to serve as exclusive enforcers in face of a *year-round* sexual receptivity. Moreover it is hard to imagine how sexual activity could even be experienced as such: in what concrete political-economic terms could or would one describe early hominid sexual experience? At the least one must admit that political and economic events are colored by feelings and at the most that, particularly insofar as with upright posture both partners are face to face to each other, sexual activity involves intimate touching.

A broader evolutionary picture likewise exacerbates the basic inconsistency. Upright posture

is consistently spoken of in terms of “freeing the hands,” a freedom which is immediately linked to tool-making and tool-using and to the ability to carry objects about. It is never elaborated in terms of touch. Yet touching and being touched would seem to be what free hands are all about, whether a matter of making, using, carrying, reaching, throwing, or any other manual action. Whatever their functional practicality might be at any moment, it does not rule out existential realities; on the contrary, it necessarily assumes them. Thus, to speak of a freeing of hands is to take for granted a tactile/tactual body, an incarnated subject. But this is not all. Upright posture does not eventuate in freeing *only* the hands: it frees the body as well. Touching and being touched are not therefore restricted to hands. In light of this fuller bodily power and exposure to touch, studies in primate psychology and field studies of primate behavior are again particularly significant. They have shown that mother-child relationships, peer play, and grooming are critical developmental social behaviors as much because of touching and being touched as because of what they accomplish in the way of practical benefits, i.e., feeding of young, sensorimotor learning, and cleaning of fur and skin respectively (Harlow, 1958; Harlow and Zimmerman, 1958; van Lawick-Goodall 1971, p. 231 and pp. 242-248; Montagu, 1971). In fact, the experience of touch itself in all these situations is at times seen as *more* significant than what touching accomplishes. Surely such knowledge gleaned from experimental primate research and primate field studies should be consistently taken into account analogically and its analogical validity accepted by the paleoanthropologist as readily as any other analogical referent, e.g., seed-eating in present-day gelada baboons.

Given the social primacy of touch affirmed by psychological studies and field observations, it would seem that an inquiry into the existential significations of upright posture as not only the freeing of hands but also the fuller bodily power and exposure to touch would shed substantial light on the phenomenon of pair-bonding and on the seemingly not unrelated phenomenon of year-round sexual activity. It might be noted that while a considerable number of obstacles might be in the way of such an inquiry, the number might well reduce to the fact that touching is not considered biologically respectable unless it involves hunting and/or fighting and emotions are not considered biologically respectable unless they involve fear and/or aggression. One need only imagine the difference between a film of baboons fighting one another and a film of baboons grooming one another to appreciate the distinctions being drawn. There are behavioral fireworks in the former film — perhaps crouching and lunging, a baring of teeth and a snapping of jaws — all of which can be interpreted, analyzed and discussed in certain clear-cut ways. Whatever might be going on in the second film it appears to the human observer to be empty and even tedious by comparison, an ongoing repetition of the same basic little movements and static postures: ostensibly there are no contrasts, there is no drama, no action. The resulting tacit judgment of a behaviorist of course is that nothing is going on. In practice this means that while paleontologists might conceptually allow one animal to care for another, for example, and this caring to be integral to the animal's survival, they cannot allow *feelings* of caring and *feelings* of touch to enter into their account of adaptation and survival. Caring and touching are thus grafted upon a mere mobility. They are motions a body goes through without shaping or feeling them.

Now it would seem that unless a lived sensory-kinetic world animates the paleontologist's recreation of the evolutionary past, then early hominid survival will continue to be spelled out in terms of partial subjects, subjects who, for example, feel only certain feelings but not others and who touch, if at all, only incidentally and then only certain things but not others. That the other feelings exist in terms of affectional ties, for example, or even experimentally-located pleasure centers for that matter, does not seem to be doubted, only ignored. Similarly, that

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touch has an existential as well as functional dimension and that other things are touched — be it in terms of pair-bonding or primate lip-smacking or human speaking — does not either seem to be doubted but again, only ignored. In sum, the recognition of existential significations and a full-fledged subject go hand in hand. Such recognitions do not cast doubt on the paleontologist's credentials or on the scientific history reconstructed. On the contrary they are an acknowledgement of the dual nature of paleoanthropology as both a natural and human science. Hence, existential meanings need not be excised and closeted away as the fossil bones themselves are dug up and examined. Indeed, the paleontologist's closet is rich in existential inscriptions awaiting the interpretation of someone willing to take the first steps toward an openly hermeneutical paleontology. The insights to be gained from such a venture would surely breath life into the story of some old bones and history into a life once lived. That that life and history might have implications for hermeneutics itself — posing questions about evolutionary continuities, for example — is a critical possibility.

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NOTES

1 Since the colloquium, this article has been printed in *Reflections: Essays in Phenomenology* 4 (1983): 28-36.

2 Perhaps "protestations to the contrary" should be added, e.g., "Paleoanthropology is the study of our origins. I view it as more than a history or a simple narrative of past events. The subject is a *science* and not a *history*..." (Wolpoff, 1980, p. v).

3 It is pertinent to cite here Merleau-Ponty's remarks on understanding as well: "Whether we are concerned with a thing perceived, a historical event or a doctrine, to 'understand' is to take in the total intention — not only what these things are for representation (the 'properties' of the thing perceived, the mass of 'historical facts', the 'ideas' introduced by the doctrine) — but the unique mode of existing expressed in the properties of the pebble, the glass or the piece of wax....It is a matter, in the case of each civilization, of finding...not a law of the physico-mathematical type, discoverable by objective thought, but that formula which sums up some unique manner of behaviour towards others, towards Nature, time and death; a certain way of patterning the world which the historian should be capable of seizing upon and making his own." (1974, p. xviii).

4 The notion of manual concepts originated in the very late 1800's in Cushing's studies of the Zuñi Indians; specifically, in their manner of counting in relation to their language, spatial orientations, artifacts, and so on. To my knowledge the notion of manual concepts has never been elaborated beyond Cushing's original formulation. It has however been mentioned by others, e.g., Ernst Cassirer in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and Lucien Levy-Bruhl in his *How Natives Think*.

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