



University of North Florida  
**UNF Digital Commons**

---

All Volumes (2001-2008)

The Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry

---

2002

# Holism, Hermeneutics, and Heterophenomenology: A Critique of Daniel Dennett's Intentional Stance

George Fletcher  
*University of North Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii\\_volumes](http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii_volumes)

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

## Suggested Citation

Fletcher, George, "Holism, Hermeneutics, and Heterophenomenology: A Critique of Daniel Dennett's Intentional Stance" (2002). *All Volumes (2001-2008)*. 113.

[http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii\\_volumes/113](http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/ojii_volumes/113)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Osprey Journal of Ideas and Inquiry at UNF Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Volumes (2001-2008) by an authorized administrator of UNF Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Digital Projects](#).

© 2002 All Rights Reserved



## Holism, Hermeneutics, and Heterophenomenology: A Critique of Daniel Dennett's Intentional Stance

George Fletcher

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Hans Herbert Koegler  
Associate Professor of Philosophy

### Introduction

In his work over the last thirty years, the philosopher Daniel Dennett has articulated a philosophical attitude, the *intentional stance*, in hopes of providing a firm foundation for research efforts in the interdisciplinary field of inquiry known as cognitive science. Falling under the umbrella of cognitive science are those areas of computer science, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and neuroscience that, naively put, assume, in various shapes and forms, that the human brain is a computer and that the subjective "mind" is a function of this physical machine. Various computational models of consciousness based on this assumption have been put forward in the past quarter century — and, troubling enough, none have yet to produce any program or machine with results remotely resembling human consciousness.

A major stumbling block in the formative years of cognitive science was recognizing and defining the key element necessary for producing an artificially intelligent machine — namely, consciousness. What is consciousness? What are the defining features, after all, of this *sentience* that accompanies "cognitive processing" (e.g., the mental addition of numbers, pattern recognition, etc.)? These considerations become especially problematic when one asks — "How do I know that your experiences are (generally) the same as mine?" Pushing this question even further, one is then forced to ask how criteria established from the perspective of the first-person can be generalized in a way that can be utilized by an *objective* science

of consciousness. Thus, researchers in cognitive science soon found themselves turning to philosophers, who have been debating these deeper questions for some time now, for answers to the tough questions of the *being of consciousness* — in hopes that they would be provided with a workable model and method to use for overcoming the enigmatic nature of consciousness.

The *intentional stance* proposed by Dennett is necessary to clear the way for one such coupling of model and method. By this stance, Dennett suggests that in ordinary everyday life we treat others (the *subject* in our experiments and research) as intentional systems; "that is, as entities whose behavior can be predicted by the method of attributing beliefs, desires, and rational acumen" under the assumption that the other is rational like one's self (Stance 49). This stance is proposed as an alternative to the traditional, Cartesian, dualistic conception of mind and body that permeates common assumptions about the nature of self-consciousness, the soul, and the body. "Heterophenomenology" is a method, based upon this *behavioristic* stance, that Dennett contends transcends the limitations of common-sense assumptions to support a computational model of consciousness.

Heterophenomenology downplays the reality of the internal experiential aspects of consciousness in deference to an intentional, language-based model of consciousness that places emphasis on the neutral acceptance of the speech reports of subjects as the basis for understanding consciousness — thus placing the foundations of consciousness in a physical, monistic (physical *sans* soul), computational device (the brain). I shall argue that this methodology can be seen as a form of *empathic extrapolation* of self-understanding onto the other in dialogue, akin to the work of early hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup> This methodology is closely tied in with a contemporary connectionist conception of computability

that Dennett develops in his book Consciousness Explained.

This essay has three major parts: heterophenomenology, hermeneutics, and implications of hermeneutics for heterophenomenology — the first two-thirds being, for the purposes of contrast and comparison, mainly exegetical. I will initially be concerned with developing more fully not only an account of Dennett's heterophenomenology but also the background that gave rise to it. I will also explore in this part the relationship between Dennett's notion of phenomenology and intentionality and the account of intentionality developed by Edmund Husserl in his Logical Investigations. This will be necessary to draw the external critique of heterophenomenology as method developed in the second part of this essay and Dennett's model closer together for the sake of highlighting their common ancestry. I will next bring into question the notion of *method* in the human sciences by examining a strain of philosophical thought, which, at first glance, seems completely foreign to the concerns of cognitive science. Hermeneutics is the philological / philosophical tradition concerned with the proper interpretation and understanding of the voice of the *other* in dialogue and texts. Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, as developed in his work Truth and Method, serves as a vehicle to bring into question the methods and goals of science and the subject / object dichotomy upon which they are based. Working through Gadamer's relationship, via Martin Heidegger, to Husserl's phenomenology, I will bring to light, *contra* understanding as instrumental empathic transposition in heterophenomenology, a competing view of dialogue founded in the sustained, mutual agreement of interlocutors. The hermeneutic vision of language as mutual agreement developed in this section of the project will be informed and directed by the contemporary critical-hermeneutic work of Hans-Herbert Kögler.

I will close with a consideration of the implications of hermeneutics for heterophenomenology and similar research efforts in cognitive science. Although it is my main goal to articulate a view of cognitive science and artificial intelligence from a hermeneutically sensitive position, I will attempt to develop some of the ramifications of careless objectification in the human sciences. When we objectify our fellow humans in research under the object / subject dichotomy, we place significant dialogue in a precarious position. By treating the other in dialogue as an object, available for manipulation and domination (via the scientific method), we run the risk of alienation and termination of any fruitful dialogue that may lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of being and consciousness, and of the relationship of the self to language and other agents. In conclusion, I will consider the bearing of this impasse for future studies in cognitive science.

### **Husserl and Dennett: Heterophenomenology as Method**

#### Husserl's Proposal

We begin our study by developing a conception of intentionality vis-à-vis the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In an attempt to avoid what he considers the naïveté of objectivism in psychologism and the "positivistic" sciences, Husserl grounds knowledge (in the tradition of Kant but against the shortcomings of the "forms of knowledge" of the neo-Kantians) in a *transcendental subjectivity* not unlike Descartes' *cogito*; i.e., the *cogito* posited to serve as the basis for an eradication of deception in the material world. Because of the rich structure of transcendental subjectivity developed in Husserl's writings, it is easy to lose oneself in exegesis. Nevertheless, it will be instructive for us to understand more fully Husserl's motivation for this attempt, both as a contrast to Dennett's

understanding of intentionality and as the framework in which Heidegger and Gadamer after him worked and struggled. When we come to grasp the full import of this project, however, we will see that Husserl's equation of meaning with the *noetic* bed of phenomenological being leads inevitably to a solipsistic idealism that makes a return to the world (the life-world of sensible *hyle* which was supposed to support an ego-centric investigation of intentionality) impossible (in contrast to the Cartesian cogito) (*Ideas* §85, 227-230). To this end, I will, after a brief outline of Husserl's project, take a look at two peculiar aspects, or rather symptomatic results, of phenomenological reduction (*epoche*) which lead to the untenable nature of a "scientific" study of intentionality — namely, the alienation of self from community and the desire to found knowledge as constitutive of this loss.

The "crisis" of the western mind that Husserl speaks of in his *Vienna Lecture* is, in a sense, real. The trend towards objectification (that is, the striving towards an explicating methodology in the human sciences that has marked the progress of our intellect since the "Enlightenment") has necessarily neglected both the qualitative (ineffable) aspects of subjectivity that are the hallmarks of consciousness (in the natural sciences and philosophy of language post-Frege) and the life-world background that orients us towards just these notions of objectivity and subjectivity (in the dialogue stemming from transcendental phenomenology). I say "necessarily" because science deals only with intersubjective experience — experience that relies upon language and the conceptualizing power of speech — communication with other humans in an attempt to deal with each other and interactions with a natural world. Science can be criticized for trivializing or denying the existence of the individualistic and historically situated aspects of experience in striving for objectivity.

Coupled with a Western teleology of reason, exemplified in Hegel's understanding of absolute being, this objectifying spirit leads in various paths to foundationally oriented structures of experience and understanding that appear on further analysis to merely buttress the deep seated beliefs of our culture against views on the periphery of our objective gaze.<sup>12</sup> The answer, Husserl maintains, is to turn altogether from this naturalization of spirit that science advocates to a new, purified science of intentional analysis — for "no objective science can do justice to the [very] subjectivity which accomplishes science" (10).

To found knowledge, in hopes of establishing a "science of consciousness", Husserl must find a bedrock upon which his science may be stabilized. His initial step is to differentiate between a "natural standpoint" and a more fundamental state of "Being" (*Ideas* §32). The natural standpoint is the practical one within which we operate on a daily basis as we attend to the affairs of non-philosophizing being (to foreshadow our Heideggerian exploration of hermeneutics). It is the natural thesis that we presuppose for every act we commit in the community — the stance we take towards the world we find about us (§28). He proposes that we bracket the natural standpoint of spatio-temporal existence (setting aside the facticity of Dasein) — a suspension of belief rather than hyperbolic doubt — to get to the basis of the being of consciousness:

Consciousness in itself has a being of its own which in its absolute uniqueness of nature remains unaffected by the phenomenological disconnection. It therefore remains over as a "phenomenological residuum," as a region of Being which is in principle unique, and can become in fact the field of a new science — the science of phenomenology. (§33)

By returning our attention to the “essence” of consciousness, this *epoche* of the natural thesis will hopefully allow us to avoid the trivialization of spirit that occurs when we place all our focus on the natural world (§34).

When we deal with “pure” phenomena as presented to the self when we turn our gaze inwards, we no longer presuppose or concern ourselves with or even have recourse to the objective-external referents of intentionality — we lose certainty, in the end, of the things in themselves which our thoughts necessarily depend upon to be intentional (be conscious *of*) — the fundamental relationship between the *cogito* and its *cogitatum*.<sup>13</sup> With this loss, however, we open the possibility of studying the pure meaning-bestowing relationship that holds between pure ego and its sphere of pure experience (*Erlebnisse*) (*Ideas* §33). The “being” of consciousness has as its essence the intentional relationship, and this essence becomes the focus of phenomenology.<sup>14</sup> Immediately one asks — “what become of the ‘others’ out-there that form the community we are part of, those other subjects that exist in the social world we bracketed in the phenomenological *epoche*?” They cannot escape the reduction; they cannot serve in our search for a “science of consciousness”. This paints a lonely, desolate, and truly antiseptic picture of the individual ego searching for foundations, floating out beyond the community. Are the others, in a sense, encompassed by the master-self as acts of idealistic instantiation? Husserl seems to notice this problem early on, yet does not recognize the significance of this solipsism:

Despite all this [the possible contradiction of “others”], we come to understandings with our neighbors, and set up in common an objective spatio-temporal fact-world as *the world about us that is there for us all, and to which we ourselves nonetheless belong*. (§29)

This is quite a leap of faith to take. How do we “set up in common” the natural world? By Husserl’s own admission, the strictness of “science” allows for empathy and acknowledgment of an other as merely representative activities of the ego (*Ideas* §42). Yet, the bogey of solipsism, he maintains, is merely an illusion — a transcendental illusion that can be dispelled with a pinch of faith (*Formal and Transcendental Logic* §96.b). Again in *Phenomenology*:

The reductive method is transferred from self-experience to the experience of others insofar as there can be applied to the envisaged mental life of the Other the corresponding bracketing and description according to the subjective ‘How’ of its appearance and what is appearing ... thus results the perfect expansion of the genuine psychological concept of ‘inner experience’ ... the reduced intersubjectivity, in pure form and concretely grasped, is a community of pure ‘persons’ acting in the intersubjective realm of the pure life of consciousness... (18-19)

This, too, seems questionable. How can we apply/expand ‘inner experience’ to the Other without presupposing the supremacy of Self? To understand otherness in the study of the transcendental ego as *absolute subjectivity*, the Other in dialogue becomes first and foremost *alien* — a non-ego that only through painful admission becomes an alter-ego.<sup>15</sup> When the smoke clears, we see that:

As this absolute ego, considering myself henceforth as my exclusive thematic field, I carry on all my further sense-investigations ... I reflect upon what I can find purely “in” myself ... I separate that which is primordially my own and that which is constituted in me at different levels as something “alien”: that which is constituted, in me, as real or ideal; constituted, in me, as Nature, as psychophysical being, as a human community, as a people or as a state, as

reified culture, as science, ... *by the effort of my own thinking.* (Formal and Transcendental Logic §104)

Can the Other become a personal fiction? Surely not — how do we speak of otherness in the first place? Yet, on this account it surely seems so. Or is this troublesome route to community merely the by-product of a failed attempt to found knowledge in the Self?

This suggests the second peculiarity I would like to touch upon before we move on to Dennett's heterophenomenology — namely, Husserl's lack of rigorous self-criticism of the presupposition of the cogitator / cogitatum distinction necessary to undertake the phenomenological epoche which, in the final analysis, points to the *constructive* nature of pure ego. He does not consider critically approaching his own understanding of "self" as a socially organized and acquired conception (which can fundamentally motivate his very inquiry).<sup>16</sup> In light of the intentional relationship between pure ego and its representational constructions that makes the epoche possible, a void opens between the "self" and other — a void that seems to be incommensurable. How can he be certain of the concreteness, so to speak, of the "self as subject" as the firm basis for the intersubjective transcendence of consciousness? Cannot our conception of an autonomous "self" be a socially, culturally, and historically situated, given, and directed one? At this point, we can criticize Husserl for taking this conception ("self" as an a priori — "necessary" truth) for granted without considering the relationship of subject to community. Later, we shall see worked out in Gadamer's hermeneutics not only a response to just these questions but also a consideration of the bearing of hermeneutics on any methodological explication of being and consciousness.

## Dennett's Proposal

As we move our discussion to the contemporary reflections of Daniel Dennett found in his books The Intentional Stance and Consciousness Explained, we must reorient ourselves to accommodate a new set of concepts and new understanding of the problems of consciousness. Although it will initially help to view his instrumental view of phenomenological research within the Husserlian framework originating in modern Cartesian philosophy, we must eventually overcome a century's difference in development and reconfiguration that informs Dennett. In this section I will recapitulate the time-lapse between these two thinkers while developing an understanding of Dennett's methodological stance and goal. In the conclusion of this essay, I will move to develop a critical reevaluation of Dennett's thought through a hermeneutic conception of understanding and dialogue in the human sciences by carving out a space for understanding as a mutual discovery between agents of significance in a space of historical-cultural background oriented self-discovery.

Following Gottlob Frege, Anglo-American philosophy concerned itself mainly not with questions of intentionality and phenomenological structures, but rather with those of the supposed logical, propositional and sentential structure of belief and understanding. This focus on the logic of language over the situatedness of communication, typified by the early work of Wittgenstein, quickly settled into an un-insightful dead end that eventually led to Wittgenstein's rejection of the mathematical conceptualization of belief and intentionality. This rejection was initiated by Wittgenstein's insight that meaning is not necessarily oriented always towards truth (propositional truth-sentences) — truth being a key component of any positivistic inquiry. Carried through by Donald Davidson's work (stemming from Willard Quine) on translation (*viz.*, translation as correlation of truth-sentences)

under a principle of charity, a general sensitivity developed to a conception of speaking as a purely social activity in forms-of-life as well as to the interdependency of conceptual schemes, under which interpretation is always performed, and its target content-matter. Dennett takes as his point of departure Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations and this general insight into a practical, instrumental, and holistic view of language and belief formation / actualization (CE 463).

Dennett likens the bulk of contemporary analytic philosophy of language to the planetary epicycles studied by pre-Copernican astronomers. We are caught up in the quandaries of "qualia" and the "intrinsic qualities of inner-life", not because of an essential structure of consciousness that dictates ontological distinctions, but rather because of our use of the traditional metaphors inherited from epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological (*eidos* oriented) investigations that inform the way we speak of consciousness (CE 455). On this account, the debates between idealism and dualism are moot; Dennett feels that the ways in which the metaphors of mind / brain and soul / body inform our talk of "reality" effectively halt any progress towards a theory of consciousness.<sup>17</sup> Instead, we should highlight the *pragmatic* nature of dialogue in forms-of-life.

Liberated from the constraints of the traditional dialogue, Dennett sets himself the task of developing a *productive* method of intentional research that coincides more closely with the aims of natural science. Dennett, desiring to uncover the possibility of developing a computer model of consciousness, is concerned with how we can systematically study "subjective", intentional experience — and the basic message of several hundred pages of analysis amounts to a simple, pragmatic justification of naturalized consciousness. We begin, on this account, from an *intentional stance* grounded in common sense folk psychology, whereby we treat

the other as rational (from our own notions of sense and rationality) and hence highly predictable, just as we normally do in our daily non-philosophical activities in the life-world. In this formulation, we have a theory of mental content that sets aside ontological considerations by working under a natural ontological attitude; i.e., that of the "disinterested" natural scientist; i.e., acceptance of the materialistic mainstream Western conception of Being. Setting aside concerns about physical design or implementation, we use this stance to form a theory of competence — that is, a theory of what it takes to be an intentional system conceived of in holistic, instrumentalistic, and normative terms — "a sort of holistic logical behaviorism" as Dennett calls it (Stance 57-58).

Interpreting the beliefs and belief talk of an other is taken to be merely an instrumental self-projection of self on to the subject — where the other's beliefs are taken, with a grain of salt, to be "real" and "true" for purely useful, predictive goals (72-73). However, Dennett still stresses the fact that, under this stance, we do not commit ourselves to any metaphysical claims and that such "neutral" and arbitrary ascription of reality and truth-values is to be taken as a *strategic maxim* rather than as a binding epistemological principle (75).

It is important for this discussion, and particularly for understanding Dennett, to mention the profound effect evolutionary explanations of general phenomena have on contemporary discourse. Dennett, as many intellectuals are, is enamored with the predicative and productive capacities of the mathematical-naturalistic sciences. The use of Darwin's ideas to "reveal" the "true" nature of all social and natural events is currently in vogue. Dennett, feeling that the inherent practicality of these ideas is in tune with his instrumental view of dialogue, is eager in his development of a theory of consciousness to abide by the dictates of evolutionary explanation.

On the path to a productive theory of consciousness, Dennett's primary task is to

develop a new methodology for research founded on this intentional stance. With a Wittgenstein-Davidsonian pragmatic understanding of interpretation (reinforced with Darwinian tools), he has a firm footing to uncover just what such a method entails. What is a believer in this stance?

[A]ny object — or as I shall say, any system — whose behavior is well predicted by this strategy [the Intentional Strategy] is in the fullest sense of the word a believer. *What it is* to be a true believer is to be an intentional system, a system whose behavior is reliably and voluminously predictable via the intentional strategy [an interest relative cross of realism and interpretationism].” (Stance 15, 27)

In the *Heterophenomenological* method, we approach the verbal, behavioral report of a subject on her experiences much like an anthropologist would the reports of members of another social group in investigating their religion. Individuals, under this method, are the authors of their “fictional worlds” (*notional* worlds, alternatively) of experience, and it is the role of the investigator to maintain “a constructive and sympathetic neutrality, in hopes of compiling a definitive description of the world according to the subjects” as they record the ‘texts’ of the authors (CE 83). These neutrally compiled texts (as “theorists” fictions) allow the investigator to interpret the phenomenological world of an individual, as reported, as one would interpret a novel to be read. “Maximally extended, it is a neutral portrayal of exactly what it is like to be that subject — in the subject’s own terms, given the best interpretation we can muster” (98). In this light, the concept of selfhood and soul are “abstractions rather than nuggets of mysterious stuff ... they’re exquisitely useful fictions” (367).

The heterophenomenologist can now turn to the task of developing a naturalistic causal account of how these fictions are created. Dennett elaborates a detailed

computational mechanism, using the latest ideas of parallel distributed processing, neural networks, and memes, to “explain” consciousness in his interesting work Consciousness Explained. The details, although quite interesting and well developed, are of little significance for our present essay.

#### Auto- vs. Hetero- phenomenology

At this point I will undertake a more direct comparison of Husserl and Dennett. Through this, we shall clarify the similarities of each and gain an overall better understanding of their projects. It will be helpful here to adopt Dennett’s terminology whereby he distances himself from traditional phenomenology; an ego-centric investigator in the Husserlian tradition I shall label autophenomenologist; the pragmatic scientist I shall term the heterophenomenologist.<sup>18</sup> To streamline this process further, I will work under four headings that will hopefully delineate their essential differences: goals, views on intentionality, methodology, and attitudes towards realism and the life-world.

*Goals.* The main contrast between the auto and hetero phenomenologists lies in the overall aims of each project. For the auto, a science of consciousness is sought which in the end will support a grand foundation for all knowledge. This traditional philosophical ideal is immediately evident from the start in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology. We aim, in this schema, to replace previous foundations at hand with an ultimate bedrock:

In opposition to all previously designed objective sciences, which are sciences on the ground of the world, this would be a science of the universal how of the pregivenness of the world, i.e., of what makes it a universal ground for any sort of objectivity. (Crisis §38)

Unlike those before him, Husserl boldly attempted to overhaul our understanding of



self and the world. Like those before him, however, he boldly asserted the supremacy of his own culturally acquired presuppositions and failed to break with the “enlightenment” he criticized and the circularity of the dichotomies cherished by its method.

The hetero, on the other hand, tempers any yearnings for universality with an appeal to pragmatic holism. She seeks an “objective” science of consciousness supported by her productive method.

*Intentionality.* In pure phenomenology, the auto investigates the essence of the intentional correlation; the phenomenological field of experience is between an ego-pole and a world-pole and therein lies the intentional correlation that gives rise to meaning in experience:

Essential intentionality

↓

I-pole ⇔ World-pole

Thus posited, the auto circumscribes any infinite regress by placing the self in relationship to the lifeworld, while at the same time also negates the significance of others in giving supremacy to the conscious-ego as meaning giver-endower.<sup>19</sup>

The hetero views this system-building as ludicrous. Intentionality is a place-holder borrowed from folk psychology (which is unfortunately reified/deified by autophenomenology) that can be used as a tool for predicting and controlling the other — specifically:

We must treat the noise-emitter as an agent, indeed a rational agent, who harbors beliefs and desires and other mental states that exhibit intentionality or ‘aboutness,’ and whose actions can be explained (or predicted) on the basis of the content of these states. (CE 76-77).

As intentional systems, bestowed with a self-similar (to the hetero’s) experience of

“reality” through acts of self-projection, the hetero holds a limited sense of “rationality” for her research subjects.<sup>20</sup>

*Method.* The epoche, as the auto’s main method, is taken to be a self-evidently effective tool that allows investigation into the world-constructing essence of being:

Every opinion about ‘the’ world has its ground in the pregiven world. It is from this very ground that I have freed myself through the epoche; I stand above the world, which has now become for me, in a quite peculiar sense, a *phenomenon*. (Crisis §41)

Responding to Heidegger’s Being and Time, the auto recognizes the background that orients her epoche (the main methodological tool), yet still maintains its efficacy.<sup>21</sup>

For the hetero, her method is just that of modern science coupled with a predictive strategy. The determination of the efficacy of this approach is left to the normal means of the scientific community.<sup>22</sup>

Attitude towards realism and the lifeworld. *What kind of realism about the lifeworld do each of these projects entail? The world, for the auto, is a fundamental realm of life before objective science in the form of a structured horizon. “The world is pregiven to us, the waking, always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon.” (Crisis §37)*

The hetero, on the other hand, views the world as “the objective, materialistic, third-person world of the physical sciences” (Stance 5). This view is coupled with the pragmatic / productive holistic intentional strategy in an ironic use of the Wittgensteinian insight into forms of life to overthrow *significant* dialogue. It must always be remembered that “deviation from normal interpersonal relations is the price that must be paid for the neutrality a science of consciousness demands.” (CE 83)

## Gadamer's Hermeneutic Critique of Interpretive Method

When we follow the trajectory of thought from Husserl to Gadamer, we find a common theme and purpose. Each turns from the objectifying tendencies of modernity in search of a more satisfying account of Being — each building upon the former while responding to the post-Nietzschean episteme (incredulity towards tradition) that marked the thought of the 20th century and continues to influence philosophical dialogue. In this section, I develop an account of Gadamer's thought in relation to this arch of discourse and see if we can be justified in finding satisfaction in his onto-linguistic hermeneutics. To that end, it will be necessary to gain some understanding of Heidegger's use of the phenomenological method in explicating Being, as Dasein, and language — not to develop a criticism, but to better understand what Gadamer is hoping to achieve. After outlining his thought, I will briefly entertain some criticisms of the linguistic idealism that Gadamer's hermeneutics suggests and explore whether or not Gadamer attends to the influence that society has on discourse — as has been highlighted by critical theory. I will then tie together these thoughts to show that the turn from modernity to language is not, at core, anti-anything in orienting towards Heideggarean phenomenology. On the contrary, the suspension of awe before the positive methodology of the scientific program is urged by the need not to destroy or to leave it by the wayside but rather by the need to develop a wider, more pluralistic (vs. dichotomous) account of humanistic understanding.

It is reasonable to see Heidegger's working-out of Dasein, in part, as an attempt to recover the most useful parts of Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl, in grounding knowledge in a transcendental subjectivity via the phenomenological *epoché*, hoped to avoid what he saw as naïve objectification in Enlightenment

thought. This move towards a transcendental subject, however, does not lead to a satisfactory understanding of Being; in fact, as we have already seen, the positing of the solipsistically situated self in Husserl's reduction ultimately opens an unbridgeable void between the subject and the bracketed community of Others out in the life-world.<sup>23</sup> That he noticed the shortcomings of the methods of modernity and attempted to reconcile them with the "ineffable" aspects of consciousness is of great importance. Unfortunately, his desire to ground knowledge in an ultimate foundation (and to develop an *a priori* science of phenomenology) led to other problems that make questionable the extent to which we can be satisfied with his conclusions.

Heidegger points out that this solipsistic move is a result of *anxiety* — that is, the natural stand-point is but one of the possibilities that is open to the self — being-in-the-world as 'fallen' — focusing on the stand-point (constituted by the drive in objectification), and thus causing the inauthenticity which gives rise, ultimately, to individuating anxiety (BT §40). Heidegger took the results of Husserl's phenomenological investigations and shed light not only on the limiting (inauthentic) nature of the reductive method (a narrowing of focus) but also on its contextual (and historical) aspects.<sup>24</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger brings out the "fore-knowledge" — the backdrop, so to speak — the historical nature of essentialism, of which Husserl's phenomenology serves as crown, in some regards — in his criticism of Enlightenment inquiry. Interpretation, in this account, comes into play as *explication* rather than self-projection; i.e., "meaning" only makes sense in specific contexts and against a holistic background of shared, pervasive practices. The possibilities open to Being for understanding in the world are more wide-open than that allowed within the consciousness of modernity (the consciousness of *rational*, eidetic

dichotomies). It is in a temporal act, rather, that meaning becomes possible:

In interpreting, we do not ... throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand ... when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question *already* has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world ... (§32)

Before any conceptualization, before any knowledge, there is a "fore-ground", a "fore-structure", a "fore-knowledge" that makes the act possible. Husserl's self-criticism failed in this regard. We become aware, after Heidegger, that the transcendental subject is not possible without the bracketed life-world.<sup>25</sup>

Through his critique, Heidegger brings out the two very important points from which Gadamer departs: 1) the fore-structuring of experience — Dasein as the "historical being" and 2) the possibilities of being in time (over and against anxiety) — both of which together have made Enlightenment thought (or any, for that matter) possible. We cannot, however, break out of the 'circle' of our understanding to attain the God's eye view of the metaphysician — the "independent standpoint of the observer". In fact, it is within the circle that meaning lies:

What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way ... in the circle is hidden the positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing ... our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the *things themselves*. (§32)

The difficulty in "securing" this, however, lies in trying to develop an account that does not make any universal, trans-historical claims. This, in a sense, is

what all of the thinkers after Husserl have been dealing with — trying to balance, on one hand, the problematic nature of foundationalism that highlights the need for a reassessment of positive methodology and metaphysical inquiry with, on the other, the contradictions we run into when, in the light of this reassessment, we try to support in some way any claims we may make, without resorting to essentialism.

Gadamer, while hoping to avoid Heidegger's claims of goal-driven methodology, emphasizes the historical-linguistic ground of Dasein in his working of hermeneutic consciousness. Whereas Heidegger saw language as but one of the possibilities of Being, Gadamer places Being and understanding fully in language — thus bringing together Heidegger's two themes (the fore-structure and open possibilities of being) in the space of discursive activity. Language, in this account, is the fundamental mode of operation of our being-in-the-world and the all-embracing form of the constitution of the world (Reader, 111) and the goal of hermeneutics thus becomes to reconnect the objective world of technology, which the sciences place at our disposal and discretion, with those fundamental orders of being that are neither arbitrary nor manipulated by us, but rather simply demand our respect. (111)

The world, for conscious being, is an endless linguistic creation, the instantiating source of which lies in our shared traditions and 'prejudices'.<sup>26</sup> It is in this turn to language that he hopes to find safety from any methodological (ahistorical) claims. So, just what is contemporary hermeneutics (as opposed to traditional)?<sup>27</sup> As Gadamer works it out in his essay "Hermeneutics as practical philosophy", it is, at base, an art of understanding that moves beyond methodology — and so we have to come to see hermeneutics as a "dimension of human ability ... [having] to do with what is each individual's due as a citizen..." that inevitably comes out of practice (327).

Acknowledging the historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) as the base of the linguistic “space” of discourse, so to speak,

Hermeneutics can designate a natural capacity of human beings ... it refers to the human capacity for intelligent interchange with one’s fellows. (328)

This interchange builds upon Heidegger’s notions of the situated, temporal consciousness — in a way, fleshing out his ideas with the body of language. The relation between the self and other that was severed in Husserl’s transcendental subject — the relationship between self and a discursive text — is now reconnected in an understanding of their inextricable co-dependence — downplaying the autonomy of the Western self (the “I”, the *Dasein*).

The purpose of developing some of our ideas about the universality of this linguistic space is, as Gadamer states in the forward to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, not to prescribe “what we do or what we ought to do” but rather to bring to light “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing” (339). Through hermeneutic inquiry, Heidegger’s ‘circle’ of understanding is never ending — non-teleological spirit that is worked out further through discourse when the depth of being is brought to light, escaping reduction to an object of knowledge. This escape from the “leveling” of modernity, Gadamer feels, is the “universal human task” —

Genuine speaking, which has something to say and hence does not give prearranged signals, but rather seeks words through which one reaches the other person ... (Reader, 121)

When we leave behind the inherited, written tradition (Weitersagen) — we make a move to disarm *anxiety* (significance of life, etc.).

We can question Gadamer about his commitments in this seemingly linguistic

idealism, however. To vouchsafe knowledge in universal discourse seems, in a sense, to be a step backwards. Gadamer would respond to this, not with a counter argument, but rather an appeal to our understanding of language. The move to solipsism is not possible, he would contend, in light of the fact that “there is absolutely no captivity within a language” — discourse is the on-going creative act that makes experience possible (Reader, 120). This assertion does carry its own weight in Gadamer’s conception of Being — “Language goes beyond the consciousness of the speaker and is in this respect more than a subjective behavior” (Foreword, 348). To cry idealism is to misunderstand the goal of hermeneutics — the broadening-of-horizons.

On the other hand, we can criticize Gadamer for not attending to the insights of the critical theorists and Foucault’s analysis of the role of power in discourse. It seems that he is a bit of an optimist, in that he supposes (necessarily) that all individuals will pick up the torch of humanism (and human solidarity). The only consolation (to counter this criticism) would be to consider the play of power to be an element of the discursive creation of being that is at a level less abstract than the articulation of hermeneutics itself, deferred to latter discussion; although critical theory is a tonic in many ways, we must still return to the question of why just such an orientation towards power structures in the body of language is refreshing to our sensibilities. A Gadamerian conception of prejudice may possibly overcome Enlightenment ideals that still lie dormant in our post-Marxian episteme. Gadamer’s hermeneutics is responding to the shortcomings of Husserl and the suggestions of Heidegger in an attempt to liberate Being from categorization and ‘mechanization’ (to use Gadamer’s word). In the spirit of Derrida’s *différance*, Gadamer suggests that liberating “play goes beyond the consciousness of the player and is in this respect more than subjective

behavior” (Foreword, 348).<sup>28</sup> Gadamer is attempting to open a space for ethical self-creation after-modernity; i.e., he is attempting to prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into a research program, not to eliminate the role of scientific inquiry.<sup>29</sup> Science is not ultimately discarded, but rather ‘put in its place’ as a non-final arbiter of ‘reality’. Gadamer has not given us a thorough system of inquiry or universal-schematic metaphysical account. Rather, through the eye-opening hermeneutic move, he has given us *ideas* to help broaden the closed horizon of the world of Enlightenment thought in which we labor and to open our ears to the unclosed, non-teleological, “infinite dialogue [that] is opened in the direction of the truth that we are” (Reader, 120).

## Conclusion

For some readers sensitive to holism, the hermeneutic ideas developed in this essay will strike either a positive or negative chord. This gut-reaction lies at the heart of an important split in philosophical discourse surrounding holistic conceptions of language. While Dennett relies on some holistic view of understanding and dialogue as support for the intentional stance, hermeneutics also relies on a practical holistic conception of interpretation and understanding. As we have seen, however, each view has a different orientation towards its interlocutor, the other in communication. The heterophenomenologist builds theories, the hermeneutist seeks significance and self-unfolding. Theory-building and methodological inquiry are not, as such, futile endeavors, however; I do not make this claim. On the contrary, the linguistic ability to support alternate modes of explanation is central to the nature of our being. In the Fregean tradition, we still engage in dialogue. However, the positivistic intent and orientation that support its “success” in turn lead to “deviation from normal interpersonal relations,” as Dennett

willingly concedes.

In the essay “Holism and Hermeneutics,” Hubert Dreyfus elucidates a distinction between practical and theoretical holism that further highlights the inadequacy of methodological studies of consciousness. Viewing interpretation as translation between theories and understanding as an epistemological problem, the theoretical holist is guided by the Heideggerian concept of *vorsicht* — our conceptual schemes. The practical holist, in contrast, is sensitive to our *vorhabe* — the totality of our cultural practices. She views interpretation as explication; i.e., meaning arises only in specific contexts and against a background of shared practices that are not theorizable because they are pervasive and involve skills (6-7). This distinction leads Dreyfus, after considering the role of non-technological micro-practices of Being in understanding, to argue that the human sciences are incommensurably different from the physical sciences:

[S]ocial science might, indeed, establish itself, only ... by leaving out the social skills which make the isolation of features or attributes possible. But such skills and the context of everyday practices they presuppose are internal to the human sciences, just as the laboratory skills of scientists are internal to the history and sociology of science, for if the human sciences claim to study human activities, then the human sciences, unlike the natural sciences, must take account of those human activities which make possible their own disciplines. (17)

The theoretical holism developed by Richard Rorty, a view that supports and is most closely aligned with Dennett’s intentional stance, does not attend to this distinction.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Kögler has argued persuasively that Dreyfus’ practical holism itself puts one in an untenable ethnocentric situation.<sup>31</sup> Addressing the shortcomings of practical and theoretical holism in dealing with power structures in

dialogue (e.g. ethnocentricity and social structures), Kögler has developed a broader conception of hermeneutic competence (acknowledging the role of empathy in understanding) that incorporates both aspects of holism and strives to overcome the deficiencies of these approaches in understanding consciousness in his work The Power of Dialogue and more recently in his lecture “Language and the Paradigm of Performativity”. All of these holistic variants hinge on the examination language and on a conception of dialogue as the basis for inquiry and explication of the human condition and consciousness.

Having considered the human sciences in general, I will close with a discussion of the positive implications for heterophenomenology and other similar efforts in cognitive science regarding the limited and misguided nature of interpretive methodological inquiry. Dennett’s work, as a case study for cognitive science and as a bridge between the analytic and continental strains of philosophical thought, has mainly served as a vehicle to launch our discussion. If research in cognitive science is to continue while maintaining sensitivity to the insights of post-modern visions of language, how will it reformulate its goals? What is the future role of cognitive science? In discussions with Professor Kögler, I have considered possible technological worst-case scenarios involving artificial intelligence (AI). As in the case of old science fiction, the future usually seems better (or worse) than it actually turns out to be. Artificial intelligence will continue to be a technological handmaiden to objectifying inquiry — work in cognitive science and its offspring will go on as long as the dialogue of psychology continues. When I began this study a year ago, I was strongly against the idea of AI; my instinct was reactionary. In the course of thinking and reading about hermeneutics and the philosophy of language, I became deeply involved in an internal dialogue, in effect internalizing a dialogue within our Western tradition. I

breached a broad area of knowledge formerly unknown to me and basked in the beauty of ideas finely interwoven and then wove my own thread — this essay. Through the exchange of ideas, I discovered the true value of my Liberal Studies work. Dialogue, in whatever form, can not be denied; it leads to outward growth, occasional retreat and reformation, and to the discovery of significance and meaning in a lifeworld populated with so many fresh other voices. The ethical consequences of methodological inquiry in the human sciences will be balanced by a growing awareness of multiculturalism and holistic discourses that mark the beginning of our new century — marked with the promise of a grand continuation of the dialogue of humankind.

#### Works Cited

- Dennett, Daniel. Consciousness Explained. (CE). Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1991.
- - -. The Intentional Stance. (Stance). Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.
- Dreyfus, Hubert. “Holism and Hermeneutics” in *Review of Metaphysics* 34, 3-23.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. “Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy” in After Philosophy. Eds. Baynes, Bohman, and McCarthy. Cambridge: MIT, 1987.
- - -. Truth and Method. (TM). New York: Seabury Press, 1975.
- - -. “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem” in The Continental Philosophy Reader. Eds. Kearney and Rainwater. London: Routledge, 1996.

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. (BT). Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

- - -. Being and Time. (BT 2). Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 1996.

Husserl, Edmund. Crisis of European Sciences. (Crisis). Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1984.

- - -. Formal and Transcendental Logic. Kluwer Academic Press, 1978.

- - -. Ideas. Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. New York: Collier, 19??.

- - -. Logical Investigations. Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1970.

- - -. "Phenomenology." The Continental Philosophy Reader. Ed. R. Kearney and M. Rainwater. London: Routledge, 1996. 15-22.

- - -. "The Vienna Lecture." in The Continental Philosophy Reader. Ed. R. Kearney and M. Rainwater. London: Routledge, 1996. 7-14.

Kögler, H.-H. "Language and the Paradigm of Performativity". Keynote lecture delivered on Jan. 22, 2000 at the Univ. of South FL, Tampa, (Conference on Continental Philosophy / Ethics / Social Theory).

- - -. The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Philosophical Investigations. Trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.