

**LEARNING FROM MISUNDERSTANDING:
THE APPLICATION OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE UNIVERSITY**

A Thesis

by

ALAN CLAYTON MILAM

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2010

Major Subject: Philosophy

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee,	Theodore George
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ABSTRACT

Learning from Misunderstanding:

The Application of Hermeneutics in the University. (August 2010)

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Dr. Gregory Pappas

In this thesis I examine the rectoral address of both Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer to articulate their vision of education as well as the role the university plays in this vision. As a student of Heidegger, Gadamer departs from a similar conceptual ground. However, Gadamer parts way with Heidegger when he emphasizes the role of prejudices in understanding. This subtle distinction equips Gadamer's hermeneutical project to encounter the role of the American University flexibly. I argue that by viewing both of these addresses alongside their historical context we not only gain a nuanced understanding of Gadamer's departure from Heidegger but we also gain an important turn in the hermeneutical project. Because Gadamer emphasizes prejudices as a condition of understanding, his hermeneutical project necessitates an inquiry into the historical circumstances that gave rise to the questions he sought to address. His emphasis on the historicity of understanding effectively allows us to test which aspects of the hermeneutical project are viable for the American university. I argue that while many aspects of Gadamer's philosophy of education are broadly aligned with many American institutional goals, he does not address the issue of race in higher education. I conclude by arguing that if the hermeneutic project is to move beyond Gadamer's

historical circumstances, and apply viably to any American context, then it must deal with the problems of racism as an everyday occurrence.

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This project is the outcome of my experience in the TAMU Department of Philosophy. I wish to thank them for their support and patience as well as the invaluable experiences I had in turning to these thinkers and this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education depends upon an occurrence of understanding. This seems to be reflected in one of the most common questions following a lecture, ‘Did everyone understand that?’ Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer focus upon the phenomenon of understanding in their descriptions of the hermeneutic circle. For this reason, their thoughts on education are oriented by the task of articulating the role of understanding. For Heidegger, the university, as a site of education harnesses understanding for the purposes of national self-assertion. For Gadamer, the university is the site of a more global project and this global scope obligates a more egalitarian conversation between the university and its community. In either case, the university requires a degree of autonomy to pursue these goals to pursue these avenues of understanding. Additionally, Gadamer and Heidegger forwarded their explicit goals for the universities at which they were employed at a time in German history when the universities were under increased scrutiny due to political anxieties concerning the proper role of education for a nation.

In each of their addresses the autonomy of the university figures significantly into their discussions of the university; however, the freedom of the university to pursue avenues of research does not entail a politically disengaged pursuit.

This thesis follows the style of *Philosophy Today*.

Rather, as we shall see, both of these philosophers recognize the importance of everyday concerns for the generation of any inquiry. In light of this, both thinkers describe a political function for the university due in part to its autonomous pursuit of research.

The interplay between our historical and political circumstances, our paths of research or even our common everyday inquiries illustrates a process of understanding.¹ As such Gadamer and Heidegger sought to nurture this process in the universities by uncovering the primordial roots of science in the basic act of questioning and thinking. Consequently, the universities autonomy is not that of an ivory tower in pursuit of timeless truths. Rather, the university serves a role in educating subsequent generations and may even serve as a means to stave off similar events to those of World War II.

Perhaps owing to the events of World War II, nurturing a process of inquiry that is historically and politically situated is not an uncommon practice. Even this particular university, Texas A&M (TAMU), describes their goal in relation to an historical inheritance as well as serving an important social and political function.

Texas A&M is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields. Its mission of providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate programs is inseparable from its mission of developing new understandings through research and creativity. Students are prepared to assume roles of leadership, responsibility and service to society. Texas A&M assumes as its historic trust the maintenance of freedom of inquiry and an intellectual environment nurturing the human mind and spirit.²

Navigating the circumstances that shape our questions historical, social, and political engagement is not an easy task. Additionally, simply dismissing the circumstances surrounding a given path of inquiry conceals the subject matter of the questioning by presupposing the assumptions the question is founded upon as valid.

In light of the significance and complexity of this navigation many academic goals embody conflicting aims. TAMU articulates their approach to this project in their dedication to the pursuit, transmission, and application of knowledge. As a research university, TAMU takes pride in its ability to foster an environment for both teaching and research. Additionally, TAMU identifies their social and political function within a tradition of academic freedom and autonomy that also balances the fostering of a community of inquiry.

The aims are not meant to conflict. Rather they work together without sacrificing one aim for another. If any of these aims are pursued individually than we seem to stifle the social and political role of the university. The transmission or communication of knowledge varies from the application of that knowledge. Essentially the task of communicating knowledge and applying knowledge are different and if pursued without recourse to the other end would move us away from what Gadamer and Heidegger call education.

The lecture serves as an interesting demonstration of this very problem. A lecture is often described as an explication of a particular subject matter. The history behind the word lecture gestures towards a presentation that intends a particular exposition of a text, or the act of reading a text to an audience.³ Commenting on the persistent use of the word lecture in the academic world, Gadamer observes that, “When one speaks, one speaks to somebody, when one lectures, then this paper lies between the speaker and the audience”.⁴ The lecture is disengaged from the audience by the distance imposed by the text. The distance limits the possibilities of sincere dialogue with the

subject-matter of the lecture. However, this distance also authorizes a particular interpretation of the subject matter to range regardless of the circumstances that gave rise to the interpretation, so there is room for more than the articulation of an isolated perspective. Depending on the audience, a particular interpretation presented in a lecture can establish the 'correct' interpretation. All too often students seem to recognize lectures as the final word on the subject-matter rather than a particular inquiry into the subject-matter.

If we focus solely on the aim of a lecture's correct communication of knowledge, the student becomes a vessel to be filled rather than a willing participant in their own education. In this situation the lecture becomes the sole criteria for the subject-matter. The correct presentation of the subject-matter is determined by the particular presentation of the subject-matter in the lecture. The quantity of information successfully communicated can easily be tested for by asking a set of questions that require a reproduction of the presentation.

However, when some lecturers call for questions they ask the audience to situate their particular presentation within a larger framework through the practice of evaluation. By asking for evaluation a lecturer implies that their particular presentation needs to be situated within a larger understanding of the subject-matter. A lecture begins to drift from the pure transmission and communication of knowledge and towards its various applications in evaluation. The conception of the others in the audience must be thickened if they are meant to do more than correctly reproduce a lecture. The practice of evaluation asks the audience to enter into a dialogue between the particular

presentation of the subject-matter and their own understanding of the subject-matter. A call for evaluation even at the level of clarification questions asks, “And how does your experience of the subject matter agree or disagree with this particular presentation?” In evaluation the text no longer separates the lecturer from the audience because the subject-matter makes up the common ground between them.

The evaluation of the subject-matter given in a lecture is the application of the communicated knowledge. Application requires navigation between the circumstances that brought us to the subject-matter, the tradition of the subject-matter, and this particular presentation of the subject-matter. While we could subsume application within the act of communication because successful communication only seems apparent in the successful application of a subject-matter, no single method seems to capture the best possible way to apply a given subject-matter in any given circumstances. Even the scientific method is open for change. The evaluation of a lecture is a site of education because the principles of the subject-matter are situated with reference to our circumstances in the unfolding of language. Communication and application, despite their different concerns, align in the articulation of questions and answers in evaluation.

Gadamer describes this tense relationship by examining the paradoxical character of pedagogical questions.⁵ For Gadamer, the paradoxical difficulty of asking pedagogic questions results from the difficulty in communicating a correct interpretation of the subject-matter while simultaneously implying that this is a single interpretation that emerged against the background of a larger tradition of inquiry.

To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be

undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned. It has to be brought into a state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question requires this openness. Without it, it is basically no more than an apparent question.⁶

The pedagogic question parallels a true question because in revealing the subject-matter these questions open the subject-matter to further evaluation. The very presentation of the subject-matter in a pedagogic question is meant to imply a state of indeterminacy concerning the final results of an inquiry. Pedagogical questions help in navigation because they present the opportunity to evaluate the concerns that brought us to the subject-matter with those concerns that have shaped the tradition of the subject-matter.

A lecture can possess both apparent and true questions. The apparent questions emerge from a normative understanding of the subject-matter. Certain areas of the subject-matter are considered closed as a matter of normative agreement. The apparent question is easily recognizable by its similar character to that of an inside joke. The apparent question is meant to weed out those students who have not been paying attention by exposing their ignorance. When an apparent question is answered successfully the lecture simply moves on there is no need to apply any knowledge because the question is simply asking for the reproduction of some scrap of subject-matter. As such the apparent question seems to have the most educational value in evaluating a student's relation to the normative commitments embodied in the tradition of a subject-matter.

As soon as a student is asked to apply the subject-matter, it is opened to the inclusion of new circumstances. This process of asking pedagogic questions is meant to

develop and discover novel applications of the subject-matter. Pedagogical questions are capable of doing this because of the ambivalent posture they take in regards to the subject-matter. The subject-matter is neither completely closed nor completely open in a pedagogic question. Pedagogic questions reveal the general questionability of the subject-matter by inquiring within the subject-matter. Without the paradoxical tension within pedagogical questions the audience would not be able to access the applicability of the subject-matter.

Gadamer and Heidegger both focus upon the applicative and therefore contextual character of understanding. Heidegger provides an important departure point for Gadamer. However, Gadamer broadens the scope of Heidegger's project when he focuses upon the hermeneutic project as a description of understanding in general. Heidegger's notion of understanding is oriented by its ontological function; Gadamer widens the description of understanding by describing several attempts to decipher its structure including Heidegger's. Gadamer's project is indebted to Heidegger's work as a foundational text that reveals the questionability of the hermeneutical subject-matter when viewed alongside other attempts to describe understanding as it utilized in the human sciences. The task of understanding Gadamer is also the task of conversing with Heidegger.

As we shall see in Chapter I, Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of self-assertion put forward in Heidegger's rectoral address. Gadamer expands upon Heidegger's ideas by widening the role of the university beyond that of a national guide for self-assertion and he provides a more egalitarian scope for education. In Chapter II, I trace out the

importance of prejudice for Gadamer's notion of understanding and more importantly the hermeneutical productivity of misunderstanding. Gadamer is able to broaden Heidegger's project because of the importance he places on prejudice and tradition. Gadamer's emphasis upon the past equips his philosophy of education with a better set of tools for understanding some of the issues of diversity. Chapter III traces out some of the ways in which hermeneutics can benefit the pursuit of common academic goals. For the purposes of this paper the hermeneutic productivity of misunderstanding plays more prominently than any other feature of Gadamer's educational philosophy. For Gadamer, misunderstanding indicates a conflict between prejudices. However, as we shall see misunderstanding is still hermeneutically productive because disagreement can have an orienting effect.

A diverse student body brings varying backgrounds and experiences into contact with the subject-matter of many academic disciplines. This wide array of experiences provokes the subject-matter to open itself to be applied in unforeseen ways. Additionally, a diverse student body provokes an ongoing conversation with the university and the faculty. This conversation is the confrontation of prejudices inherited from a wide variety of experiences. However, transplanting the role that Gadamer describes for the university into an American context is not without its difficulties. The diverse conversation that Gadamer envisions could be an overly idealistic image in a country that has found itself mired in issues of racism since the 3/5's compromise was drafted into our constitution. While both Heidegger and Gadamer provide a helpful lens for understanding the role of the university in general, their particular vision for the

university was meant to address their specific context. In light of this relativity, any application of Gadamer's ideas to an American context should be aware of the ways in which the context of Heidegger and Gadamer's educational philosophies limit their successful application. However, before the difficulties of transplantation can be discussed I will draw out important aspects of both Heidegger's and Gadamer's educational philosophies by examining their rectoral addresses and visions for the university.

Notes for Chapter I

¹ For Heidegger's description of the relationship between our everyday concerns and understanding as well as the expression of this structure as observed in language see (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 1953, 134-156). Additionally, see (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 363-371) for Gadamer's discussion of the phenomenon of understanding and its expression in dialogue as well as (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 385-391) for his discussion of the concretization of experience in language.

² (TAMU n.d., 17)

³ OED

⁴ In addition to discussing the atavistic use of the word 'lecture' in academia, Gadamer also sheds light on his preference for the term 'address' in (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 529) .

⁵Gadamer discusses pedagogic questions in his examination of platonic dialogue, see (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 357) .

⁶ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 357)

CHAPTER II

HEIDEGGER AND GADAMER ON THE VOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY:

TWO RECTORAL ADDRESSES

Gadamer's project builds upon Heidegger's work. Gadamer often contextualizes his work as occurring in response to Heidegger's project. Robert A. Dostal notes that, "[t]hroughout his published work and in his lectures and private conversation, Gadamer everywhere modestly acknowledges his deep debt to Heidegger".¹ In light of his admission it seems like a mistake to discount the Heideggarian roots that run throughout Gadamer's. If we contextualize the rectoral addresses of Heidegger and his student Gadamer within their historical circumstances then we can see Gadamer's rectoral address as a rehabilitation of Heidegger's rectoral address. However, as we shall see the historical circumstances of Gadamer's address prompt a much different emphasis and role for the university. Gadamer applies Heidegger's ideas within his historical situation and produces a rehabilitation that challenges Heidegger's address with a different set of historical circumstances.

The differences in their philosophical text can be traced out in relation to the disparate circumstances that shaped their inquiries. Examining the two rectoral addresses within their historical context yields a highly nuanced understanding of the text. While the historical cannot determine the ultimate meaning of the text's it does indicate the often hidden effects of temporal distance. By focusing upon the temporal distance between the addresses the divergences in meaning are more pronounced. Therefore, reading the rehabilitation of Heidegger's ideas into Gadamer's circumstances

provides an opportunity to understand how and perhaps why Gadamer's project must diverge from Heidegger's while also demonstrating those strains of thought that continue to apply for Gadamer.

While Heidegger suggests that the purpose of the university is to educate a nation's elite, Gadamer believes that the proper understanding of the university's mission is global in its scope and its commitment to the development of knowledge. As we shall see in Chapters II and III, Gadamer's broader scope gives up the possibility of neutral understanding even in the face of diverse and irrevocable differences. The broader scope of hermeneutics sheds light on often untapped avenues of understanding including those resulting in seemingly irrevocable misunderstanding. For this reason, Gadamer's rectoral address speaks to a set of contemporary concerns that press upon the university. While Heidegger's address outlines an ideal relationship between the University and the German nation his ideal loses traction when we consider the diverse populations attending American universities and the commitment that these universities have to their diverse students and their communities.

Heidegger assumed the position of the rectorate on May 5, 1933. This is little over a month after the Enabling act was passed on March 23, 1933. The enabling act is often described as the culminating event in Hitler's rise to power. Lucy S. Dawidowicz notes that, "[t]henceforth, the decrees which were promulgated by the German government adhered to the principles of National Socialist ideology rather than to the rules of law".² The pervasive reach of the National Socialist party after the enabling act construes even the everyday choices of Germans during World War II into a politically

ambiguous light.³ Heidegger is no different in this respect and his early support of National Socialist party cast doubt upon his work. While Heidegger's political actions are unwarranted we cannot simply throw the baby out with the bath water so to speak. Given the limited political range of a professor of philosophy, Heidegger could easily be situated as a bystander. However, given the National Socialist parties desperate need for scientific credence and academic support of their ideology, Heidegger's support perpetrates an extension of National Socialist ideology by lending academic integrity to their ideas. Heidegger lent his academic integrity precisely when the party needed this kind of support to justify the legal discrimination of the Jewish population.⁴ This is enough to classify Heidegger as a perpetrator, however, as the historical study devoted to the events of the Holocaust demonstrates there is an obligation to try and understand even the most virulent texts.

The body of literature devoted to studying Heidegger's politics in relation to his philosophy is substantial and Gadamer has also contributed to this body of scholarship in two essays.⁵ As a student of Heidegger's, this particular inquiry must have been of special importance to Gadamer not only because of their close friendship but because much of Gadamer's project is founded on Heidegger's project. Any implication that Heidegger's philosophy was tainted may have implied that Gadamer's possessed the same shortcomings. Jean Grondin in his *Hans-Georg Gadamer: a Biography* describes Gadamer as diplomatic in his consideration of these problems.⁶ As early as 1937, when Heidegger and Gadamer finally reunited after almost eight years of silence, Gadamer was guided by an attitude of openness that sought to understand Heidegger's actions.⁷

As a student of Gadamer's I will attempt to remain open to easily overlooked historical circumstances that help ameliorate Heidegger's actions by shedding light on his possible intentions.

Heidegger's rectoral address was characterized by the Heraclitian notion of battle. In light of Hitler's use of the concept of elbowroom, this may seem like a uniquely unfortunate characterization. Hitler motivated his push into Poland by appealing to the idea that the German identity needed more physical room in which to truly flourish.⁸ Heidegger's use of battle, however, was not intended to create a space in which an identity could flourish but rather a, "confrontation that sets those who confront one another apart, so that in such setting-apart the essential being of those who thus confront one another exposes itself, one to the other, and thus shows itself and comes to appearance."⁹ The confrontation provokes questioning directed towards what is essential or what sets what is to be understood apart from everything else. The confrontation depends upon a distinction from the other, but this distinction is dependent upon the other's presence. Elbowroom does not nurture the presence of an other for the ongoing process of confrontation and understanding. Rather, elbowroom would simply be a quick confrontation followed by a prolonged stillness. For Hitler, the stillness was the purpose for the push. Hitler wanted to develop the identity of the German People in complete isolation. For Heidegger, prolonged stillness denies questioning and terminates the possibility of any true form of self-assertion.

Elbowroom denies questioning because the space must first be cleared of the obstacles that would call for understanding. There can be no questioning if there is no

difference to confront. Without an obstacle, without another voice, the conversation becomes an incestuous self-affirmation without any kind of critical self-examination. And for Heidegger, if the university wishes to remain autonomous their “Self-governance must be grounded in self-examination. Self-examination, however, presupposes that the German university possesses the strength to *self-assertion*.”¹⁰ Self-assertion is grounded in a firm commitment to self-examination, and the question for Heidegger is whether the German university possesses the fortitude to rigorously question. Only under the conditions of rigorous questioning does a self emerge, however, this self is not simply an identity.¹¹ This self is under constant threat by the uncertainty of the world, as this is the only grounds from which a self can emerge. When Heidegger ask if the German university posses the strength to self-assertion, he is asking if the German university possess the fortitude to rigorous self-examination without recourse to a respite in the stillness of identity.

Heidegger reaches back to the Greek conception of science in order to embed the task of rigorous self-examination in the university. Heidegger distinguishes two properties from the Greek conception of science that shape his task. The first property is found in Aeschylus’s portrayal of Prometheus. “Aeschylus has his Prometheus utter a saying that expresses the essence of knowing. ‘Knowing, however, is far weaker than necessity.’ This is to say: all knowing about things has always already been delivered up to overpowering fate and fails before it.”¹² Heidegger is recapturing a sensibility that accompanied the Greek conception of science. The sensibility encompasses the notion that knowledge does not dictate a necessary relation. Knowledge stands powerless

before fate because knowledge lacks the ability to dictate fate. The sensibility is the recognition of a Dionysian-like ground on which, “the creative impotence of knowing” is defied.¹³ The defiance is the persistence of the project of knowing in the face of this uncertainty. The defiance born out of the “creative impotence” of knowledge characterizes the second property that Heidegger recovers: the circumstances of theory.

For Heidegger, the concept of theory as a detached pursuit of a particular subject-matter denies the applicative circumstances that called for a theoretical pursuit of the subject-matter. Theory is the product of finite minds and finite experience.

“Encountering this Greek saying about the creative impotence of knowing, one likes to find here all too readily the prototype of a knowing based purely on itself, while in fact such knowing has forgotten its own essence.”¹⁴ For Heidegger, theory practiced for its own sake has forgotten the everyday circumstances that called for theoretical inquiry in favor of denying impotence of its product: theoretical knowledge. Ignoring the promethean sensibility places theory in a position above practice. Theory is able to occupy this position because fate and uncertainty are no longer limitations. From this vantage point theory explains practice and purchases a status that is no longer understood as a practical human endeavor. The Greek notion of theory that Heidegger uncovers is not a theory of pure contemplation done for its own sake. Rather, “theory was to be understood as itself the highest realization of genuine practice.”¹⁵ For Heidegger, the Greek pursuit of theory was intimately bound with all aspects of life. “Science, for them, is also not a mere means of bringing the unconscious to

consciousness, but the power that hones and embraces being-there (*Dasein*) in its entirety.”¹⁶

With the recovery of these two properties Heidegger then reconstructs the essence of Greek science as, “the questioning holding of one’s ground in the midst of the ever self-concealing totality of what is. This active perseverance knows, as it perseveres, about its impotence before fate.”¹⁷ Heidegger’s formulation of Greek science is the practical endeavor to understand that operates in full awareness of its creative impotence. For Heidegger, the Greeks understood theory as a creative response to the uncertainty of the world.

For this reason, Heidegger finds the return to the Greek essence of science paramount to the self-assertion of the university.

If we will this essence of science, the body of teachers of this university must really step forward into the most dangerous post, threatened by constant uncertainty about the world. If it holds this ground, that is to say, if from such steadfastness—inessential nearness to the hard-pressing insistence of all things—arises a common questioning and a communally tuned saying, then it will gain the strength to lead.¹⁸

The only way for the German university to genuinely self-assert is through a commitment to rigorous attention to its questions. Heidegger hopes that by remaining devoted to this task a common direction might emerge that provides a clue as to the university’s direction.

Heidegger often characterizes the self that seems to hold fast as, “the distressing fate of the German people.”¹⁹ For Heidegger, the student body is closely bound to the German fate. “Out of the resoluteness of the German student body to be equal to the German fate in its most extreme distress, comes a will to the essence of the university.”²⁰

Heidegger argues that the student body brings the German fate to the university. The university is then a site of confrontation between the German fate and an historical tradition of inquiring that has roots in Greek science. For Heidegger, “To give the law to oneself is the highest freedom.”²¹ The confrontation of the student body with the various intellectual traditions preserved in a university facilitates the autonomy and freedom implied by self-assertion. The confrontation in the university presents the possibility of understanding our concerns in relation to a larger tradition of inquiry. For Heidegger, our questions indicate the existential circumstances that called for their placement alongside a particular academic tradition. Heidegger does not ask for single orientations in order to explicate a specific direction, rather he is tasking the university with an ongoing project that orients by virtue of the movement of understanding. Without this movement orientation is suspended and navigation becomes dependent upon stale directions that no longer account for our own relative movement.

Heidegger’s emphasis on the ongoing character of this task is grounded in his description of the hermeneutic circle. Gadamer also appeals to a similar circularity in his rectoral address when he emphasizes the renewal of the university. The hermeneutic circle describes the interpretive movement involved in understanding. For both thinkers the act of interpretation indicates the ongoing character of understanding because each interpretation throws different aspects of the whole into light that when present requires another interpretation. The hermeneutic circle reinforces the uncertain relationship of the parts and the whole.

Heidegger locates the primary dynamis in keeping the ongoing task of self-assertion ongoing in three state entities.²² These entities are the labor service, armed service, and knowledge service. These services all bond with the university through the student body.²³ The students act as a kind of medium through which the concerns and problems of the state entities can influence the direction of the university. Each provides a particular type of pull against the university that keeps the practice of theory close to the needs of the German people.

The labor service binds theoretical pursuits to, “help carry the burden and to participate actively in the troubles, endeavors, and skills of all its estates and members.”²⁴ Heidegger understands the labor service to bind the university to the needs of the community. The armed services, “binds to the honor and destiny of the nation in the midst of other peoples.”²⁵ Heidegger notes that he does not necessarily want to imply a militaristic or aggressive posture.²⁶ I take Heidegger to mean that a national self can only exist in the midst of other nations. Heidegger emphasizes that the bond of the armed services is meant to be understood as, “defense in self-defense.”²⁷ I take Heidegger to be arguing for a university that is also takes its national position into account for the process of self-assertion; however, each nation must have a unique voice determined by their national fate for the requisite confrontation that triggers interpretation and understanding. The knowledge service is mentioned third, which for Heidegger actually means that it is first. The knowledge service binds the people to the spiritual mission of self-examination and self-assertion. “It demands of itself and for itself that its leaders and guardians possess the strictest clarity of the highest, widest, and

richest knowledge.”²⁸ For Heidegger, the university is the site of education and as such is charged with the general dispersion of knowledge that is responsive to all aspects of the state. Moreover, they are charged with invigorating all aspects of the state with the fortitude to rigorously attend their questioning.

These three entities only work well in conjunction with each other. When a single service dictates without bothering to listen, the relationship collapses and questioning is terminated by the lack of an other to interpret. Heidegger asks for a return to the primordial notion of science if the university is to participate rather than merely dictate or conform. “This primordial concept of science obligates us not only to ‘objectivity’ (‘Sachlichkeit’), but first of all, to make our questioning in the midst of the historical-spiritual world of the people simple and essential. Indeed—only in such questioning can objectivity truly ground itself, i.e., discover its nature and limit.”²⁹ A return to the Greek notion of science obligates a rigorous pursuit of questioning in the face of uncertainty. The desire for objectivity is methodologically grounded if we are to be true to this unearthing of Greek science as a response to uncertainty. Consequently this implies that the questioning be responsive to the needs of the other state entities as they are voiced in the student body. The return to a primordial sense of science is necessary if the university does not want to either work in total isolation or uncritically adopt the concerns derived from their spiritual destiny.

For Heidegger, the university is deeply entrenched within the state or nation. The labor, armed, and knowledge services mutually develop each other and a state emerges. However, this was far from the relationship that actually occurred between

German Universities and the Nazi party. In his later “Facts and Thoughts,” Heidegger laments the ineffectiveness of his rectoral address. He felt that his warning fell upon deaf ears. Confrontation is not a justification of battle; rather it is recognition of the necessity of interaction to stimulate understanding. However, Heidegger does betray his nationalist streak when he isolates the German University’s role for the German people. While Heidegger wants frequent confrontation to provoke self-examination and self-assertion, he only wants these to be German confrontations for the purposes of German self-assertion.

Heidegger’s rectoral address unsuccessfully confronted the Nazi party by calling for a process of self-assertion. The question that drives Heidegger’s address is whether the German universities possess the strength and will to carry out this task. When Heidegger asks if the German university possess the strength and will they need for self-assertion, he implies that this is not necessarily a required task. Heidegger begins his search for the primordality of science by asking, “Should there still *be* a science for us in the future, or should we let it drift toward a quick end?”³⁰ For Heidegger, the pursuit of science is still something that the German university could turn away from. For Gadamer our entrenchment in science is the starting point for understanding our historical-mission. However, Heidegger insists that the process of self-assertion is the condition under which science must exist, “if it is to be *for* us and *through* us.”³¹ For Heidegger, it is not necessary that the university carry out the task of self-assertion for any reason other than the rigorous pursuit of science and German self-examination.

Heidegger describes the will to essence as a science concerned with the historically aware self-assertion. “The self-assertion of the German university is the primordial, shared will to its essence...The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science as will to the historical mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state.”³² The will is towards the self-knowledge of a people.³³ When the will to science is employed in the will to the essence of the German university, under the conditions Heidegger has described, it is focused upon the historical mission of the German people. The task of self assertion is only necessary if the university wants to maintain science for the Germans and through the Germans.

Gadamer does not appeal to a notion of science that runs purely back to the Greeks or the nurturing of an authentic national voice to ground the renewal of the university in the primordially of science. For Gadamer, there is no ambiguity concerning whether or not the task should be carried out. The task of self-assertion and the conditions that Heidegger laid out are necessary but for Gadamer they are not simply necessary if we choose to utilize science, they are necessary if we are to learn from the events of World War II. Therefore, Gadamer grounds the obligation to reflect by orienting our questioning towards those concerns that spring from his historical circumstances.

Heidegger’s educational philosophy betrays his national fervor. While he is not looking for a university made up entirely of a racially homogenous population, he is only interested in fostering a uniquely German thought. He harnesses understanding to the task of German self-assertion. When Heidegger asks if the German university has the

strength to self-assertion, he is asking if the Germans are able to make their Greek inheritance of science uniquely their own and responsive to German concerns.

In contrast to Heidegger, Gadamer does not ask if the German university possesses the strength to carry out this philosophical task. Rather, he insists upon the necessity of this task in light of sciences dangerous effectivity when employed for militaristic needs. For Gadamer, “The only place where there can be a difference of opinion concerns where the strength will come from to accomplish this task.”³⁴ The place that we derive our strength to carry out this task is unimportant, “for we are all united by the awareness of the enormity of our task”, given the uses of science during World War II.³⁵ Where Heidegger can still ask if science should be pursued, Gadamer cannot if he is to be honest to his historical inheritance and circumstances and maintain a rigorous nearness to what-is in the application of Heidegger’s ideas to a post-war university. For Gadamer, the responsibility to undertake Heidegger’s task, “should be so, even if it is not always so.”³⁶

Gadamer delivered his address after World War II during the Russian supervised reconstruction of eastern Germany. Grondin notes that the influence of the occupying Russians was, “unambiguously visible in his insistence on the presence of the proletariat.”³⁷ However, Grondin is also quick to note that Gadamer’s address frequently defends the importance of scholarly independence. “The whole rhetorical force of the rector’s speech lay precisely in positing scholarly independence as a contribution to political community and a bulwark against all fascist enterprises.”³⁸ In

this respect Gadamer echoes the sentiments that Heidegger attributes to his address in “Facts and Thoughts”.

Scholarly independence provides an important tension within the political community. Heidegger called attention to this role in the relationship of the knowledge service to the labor and armed services. The university was to confront these state entities and in that confrontation accomplish an act of orientation and self-assertion. The basic relationship is the same within Gadamer; however, his return to the primordality of science opens up the possibility of including globally significant reasons. With this possibility, Gadamer is able to extend the scope of the university’s role beyond their national goals. Heidegger saw the rectorship as an opportunity to return the German university system to the German people. Gadamer’s address is towards a larger audience. Perhaps this is a fortunate influence of the post-war era in Germany. As Grondin notes, Gadamer assumed the rectorship at a time when multiple nations occupied Germany. His address also occurs after the detonation of both atomic bombs. In light of this, Gadamer suggest that the task that Heidegger laid out can no longer be oriented by the German fate alone it must also include the fate of those bound to the university through the effects of science.

Where Heidegger simply relies upon an academic reverence towards the Greeks and their role in producing German thought, Gadamer exposes the historical confrontations that this role emerged within.

It was the Greeks—in their fateful confrontation with the spirit of the Near East—who first created the form of European science. Just as the defeat of the assault by the great power of Persia in Marathon and Salamis can be said to be the salvation of the Greeks’ own independence and at the same time must be

called the birth of Europe, in the same way the assimilation and further development of Egyptian and Babylonian mathematics and understanding of nature by the genius of the Greeks can be said to be the birth of European science and therefore today's world culture.³⁹

Gadamer is exploiting several historical relations in this description. Europe, as we understand it, is bound to the Greek fate. The Greek fate is the defeat of Persia and their rise to prominence in the Mediterranean, as well as their defeat and absorption by the Macedonians under Alexander. Europe must also be the crumbling of Alexander's empire, the rise of the Romans and their decline as well. By exposing the multi-faceted environment in which science emerged, Gadamer effectively supplies an historical reason to extend the inheritance of science.⁴⁰ Science is no longer a purely Greek notion because of the various participants who can be described by virtue of this historical context that gave shape to scientific inquiry. Without these confrontations science would not have the shape it does today.

In addition to exposing the emergence of European science as dependent upon a process of confrontation and therefore rightly the possession of all participants, Gadamer also draws attention to the pressing concerns raised by the uses of science during World War II. In light of the events of World War II, Gadamer extends the responsibility to safeguard science to all of humanity,

And it is an imperative demand for humanity, which it must accept in order to guarantee its bare existence, that this mastery over nature will never in the future be employed for destruction and annihilation nor in the service of particular interest—whether by capital, by the military, or in serving the thirst for power and self-deification of an individual person or entire nations.⁴¹

For Gadamer, science is to be used towards the advancement of humanity and peace.

Gadamer argues that this imperative is the result of understanding the, "agreement that

science is the essential foundation for our modern culture.”⁴² I take Gadamer to mean that the increased capabilities, gained through science, congeal humanity as a species by virtue of the terrifying range of some of these capabilities. The pervasiveness of science also acts as a very wide ranging medium through which the people can access an inquiry into the role of the university.

Throughout his rectoral address, Gadamer refers to Hitler and the rise of the National Socialist Regime as grim reminders of the responsibility to safeguard science. By drawing explicit attention to the recent misuses of science during World War II, Gadamer points to the recent events that demand the university reflect and renew its purpose within the community. Grondin notes that Gadamer, “intended to defend, before a largely distrustful audience, the contributions of autonomous scholars to the process of democratic renewal.”⁴³ The audience was understandably distrusting given the university’s relative complacency in recent years to party doctrine. Additionally, Grondin suggest that Marxist critiques of bourgeois scholarly detachment may have prejudiced the audience. Gadamer defends scholarly independence by positing three traits as safeguards to science. The traits are described as the predominant characteristics observed in the man of science. The traits are objectivity, determination in the face of relative obscurity⁴⁴, and humility before the enormity of the task with relation to our limitations. Gadamer argues that if the strength of these traits were stronger, “then the meek accommodation to the National Socialists’ regime would never have become a temptation for them.”⁴⁵

The renewal for the university is not merely a time to inherit the primordial characteristics of science by taking up Heidegger's task; it is also a moment to draw attention to the contemporary concerns that demanded this particular renewal. Grondin notes that the notion of scholarly independence had been discredited by both Marxist and the Nazi's.⁴⁶ Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of scholarly independence by indicating the ways in which it failed the German universities. Scholarly independence is no longer a task that can rest solely upon the grounds of a disciplined and willed task. The German universities as a seat of science failed to confront the rise of fascism because of their failures to maintain these traits. Gadamer derives a responsibility from this event, he learns from the mistakes, and his rehabilitation is an expression of that process.

Rehabilitation is an excursion into the historical needs surrounding the emergence of a concept. Most notably, Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of prejudice in *Truth and Method*. In these sections Gadamer describes a history where the prominence of certain historical movements, such as the enlightenment, alters the significance of prejudice and tradition as legitimate sources of knowledge. Gadamer describes the subtle nuances between thinkers that betray a set of concerns that seem to anchor the various responses to these concerns. Gadamer is careful to note that the project of rehabilitation is not an historical method of isolating a set of problems throughout history. Rather, rehabilitation expresses various historical connections that could influence the present conception of these ideas. Gadamer's rectoral address seems to be an early experiment at exposing the intimate bonds that make up the tradition of science, the all too recent Nazi regime, and the dependence of confrontation to this movement

through history. Gadamer rehabilitates Heidegger's ideas in order to renew the commitment of the university. Rehabilitation exposes the context that calls for the renewal by drawing attention to applicative problems facing a simple regurgitation of Heidegger's ideas.

However, before I can turn to the applicative range of Gadamer's philosophy of education, we must examine his development of understanding and the significance that he affords prejudice in this description. As we shall see, Gadamer develops his notion of understanding through a rehabilitation of prejudice. The rehabilitation prejudice for the purposes of hermeneutics is what lends Gadamer's project greater traction in dealing with the contemporary issues facing an American University. The hermeneutic focus of Gadamer's project directs our attention to a basic structure of understanding that is dependent upon the distance granted by our alterity. This locates a potential for understanding even when both members of a conversation fail to understand each other. Given the high rate of misunderstandings amongst people from diverse backgrounds this potential becomes uniquely significant within the context of an American University.

Notes for Chapter II

¹ For a discussion of the philosophical similarities and differences between Heidegger and Gadamer see (Dostal, "Gadamer's Relation to Heidegger and Phenomenology" 2002). For a discussion of how Heidegger's thought forms an historical backdrop for understanding Gadamer's philosophy see (Dostal, "Gadamer: The Man and his Work" 2002) as well as (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: a Biography* 2003).

² For a detailed discussion of the legal framework utilized to justify antiemetic practices during Hitler's reign see (Dawidowicz 1976).

³ Raul Hilberg devotes much effort to understanding the intricacies of many German's actions during World War II in (Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* 1993).

⁴ The necessity for a scientific justification for discriminatory practices is most apparent in the Reich citizenship laws of 1935 and the Law for the protection of German Blood and German Honor of 1935, see (Dawidowicz 1976, 47-50) for a reproduction of these laws. The budding American science of Eugenics during the 20's and 30's provided the grounds for discriminating Jews from Aryan Germans. The grounds of discrimination were thought of as biological differences that inevitably lead to certain cultural values that were often defined in opposition to German cultural values. For a discussion of how this discrimination was justified see (Bauman 1989).

⁵ See (Gadamer, "Back from Syracuse?" 1989) and (Gadamer, "On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy" 1998)

⁶ (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* 2003, 155)

⁷ Understanding does not necessarily imply justification, so I do not mean to suggest that Gadamer saw Heidegger's actions as justifiable. However, it would seem that the actions were rationalized but only as a result of their articulation in a description of the events. Rationalization does not seem to imply forgiveness but it would seem that caution is needed here so that the suffering caused is not simply abandoned or glossed over in a superficial way.

⁸ For Hitler's own exposition of the problem see (Hitler 1939). Additionally, see (Hilberg, *The Bureaucracy of Annihilation* 1989) and (Schleunes 1989) for a discussion of the various influences upon Hitler's intentions for Germany.

⁹ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 488)

¹⁰ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 471)

¹¹ Identity seems to encompass the notion of something that persists through time. The essential difference that demarcates the self from what-is does not seem to persist because it is dependent upon confrontation. Stillness as a lack of confrontation or identical confrontations would produce an identity. If the confrontations are different either as a result of content or temporal quality a self would emerge but this self would be unstable in light of new confrontations.

¹² (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 472)

¹³ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 472)

¹⁴ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 472)

¹⁵ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 473)

¹⁶ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 473)

¹⁷ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 473)

¹⁸ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 475)

¹⁹ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 475)

²⁰ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 475)

²¹ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 475)

²² (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 476)

²³ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 476)

²⁴ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 476)

²⁵ (Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts” 1985, 476)

²⁶ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 487)

²⁷ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 487)

²⁸ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 476)

²⁹ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 477)

³⁰ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 471)

³¹ (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 471)

³² (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 471)

³³ When Heidegger reaches back to the primordial origins of science he destabilizes the position of knowledge. Any science that holds fast to the subtle variations in what-is will only possess uncertain knowledge. So perhaps Heidegger is suggesting that the will of this science is towards knowledge but remains an indeterminate task so long as we keep close to the will of science.

³⁴ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 21)

³⁵ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 21)

³⁶ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 21)

³⁷ (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* 2003, 242)

³⁸ (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* 2003, 243)

³⁹ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 18)

⁴⁰ Gadamer connects the birth of European science with world culture. Historically this could appear Eurocentric. By anchoring science to 'Greek' and 'European' the description is oriented in such a way that American or western hemisphere contributions

during the Columbian exchange appear less significant. However, I take Gadamer to be reiterating the departure point that science is so bound with modern culture that world culture also participates in this bond. This could seem to marginalize the position of less technologically bound cultures with world culture, however, Gadamer could also be referring to the tremendous power atomic weapons represented combined with the uneasy peace between America and the Soviet Union insured by a policy of mutually assured destruction. There is still a question concerning the justice of describing the sometimes brutal confrontations with other groups of people as ‘participation’. I will address this concern in part in chapter III.

⁴¹ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 17)

⁴² (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 17)

⁴³ (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* 2003, 242)

⁴⁴ Gadamer suggest that the work of science can often consist of obscure discoveries that may not find an imminent application until well after the scientist life. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer suggest that this is often the case in other fields as well such as philosophy and history. For Gadamer, the works of many romantic and enlightenment thinkers is often lagging behind their own historical being. (*Truth and Method*, 272-286). I take Gadamer to mean that the context in which the author produces their work is not necessarily apparent from the work itself. The crises that shape the work become visible through historical excursion.

⁴⁵ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 20)

⁴⁶ (Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: A Biography* 2003, 242)

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING AS APPLICATION

Prejudices figure prominently in Gadamer's description of understanding. Prejudices make up the background for understanding. Understanding occurs when prejudices meet with something different. Similarly to Heidegger, Gadamer recognizes that it is the confrontation with difference that instigates questioning. However, where Heidegger places a primacy on anticipation, Gadamer's project focuses in upon our prejudices.¹ Gadamer recognizes that many methods after the Enlightenment were developed with the intention of eliminating prejudices from understanding. In response to this tradition, Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of prejudice from a dominant Enlightenment interpretation. He undertakes this task in order to open up the possibility of legitimately inquiring into our prejudices. Rehabilitation is required in order to openly inquire into the legitimacy of our prejudices because many methodological traditions seek to bleed the prejudices out of their end product. Rather, Gadamer seeks out the hermeneutical productivity of prejudices in order to demonstrate their implications for understanding. If, as Gadamer will argue, prejudices are a condition for understanding then while correct understanding must be on guard against their influence they also betray a wellspring of meaning concerning our historical and hermeneutical circumstances. "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 judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*"²

While the context of our understanding is indicative of our historical being we cannot examine our autobiography and derive our historical location as an exact set of historical circumstances comprising our individuality. For this reason, Gadamer calls for openness. Openness requires an awareness of our prejudices but an awareness that is always limited by its involvement in the hermeneutic task of understanding. Gadamer's emphasis on the role of prejudice in understanding also points to a means of learning from misunderstanding. As we shall see in Chapter III, this is perhaps a more significant aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutical project in light of the American university's history. Gadamer's focus upon the general hermeneutic phenomenon of understanding also renders a way to learn from misunderstanding.

The Structure of Understanding and the Importance of Prejudice

Gadamer examines prejudice in response to Heidegger's description of the Hermeneutic circle. The circular description of understanding emphasizes an interpretive process similar to the process of reading a text.

What Heidegger is working out here is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved. The point of Heidegger's hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance.³

The significance of the hermeneutic circle for ontology is the realization that in the process of interpretation there are fore-meanings that originate from the interpreter and the text to be interpreted. The process of interpretation continually is revised relative to the novel understandings that arise during the act of interpretation. By emphasizing the

role of interpretation in understanding the hermeneutic circle describes understanding as an ontological function.

If the process of understanding involves interpretation then understanding a text or some other stuff would be a task that maintains only those fore-meanings from the text or object itself.

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.⁴

Gadamer notes Heidegger's emphasis on the continual movement of understanding. Understanding much like self-assertion is a matter of continually adjusting the fore-projections an interpreter brings to the text. For Heidegger, these habits are often the arbitrary distractions related to our existential conditions but not necessarily productive in understanding a text. For Heidegger the,

first, constant, and last task is not to let fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception be given to it by chance ideas and popular conceptions, but to guarantee the scientific theme by developing these in terms of the things themselves.⁵

The chance ideas and popular conceptions are arbitrary to the task of understanding because they do not attend to the text. Moreover, allowing these arbitrary fore-projections to guide the interpretive process is tantamount to assuming the author agrees with one before reading a word they have written.

Gadamer agrees with Heidegger's assessment of successful understanding, "[f]or the interpreter to let himself be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter

of a single, 'conscientious' decision, but is 'the first, last and constant task.'⁶ However, Gadamer does not view the chance fore-projections as distractions from the task of understanding. Rather than considering these fore-projections as the chance thoughts enmeshed in our existential conditions, Gadamer recognizes that these prejudicial conditions point to our historical and hermeneutical circumstances. For this reason, Gadamer derives a hermeneutical productivity from our prejudices. The productivity of prejudices is located in the recognizable difference they convey in relation to the text or the other participant in the conversation. In light of the productivity of this difference, misunderstanding and error are no longer dead-ends for inquiry. By examining the ways in which our prejudices encourage misunderstanding we can better situate ourselves to the text or other participant in a conversation.

Heidegger was also alerted to the mischief that distractions from the task of understanding represented because of the temporal quality of understanding. Guarding against these distractions is the 'first, last, and constant task' for Heidegger, because understanding is simply the temporal process of refining meaning. Understanding understands as matter of course. However, this does not guarantee that we always understand what is there rather it describes the possibility of understanding what is there.

Gadamer derives a different significance from Heidegger's emphasis on the temporal character of understanding. If understanding is the interpretive process of sifting through projections then those projections, as the backdrop for understanding a text, betray a hermeneutical productivity. Even if these prejudices distract from interpreting the text the chance thought is not arbitrary it betrays the various concerns we

bring to the text. “Our question, by contrast, is how hermeneutics, once freed from the ontological obstructions of the scientific concept of objectivity, can do justice to the historicity of understanding.”⁷ Gadamer is expanding the application of Heidegger’s idea beyond the scope of understanding a text to the phenomenon of understanding in general. Once he is no longer tethered by the ontological interpretation of understanding, Gadamer is free to inquire about the hermeneutical productivity of the distractions from the task of understanding.

For Gadamer, the distractions can only be arbitrary when the task of understanding is oriented by the goal of successful understanding. If alongside Gadamer we inquire into the phenomenon of understanding we can glean a hermeneutic potential in prejudices that is capable not only of denoting a nebulous agreement with the subject-matter but they also contain the potential to point us back to our historical circumstances. For this reason, Gadamer’s hermeneutics indicate a way to glean understanding even in an environment of systematic misunderstanding. The fore-meanings from the interpreter that seem to arbitrarily divert the course of understanding are no longer bumps in the road on the way to understanding. They are indicative of a path to understanding that betrays the alterity that an interpreter brings to the text. Gadamer wants to emphasize the role of prejudice in order to alert the reader of their temporal distance from author’s production of the work. Misunderstanding indicates a moment when we ignore the meaning of the text or the text simply does encompass the needs that we approached the text with. Because our prejudices point to the historical and hermeneutical circumstances that shape the questions the interpreter brings to the text, Gadamer finds

them particularly productive for the hermeneutically trained consciousness that attempts to understand the text in as much of its alterity as possible.

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither 'neutrality' with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meaning.⁸

While Gadamer is not interested in isolating the historical forces that prejudice our understanding in order to derive a negative image of what is to be understood, gleaning hermeneutical productivity from misunderstanding does require an examination in the historical forces and prejudices that silence an interpreters concerns or when the text cannot be heard because our prejudices eclipse the problems the text does address. Gadamer indicates prejudice in understanding precisely to indicate the applicative character of understanding. The applicative character of understanding establishes the historicity of understanding. However, Gadamer does not think that we can arrive at a firm historical ground for knowledge claims based on an examination of our prejudices historical tethers. For this reason, when an interpreter learns from misunderstanding their claims must be tempered by an awareness of the ongoing movement of understanding. In addition to implying history's involvement in understanding, the historicity of understanding also tempers the products of understanding by rendering these products contingent upon their historical circumstances.

The awareness that Gadamer asks for in light of the historicity of understanding must be neither neutral nor unbiased because this would slight understandings historicity. A neutral or unbiased position denies the role of prejudice in understanding, for Gadamer this is a denial of our historical and hermeneutical circumstances. A neutral or unbiased attitude to our prejudices purports to free interpretation from, “the tyranny of hidden prejudices that make us deaf to what speak to us in tradition.”⁹ Seeking total freedom from prejudice, however, simply hides the effects that these prejudices have upon understanding a text. The unbiased and neutral position does not create the space in which tradition can be heard in its own unique historical voice. Accounting for the historicity of understanding by neutralizing the influence of prejudice simply blinds understanding to their influence. The interpreter finds no alterity in the text but simply the truth of an unchallenged prejudice reflected by the text. Therefore, any attempts to recapture meaning from misunderstanding by examining prejudices must also be aware of this limit. For these reasons, Gadamer establishes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle.

The Limitations of Understanding Our Prejudices

Establishing the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle serves at least two functions for Gadamer. First, as I discussed previously, the historicity of understanding implies a significant historical influence upon understanding through prejudices. Second, in light of this influence understanding is always situated within an historical context. This implies a contingent character to any product that is derived from understanding. Gadamer recognizes the implications this has for the human

sciences. Consequently, Gadamer recognizes that understanding is unable to secure a historical context in order to produce an unmediated understanding.¹⁰ In order to discuss the limitations that the historicity of understanding implies, Gadamer traces out a few methodologies in the human sciences that were geared towards penetrating the veil of prejudices in order to gain a pure understanding of the past. Historicism in its broadest form points to the influence of historical forces on the development of evaluative practices.¹¹ Thus the historicist critique was aimed at accounting for this influence. Many methodological approaches were specifically meant to deal with the influence of the past upon understanding. Kant embodies this same character when he dares his audience to make its own reason the touchstone of truth rather than succumbing to a dogmatic slumber in his essay “What is Enlightenment?”¹² Gadamer suggest that in order to secure a role for tradition in the wake of the enlightenment, romantic thinkers turned to the historicist critique to demonstrate the disrupting effects of temporal distance while also implying the significance of tradition. Gadamer calls this the romantic theory of understanding.¹³

Gadamer claims that Willhelm Dilthey’s project was conducted in much the same spirit as the romantic theory of understanding. Dilthey is a torn figure for Gadamer. Gadamer argues that Dilthey’s project was an attempt to secure the foundations of the human sciences in much the same way that Kant sought to secure the natural sciences. However, Dilthey understood a fundamental difference between the object of the natural sciences and the object of historical sciences. Gadamer frames Dilthey’s conception of historical subject matter as a rejection of the Neo-Kantian

development that sought historical facts in order to construct a philosophy of values.

Dilthey, however, was not looking for historical facts,

For the structure of the historical world is not based on facts taken from experience which then acquire a value relation, but rather on the inner historicity that belongs to experience itself. What we call experience (Erfahrung) and acquire through experience is a living historical process; and its paradigm is not the discovery of facts but the peculiar fusion of memory and expectation into a whole. Thus what preshapes the special mode of knowing in the historical sciences is the suffering and instruction that the person who is growing in insight receives from the painful experience of reality. The historical sciences only advance and broaden the thought already implicit in the experience of life.¹⁴

Dilthey is not interested in the facts of a phenomenon; he is interested in how the experience of life expresses a connection to tradition. For Gadamer, this indicates that Dilthey's epistemological starting point will be different.¹⁵

Dilthey's epistemological problem is a matter of linking the 'peculiar fusion of memory and expectation' to another 'peculiar fusion of memory and expectation' separated by time. The epistemological problem for Dilthey is much the same for most Romantic thinkers. While there is a lacuna between the interpreters who seeks to understand an historical object, this very lacuna represents the means by which it can be traversed. The lacuna is filled with the history standing between an interpreter and the object and this constitutes a temporal distance with epistemic consequences. Historicism disrupts the continuity of understanding by implying a contingent and unique character to inquiry. The historicist critique attempts to account for the contingencies often in order to gain unmitigated access to the historical object.

Despite Dilthey's recognition of this tension, Gadamer argues that he too succumbs to the romantic theory of understanding. Dilthey ultimately appeals to the

individuality implied by the epistemic consequences of temporal distance in order to secure the foundations of the human sciences. Kant limits and secures the limits of knowledge by articulating the conditions for experience. Dilthey hopes to situate a similar Copernican turn in historically oriented studies. Dilthey finds the grounds for his Copernican turn in the very individuality implied by temporal distance and our participation in history as historical beings. For Gadamer, Dilthey's project is, "concerned here with knowledge of the historical world, and that is always a world constituted and formed by the human mind."¹⁶ Owing to the historical world's construction in the human mind, Dilthey derives historical knowledge from the way in which the disparate parts of history are constructed into a coherent whole. "What makes historical knowledge possible is the homogeneity of subject and object."¹⁷ Dilthey concentrates upon the intersection of biography and autobiography to trace out the process by which individuality coheres into whole. Gadamer calls attention to the traditional hermeneutical significance of this task and suggests that Dilthey is operating between a psychological grounding and hermeneutical grounding for this task.

Dilthey represents the traditional hermeneutic problem that wrestles with the circular part/whole relation when he orients his project around understanding how individuality constructs a unity. However, Dilthey appeals to a psychological approach to understanding this process. Biography and autobiography take on significance for Dilthey because they allow an interpreter to access the ways in which historical forces psychologically cohere in another consciousness. Homogeneity is achieved by grounding the production of these schemas as the task of life. "Dilthey starts from life:

life itself is ordered toward reflection.”¹⁸ Life becomes the grounds for the human sciences because the act of reflection is the universal task of life. The subject/object distinction is dissolved by our ability to access the schemata of historical individuality by virtue of our own participation in this task. Gadamer suggest that Dilthey, despite his rejection of Hegel, finds himself dangerously close to idealism by appealing to the ways in which life is schematized.

Gadamer argues that Dilthey loses the hermeneutical problem when he tasks historical method with surpassing the very finitude it implies in valuing historical events. Gadamer points to Dilthey’s frequent use of comparative methods to glean lessons from the suffering conveyed in historical narratives as an indication of Dilthey’s hopes for a historically conscious methodology. “This is one of the most questionable points of his theory. Comparison essentially presupposes that the knowing subjectivity has the freedom to have both members of the comparison at its disposal. It openly makes both things contemporary.”¹⁹ The homogeneity of subject and object can be seen in Dilthey’s application of comparative methods. Dilthey denies the influence of prejudices by assuming a neutral or unbiased position to them. The historical consciousness that results is able, according to Dilthey, to understand the past in relation to the present without the distortion of time. For this reason, the comparison of two temporally disparate events can result in historical knowledge. When Gadamer suggest that this makes everything contemporary, he is alerting us to the impossibility of bleeding our prejudices from our understanding.

For this reason, Gadamer suggest that Dilthey's project works towards the recognition of contemporary life in historical tradition. For Gadamer, this recognition is simply discovering an unchallenged prejudice. The homogeneity that Dilthey finds in historical consciousness working itself out as expressions of life glosses over epistemic gaps by reading a contemporary prejudice as an ahistorical prejudice. For Gadamer, Dilthey is effectively trying to connect two consciousness, two understandings, as the simultaneous expressions of life. Dilthey understands certain schemata's for historical individuality as the expression of life working itself out. The expressions are simultaneous because the schematizations of these expressions are visible throughout history by virtue of an historical method that is unbiased and neutral with regard to prejudice.

Dilthey is unable to sufficiently shift the grounds of his project from the psychological to the hermeneutical. For Gadamer, Dilthey leaves the circularity implied by the imminent application of prejudices in understanding behind when he derives historical knowledge as the simultaneous expressions of life working itself out. For Gadamer, Dilthey's project is the recognition of psychological schemata by virtue of a historically conscious methodology. However, the tension that Dilthey attempts to overcome is the locus of the hermeneutical problem. The hermeneutic problem is still mired in the circularity implied by the historicity of understanding. A legitimate approach to this problem cannot silence the force behind the historicist critique in order to escape its effects. In light of this, Gadamer's own project must discredit the enlightenment prejudice of prejudice if hermeneutics is to be free of the gravity exerted

by a methodology seeking an unprejudiced and therefore unmitigated access to the past or a text. Gadamer challenges the enlightenment position to prejudice in order to question the legitimacy of prejudices and firmly root the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle.

The Historicity of Understanding and the Necessity of Rehabilitation for Historically Effected Consciousness

Gadamer describes both the enlightenment and romantic movements as characteristically interested in validating judgments with reason. Gadamer discovered this common root in Dilthey's project. The project was geared towards preserving knowledge derived from the past through a method that secured an authentic understanding of the past by virtue of its accounting for historicity. Gadamer situates Romantic thinkers much closer to Enlightenment thinkers in his analysis of Dilthey's project. "If the Enlightenment considers it an established fact that all tradition that reason shows to be impossible (i.e. nonsense) can only be understood historically—i.e., by going back to the past's way of looking at things—then the historical consciousness that emerges in romanticism involves a radicalization of the Enlightenment."²⁰ The romantic preservation serves as the other branch of the Enlightenment. Gadamer describes the Enlightenment task as myth's confrontation with reason, Logos conquering Mythos.²¹ The romantic historical methods complete this task by securing a path that turns tradition into historical knowledge.

This delineates one of the major lines of Gadamer's project; he must rehabilitate prejudice in order to firmly situate the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutical

principle. Discrediting the enlightenment prejudice of prejudice, “opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness”.²² In order to take the insights of historicism sincerely, Gadamer establishes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle to act as a kind of safeguard against ignoring historical influences present in interpretation. A hermeneutically trained consciousness that adopts the historicity of understanding as a general principle of hermeneutical inquiry is aware that history exerts a powerful influence upon understanding that can never be fully accounted for because of the constant movement of understanding. A consciousness trained to interpret with such awareness is a historically effected consciousness.

Historically effected consciousness is the hermeneutical description given to an historical consciousness that does not seek refuge from the historicity of understanding. Rather, historically effected consciousness takes the historicity of understanding as its principle and confronts the alterity of what is to be understood.

We are not saying, then, that history of effect must be developed as a new independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences, but that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work.²³

Gadamer is not prescribing so much as he is describing a process of understanding that draws explicit attention to a particularly perilous and common oversight. Historically effected consciousness is not able to provide a solid ground from which historical claims can grow. As you may recall, Gadamer discusses this possibility in his analysis of Dilthey’s project.. “Rather, historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches*

Bewubtsein) is an element in the act of understanding itself and, as we shall see, is already effectual in *finding the right questions to ask*.²⁴

Gadamer has not necessarily altered the way in which we understand, he has simply exposed the historical tethers that inform our inquiry. However, he has altered the way in which we conceive the products of understanding. The products of understanding are the relative application of an idea to a set of contemporary concerns. However, Gadamer does not understand this process as the mechanical recombination of past, present, and future expectation. Gadamer strives to describe understanding as a merger of past, present, and future.

Gadamer relies upon the idea of fusion to describe the merger of the past, present and future. While we are isolated by the alterity inherent in temporal variation this same variation is the result of a relation. The isolation is due to the relation. Gadamer utilizes the image of a horizon in order to capture the alterity between past, present, and future. “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.”²⁵ A horizon indicates the finitude of understanding, however, the horizon also represents the ability to see both near and far. Acquiring the appropriate horizon for a particular inquiry is a movement through a horizon that then presents the interpreter with another standpoint. We do not occupy other standpoints so much as construct them as we move and shift the layout of the horizon. The movement and shifting layouts of our horizon is the fusion of multiple horizons. “There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly*

*existing by themselves.*²⁶ The point is not to aim our horizons to guarantee a smooth trajectory from horizon to horizon. Rather there are no individual horizons. The movement through horizons or of horizons around us is the ongoing fusing of horizons with other horizons. The fusion of horizons is the same movement of the hermeneutic circle and understanding.

Gadamer establishes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle in order to encourage an attitude of openness in the fusion of horizons. The awareness of understandings historical involvement by virtue of prejudices speaks to the applicative dimension of inquiry and ground his call for openness. If the hermeneutic principle of the historicity of understanding is meant to imply understandings historical involvement while also indicating an epistemic limit based in this involvement, then openness is called for in order to recognize histories involvement in understanding as well as encouraging a general openness towards the revisions in understanding due to this movement.

To bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of what we called historically effected consciousness. Although this task was obscured by aesthetic-historical positivism following on the heels of romantic hermeneutics, it is, in fact, the central problem of hermeneutics. It is the problem of *application*, which is to be found in all understanding.²⁷

Historically effected consciousness is tasked with the hermeneutic problem of application.

The problem of application is Gadamer's access to the circular movement of understanding. This is his right way of entering the hermeneutic circle. By emphasizing the applicative character of all understanding Gadamer occupies a vantage point that

recognizes the implications of tradition and history in the tenure of the questions that an interpreter brings to a text or another participant in a conversation. Additionally, the emphasis on application recognizes the mutual agreement that the interpreter and the text or other participant have in a common agreement on the general shape of the subject-matter. Jean Grondin notes that application is synonymous with translation, “The meaning (event, person, monument) that is to be understood is always one that needs to be translated, so that understanding, application, and translation become almost equivalent terms for Gadamer”.²⁸ Grondin stresses the importance of translation in response to the frequent reading of Gadamer as an historical relativist. Grondin argues that translation is not an appropriation of the subject-matter; rather, translation renders the subject-matter relevant to the interpreter and their audience. Translation from one language to another is about rendering a foreign text or participant in a conversation as relevant to another linguistic community. The translator, if they are actually translating, cannot simply make up their own meaning. Understanding renders the foreign in terms that apply.

Gadamer’s rectoral address serves as an early example of this process. Gadamer begins with many of Heidegger’s ideas; however, he realizes the need to render his ideas differently given the change in historical circumstances. Gadamer realizes that the strength of will that Heidegger dares the university to have in the practice of self-assertion can act as a defense against fascism in the scholarly independence of the man of science. Given the conquered status of Germany during Gadamer’s address he realizes that the university cannot simply concern itself with a national identity or

heritage. “The Self-Assertion of the German University” becomes a renewal of the university oriented by the primordially of science because Gadamer is addressing an audience that is aware of the failure of the German universities to curb National Socialist propaganda and the dangers of letting scientific development only address the few concerns represented by fascist interest. Given Heidegger’s own lamentations in “Facts and Thoughts” and Grondin’s description of Gadamer’s diplomatic attempts to understand Heidegger’s political actions, Gadamer’s rectoral address seems to be motivated by the question of why Heidegger’s address fell upon deaf ears. Gadamer’s address is an attempt to render some Heidegger’s insights concrete in their direct application to the problems facing the German universities at that time. The detonation of two atomic bombs, the mechanistic precision with which German Jews were exterminated, even the development of aerial combat and chemical warfare indicated actual problems for the university as the seat of scientific inquiry. The range of these developments call for Heidegger’s ideas to be applied to a much larger audience than only the German nation, and Gadamer through the process of rehabilitation and understanding attempts this in his rectoral address.

Gadamer’s emphasis on the applicative character of understanding presents many benefits for a university. The applicative character of understanding serves as a ground for advocating interdisciplinary work, promoting an environment that nurtures inquiry, and promotes diversity in the student body and faculty. However, if we are to sincerely accept the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle we must be aware of the alterity that the temporal distance between Gadamer and the applicative concerns of

current American universities. While Gadamer calls for an egalitarian and cosmopolitan university, this may not be the correct call for current American universities. In light of America's difficulty in reaching commensurate integration ideals since *Brown v. Board of Education*²⁹, an egalitarian and cosmopolitan university may end up marginalizing where it intends to understand. However, as I have suggested Gadamer's emphasis on the prejudices reveals a way to learn from misunderstanding. Where Gadamer might stress the general attitude of openness this openness might need to be differentially oriented depending on your position. In an environment that has historically marginalized the applicative concerns brought forth by particular groups of people an attitude of openness could effectively render those concerns mute. If we are too open to a domineering tradition, the other in a conversation, or text we may gloss over our own prejudices in favor of preserving that tradition, the other's meaning, or text. However, openness to how our historical circumstances lead to such a colossal misunderstanding would be effective in trying better locating ourselves in relation to the text, tradition, or other participant in a conversation. We gain the ability to understand the conversation by learning from the ways in which we misunderstand and are systematically misunderstood.

Notes for Chapter III

¹ See (Grondin, "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding" 2002) for a discussion of Gadamer's hermeneutic circle in relation to Heidegger's hermeneutic circle and the relation of prejudices and anticipations. Additionally, see (Dostal, "Gadamer's Relation to Heidegger and Phenomenology" 2002) for a discussion of how Gadamer's primacy of the past helps him build upon Heidegger's phenomenological project.

² (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 278)

³ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 269)

⁴ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 269)

⁵ (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 1953, 143)

⁶ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 269)

⁷ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 268)

⁸ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 271)

⁹ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 272)

¹⁰ Gadamer expresses these concerns in his analysis of Leopold Von Ranke and J.G. Droysen (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 195-214) and again in his comparison of Wilhelm Dilthey to G. W. Hegel (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 214-235).

¹¹ OED

¹² (Kant 1996)

¹³ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 215)

¹⁴ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 217)

¹⁵ Jean Grondin also situates Gadamer's analysis of Dilthey as primarily geared towards describing an epistemological aspect of understanding (Grondin, "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding" 2002, 36-37). Additionally, see (Taylor 2002) for a discussion of the epistemic dimension of understanding in relation to dialogical understanding.

¹⁶ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 217)

¹⁷ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 217)

¹⁸ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 229)

¹⁹ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 227)

²⁰ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 277)

²¹ For Gadamer's description see (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 277)

²² (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 277)

²³ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 300)

²⁴ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 301)

²⁵ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 301)

²⁶ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 305)

²⁷ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 306)

²⁸ (Grondin, "Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding" 2002, 43)

²⁹ For a discussion of the divergent interest surrounding the decision to desegregate schools see (Dudziak, "Brown as a Cold War Case" 2004) (Dudziak, "Brown as a Cold War Imperative" 1988). Additionally, see D.A. Bell's "Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interest in School Desegregation Litigation" and Bell's "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma" for a discussion of the interest convergence dilemma as observed in desegregation cases. Bell's interest convergence theory argues that in light of the many failures of school desegregation to accomplish integration goals that the interest of whites and blacks concerning school integration are not aligned and more often than not are resolved at the expense of black interest.

CHAPTER IV

THE BENEFIT OF MISUNDERSTANDING

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Gadamer's emphasis on prejudice opens up the possibility of learning from misunderstanding. In this chapter I will discuss Gadamer's notion of conversation and its use for understanding educational goals. However, the application of Gadamer's vision for the university meets with considerable difficulty in American universities. While his vision for the university may be inapplicable, Gadamer's hermeneutic project supplies the tools for learning from this misunderstanding. The unsuccessful application of Gadamer's rectoral ideas within an American context betrays a conflict of prejudices that in turn, betray a temporal or cultural distance. The distance is hermeneutically productive and opens up a legitimate inquiry into the applicative needs that Gadamer's vision fails to address. Gadamer's emphasis on seeking out understanding is helpful in this respect; however, there is aloofness in simply enjoying the discovery of multiple sites of understanding. Gadamer does not describe a method to evaluate which understanding is better than another or which prejudices are false and which are true. His lack of method is often interpreted as an historical conservatism and moral relativity. Therefore, any transplantation of Gadamer's philosophy of education must take stock of the risk involved in heeding Gadamer's call for an attitude of openness.

Education and Conversation

...I believe that one can learn only through conversation¹

Gadamer made this claim in an address delivered in 1999 reprinted under the title “Education is Self-Education”. Gadamer is careful to qualify his claims in this address. He does not mean to dictate educational theory, “I would need to know how things stand with school today, what are the concerns of present-day parents, what are the concerns your sons and daughters have, and all of that which I no longer know. I have doubted whether I can feel qualified to speak about it.”² Rather, Gadamer clusters this address upon a developmental description of the communicative quality of learning. Gadamer argues that in light of this quality, “the humane capabilities are the ones to stress if one is to educate and to cultivate oneself, and that only then, when we succeed in that, will we also survive without damage from the progress of technology and technicity.”³

The damage that Gadamer is referring to is the decay of paths of communication in favor of newer technological developments that hope to serve similar functions. This is indicated by his discussion of the effects of the phone, typing, and television.⁴ He laments the phones encroachment into the realm of conversation and notes the decay of phone conversations into gossip. He inquires into the effects of typing and asks what is lost when we fail to develop a distinct and personal handwriting. Gadamer is immensely worried about the ability of television to conjure a genuine desire to learn. However, Gadamer is not necessarily advocating a return to these traditional practices. He evokes the missing elements in technological developments in order to gesture towards the loss of genuine human communication throughout this address.

The communicative quality of learning is not a purely linguistic phenomenon. Gadamer admits that there is communication that is non-linguistic.⁵ However, Gadamer argues that we do not come to dwell within a world until we learn a language. World refers to an existence that is intimately bound with language. “To have a world means to have an orientation (*verhalten*) toward it. To have an orientation toward the world, however, means to keep oneself so free from what encounters of the world that one can present it to oneself as it is.”⁶ Language allows enough distance to fit what we encounter into an understandable framework. Without this distance we would have no choice but to react rather than to act upon what we encounter. Gadamer argues that education is self-education because the kernel or impetus of learning is located in the capacity to utilize this distance. The capacity to utilize this distance is only fully realized in conversation with others or the translation of a text into a relevant context. Gadamer laments certain technological encroachments because they seem to discourage the communicative quality of learning that encourages conversation with others.

Learning occurs through conversation because understanding is analogous to conversation. The hermeneutic circle is an ongoing conversation that fuses historical horizons in the interpretive act of understanding. Chapter I located this kernel in Heidegger’s notion of self-assertion. Self-assertion is dependent upon confrontation for its momentum. Without confrontation there is nothing to trigger a self-differentiation or assertion. Gadamer’s rectoral address is a rehabilitation of Heidegger’s idea. In this address we witness Gadamer applying Heidegger’s idea to a drastically different set of circumstances. This chapter is dedicated to a similar task of application. Chapter II

provides a groundwork for this application by focusing on the significance of prejudice and misunderstanding. Where Heidegger is bound by the pursuit of the question of being, Gadamer sets out to describe understanding. His descriptive project allows him to garner insights from the successes and misfires of understanding. Misunderstandings can point us towards an historical distance. However, I do not think that this distance should be conceived of as purely generational distance. Rather, the misunderstanding that results from historical distance can also refer to the diverse background that constitutes our individuality.

In this chapter I will first describe some of the broader outlines of Gadamer's notion of conversation. I argue that Gadamer's notion of conversation provides a compelling reason for interdisciplinary work, a diverse student body, and the cultivation of a culture of inquiry. However, in light of the difficulties of desegregation in this country Gadamer's insights will have to be situated to bear upon a very different set of circumstances. There are uniquely American issues that would force us to adopt an asymmetrical emphasis on Gadamer's project depending on where one stood in the conversation. Openness maybe misguided if you belong to a group that has been marginalized through much of history. Gadamer addresses these concerns in part in some of his works on politics. However, Gadamer does not expressly discuss the issue of marginalizing practices that racially discriminate.

Race is not an issue for Gadamer and this is perhaps most clearly defined in his call for an egalitarian student body through the inclusion of the working-class student.⁷ While his egalitarian student body would incorporate diverse students from different

classes this would not produce a racial equilibrium. Certainly an egalitarian student body would include more minority students; however, this would still result in a disproportionate effect. A quick look at the 2006-2008 US census will indicate that despite their overall population being smaller, more minorities fall below the poverty line than whites.⁸ Thus, any egalitarian restructuring will still leave entire minority communities in a situation of unequal educational opportunity.

In this chapter I do not intend to overlay Gadamer's project onto the American university, rather I will use his project to draw out the different set of concerns that Gadamer's vision for the university fails to capture. Gadamer was addressing a different audience with different reasons. He does not address a people who have been the target of racial discrimination. While his ideas may have implications for these groups his inability to center racism as a major concern for the university indicates a fundamental applicative difference between the needs of the German university and the American university. While his hermeneutical insights enable interpreters to learn from an historical trend of misunderstanding, his vision for the university does not incorporate the concerns of those groups that are traditionally marginalized based upon an idea of race.

Conversation

Conversation fulfills the capabilities of language because it is site of linguistic play. Play is another common theme for Gadamer. Play is the interaction of horizons in the fusion of understanding. Application is the play of the text with the prejudices that an interpreter brings to the text. Gadamer discusses play extensively in order to

comment on the problems of aesthetic interpretation. Play provides a medial relation between an aesthetic object and an interpreter. Gadamer employs the notion of play in order to escape the dichotomy in aesthetic theory that vacillates between a subjective notion of beauty and the more objective claim that an object is beautiful in itself. The interaction described by play is the interaction of understanding,

The weight of the things we encounter in understanding plays itself out in a linguistic event, a play of words playing around and about what is meant. *Language games* exist where we, as learners—and when do we cease to be that?—rise to the understanding of the world. Here it is worth recalling what we said about the nature of play, namely that the player’s actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is rather, the game itself that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of the playing.⁹

Language is able to fulfill its capability in play because conversation is a game.

Grammar and tradition provide a set of regulations that are playfully engaged with in conversation. The conversation has a life of its own because it is the unique interaction of diverse individuals. Our familiarity or naivety with regards to the subject matter helps preserve the indeterminate quality of conversations. What emerges from conversation is both ours and not ours, it occurs outside of the participants but is dependent on the participants.

We say that we “conduct” a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct. Rather it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own

truth within it—i.e., that it allows something to “emerge” which henceforth exists.¹⁰

Gadamer finds a hermeneutic productivity in play because it is the site of novel understandings. Learning takes place in conversation because it is often a playful engagement that generates novel understanding. Additionally, the concept of play is what enables learning from misunderstanding. A historical trend of misunderstanding indicates a one-sided conversation. While one-side of the conversation is either incapable or unwilling to listen the silence is by no means the end of the conversation. The silence is still in play because by examining how and why the applicative concerns are being silenced an interpreter could be pointed back to the historical influences that silence rather than listen.

Mapping a Few Sites of Hermeneutical Productivity

Gadamer’s description of understanding provides a beneficial lens for understanding the role of the university in society. Rather than prescribing a theory of education, Gadamer describes the communicative quality of understanding in order to highlight hermeneutically productive moments. For Gadamer, the university as a site of education should foster the recognition of these productive moments in order to exploit the novel emergences that occur in understanding. Gadamer’s hermeneutic principles extend to the field of education insofar as education is concerned with understanding. When Gadamer establishes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle he alerts us to the productive character that even the misfiring of understanding makes possible. In light of this awareness Gadamer’s description of the hermeneutical

phenomenon provides a further support for the nurturing of inquiry, interdisciplinary work, and diverse students and faculty.

The hermeneutic project is oriented by the play in question and answer. One of the fundamental tasks of *Truth and Method* is to separate the methodological approaches of hermeneutics from the general focus of hermeneutics upon the phenomenon of understanding. Gadamer is not prescribing a method for arriving at correct understanding, “Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must—and really can—be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth.”¹¹ Gadamer’s emphasis on conversation is an attempt to describe the basic structure of inquiry that produces truth without a methodical restriction on how that truth emerges. The methodical pursuit of truth can be undertaken at any moment. We can put down our work and go about our lives. Questions and inquiry, however, are born out of the concerns that our particular historical circumstances influence. They are pressing and need answers. While we can definitely stop our pursuit, it is difficult to deter a passionate search for something. This opposition between genuine inquiry and methodical inquiry speaks to the nurturing of an environment that is conducive to inquiry.

There is a risk associated with genuine inquiry that is not associated with methodical inquiry. Methodical inquiry remains well within a pre-established tradition. There is not necessarily a risk of asking the wrong question, however, there is a chance of error in deploying a methodology. You are given the question and the appropriate method of answering the question. The risk involved in methodical inquiry is the risk of

arriving at incorrect answer. Genuine inquiry, on the other hand, involves the risk of asking a novel question. While there may be no stupid questions there are definitely those questions that seem to betray more of our prejudices than we may be comfortable hazarding. Cultivating an environment where students and faculty feel comfortable in publicly recognizing and testing their prejudices is difficult. However, Gadamer offers a tentative solution to this problem when he suggests an attitude of openness. Openness refers to a general willingness to accept the novel emergences of understanding. This openness is towards the recognition of moments of hermeneutic productivity. Gadamer's notion of openness encourages a general appreciation of risky inquiries as opportunities to find new applications for a text.

Questions that seem provincial or even just wrong to us generate an opportunity to test the differences between the prejudices that shaped the disagreement. This process points us back to the varying historical context that we occupy. From this position we can inquire in the legitimacy of our prejudices. Students and faculty should feel secure in divulging their prejudices otherwise we risk blindly allowing them to shape our understanding. Without openness we risk terminating conversations before they begin. If we are unwilling to listen to the concerns embodied in any genuine inquiry we are unwilling hear the other person speaking at all. This is often the case in universities when a student asking a sincere question suddenly reveals their provincial background and the question is methodically dealt with as an absurd concern to entertain. The professor reveals his or her blind faith in certain prejudicial positions when he or she silence an aberrant question without first inquiring into the contemporary legitimacy of

maintaining those prejudices. Therefore, the attitude of openness and an awareness of the hermeneutic phenomenon encourages an environment where inquiry is nurtured and risky questions are cultivated.

In addition, to a culture of inquiry Gadamer's hermeneutic lens provides footing for interdisciplinary work. The divergent methods employed by different academic disciplines render multiple dimensions of similar experiences. By examining the possible continuities and discontinuities between these methods and their results we alert our inquiry to their historical circumstances. The discontinuities alert us to a temporal distance that allows for a legitimate inquiry into the clash between our prejudices and what we are trying to understand. The continuities gesture towards a moment where we seem to align with a tradition or the subject-matter. Cultivating an atmosphere where different disciplines frequently converse with each other will lead to a historically conscious critique of their methods. Even if this yields minute variances to a disciplines method there seems to be little harm in providing rich descriptions of that disciplines proud preservation of an academic tradition.

Additionally, establishing the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle provides further support for a diverse student body. If prejudices are a condition for understanding then a place where diverse students and faculty interact will lead to multiple moments of hermeneutic productivity. While a homogenous student body and faculty would still contain multiple prejudices, given the historicity of understanding, both Heidegger and Gadamer seem to favor the inclusion of groups not traditionally associated with the academic world. Heidegger situates the university

amongst the labor services and the armed services. Heidegger argues that the university exists within tension to these other two services in order to hear the concern of the German fate and address it by a rigorously attending to the unfolding of understanding. This helps the university educate the future leaders of the German nation. Gadamer argues in favor of a more cosmopolitan scope. As we have seen, he grounds the need for this broadened scope in a more historically nuanced telling of the birth of science as well as an awareness of its devastating power as demonstrated during World War II. Gadamer claims that in light of this cosmopolitan participation in the tradition of science and given the global domain of some of its effects the university reflects more than a Greek and perhaps western heritage and responsibility. The heterogeneity of the student and faculty population beyond the national scope is not only hermeneutically productive but demanded by global reach of science.

In addition to the cosmopolitan inheritance of the scientific tradition, Gadamer specifically points to the inclusion of workers. As Grondin notes, it is difficult to recognize the substance of this claim because of the circumstances under which Gadamer spoke. However, Gadamer singles out a reciprocal obligation between the man of science and the workers. One of the characteristic traits of the man of science is the relative obscurity of their work. Gadamer notes that,

Science—different from all other essential occupations—is quiet and secret in its work and incomparably confronted by misunderstanding, since its effects and successes are often invisible and always come to light long after and distanced from the creative activity.¹²

Given this is the regular state of affairs, Gadamer stresses that the workers presence at his particular address obligates a reciprocal interest in the workers inclusion in the

university. “That especially the workers advance this maxim in their political rejuvenation is a joy and responsibility for us.”¹³ The maxim that Gadamer is referring to is the renewed defense of science in the wake of its abuses by the Nazi regime. Gadamer finds hope in the workers who are still willing to believe that the university can provide more than a complicit arm of the government. Moreover, the opposition between those who work in the industrial process and the man of science speaks to a basic separation between theory and application.

Gadamer stresses the applicative dimension of understanding because of the relative ease with which theories often forget its significance. Gadamer proposes that the hermeneutics of the human sciences redefine itself in terms of the legal hermeneutics.¹⁴ Gadamer looks to legal hermeneutics because of the emphasis placed upon the applicative character of interpretation. The task of historically effected consciousness is to bring about the regulated fusion of historical horizons. Therefore, when Gadamer establishes the historicity of understanding as a hermeneutic principle he is reorienting the hermeneutical pursuit of the human sciences towards the problem of application. Historically effected consciousness is meant to be aware of the applicative concerns involved in the occurrence of understanding. In light of this, Gadamer’s explicit targeting of the workers’ inclusion in the university could also be understood as an early attempt to resist the forgetfulness of the often quiet and secret movement of theory. The workers presence, as a distinct voice that pulls against the university in Heidegger’s address, seems echoed in Gadamer’s repeated call for their inclusion. However, Gadamer also notes the university should, “accept with particular zeal and

care...the working-class students.”¹⁵ For Heidegger, the student body brought the concerns of the German fate to the university. For Gadamer, the working-class student brings the applicative concerns from industry back to theory.

Gadamer provides a hermeneutic ground for the inclusion of diverse students and faculty. However, his vision of the university is a response to the concerns arising out of World War II. The issues of diversity for the American university seem to call for a different approach. Several legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Robert Carter, Mary Dudziak, and Charles Payne have written about the issues of integration and desegregation plaguing America’s academic system since the *Brown v. Board* decision. Their works run the gambit from historical analysis, legal interpretation, and fiction. A central tenet in their work is that race is a permanent facet of the American legal system and the institutions that operate within the restrictions of those laws. In his article “35 Years Later” Robert Carter argues that, “The Rehnquist Court has embarked on a studied program to return the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process and equal protection clauses and the federal civil rights laws to the empty formalistic readings these provisions received before 1938.”¹⁶ The studied program is a series of decisions that eroded a legal recognition of the category of race. The colorblind position then becomes the grounds for dismissing all legal recognition of race regardless of the possible benefit or harm that a policy may have on a minority. Carter goes on to claim that this effectively outlaws all remedial programs that might violate the rights of those who benefit from a legal blindness to race.

The university as an institution operating within the law participates in this categorical blindness. A&M, as a state run university must operate within the constraints of judicial rulings concerning the legitimate practices of government institutions. The policies enacted within the legal framework could reproduce a systemic blindness and discrimination within American universities. Gadamer could not have possibly had this concern in mind and so his vision of a cosmopolitan conversation differs from my own and perhaps some Critical Race scholars' vision of a diverse conversation in the university. Gadamer's inability to recognize race as a contemporary concern betrays a temporal or cultural gap between him and me. The problems of seamlessly applying Gadamer's ideas alerted me to the prejudices that shaped the questions that oriented my research on Gadamer's work. The hermeneutic productivity in this misunderstanding is a legitimate inquiry into the prejudices that seem to betray incongruence between Gadamer's vision of the university and my own.

Gadamer and Politics

Gadamer's cosmopolitan image of the university does not necessarily exclude my concerns, however, adapting his philosophy of education to the concerns of an American university calls for special attention. If we did not sincerely inquire into this difference we would be ignoring the historicity of understanding that Gadamer has worked so tirelessly to establish as a hermeneutical principle. We would also ignore the hermeneutical opportunity that this historical trend of misunderstanding could offer. The divergence between prejudices in misunderstanding presents the opportunity to inquire into the legitimacy of our prejudices.

The process of legitimately inquiring into our prejudices is often the topic of work situated around the moral and political import of Gadamer's hermeneutical work. Gadamer offers no criterion by which to establish a legitimate prejudice. This should not be a surprise given his emphasis on differentiating method from the pursuit of truth. Owing to this reason, several critics have accused Gadamer of moral relativism. In his article "Hermeneutics and Relativism" Jean Grondin notes that,

if one follows the postmetaphysical spirit of *Truth and Method*, it would be illusory to hope to discover something such as an absolute criterion that allows one to distinguish true from false prejudices. This kind of criterion would reiterate the absolutism of metaphysics and of methodical consciousness in its search for a universal key to truth.¹⁷

Gadamer echoes a similar sentiment in his essays "Back from Syracuse?" and "On the Political incompetence of Philosophy." Both essays deal with publication of Victor Farias book *Heidegger and Nazism* and the ensuing literature that began to shape around Heidegger's political life and his philosophy. The lack of a work on ethics simply added to the literature as both sides attempted to utilize the lack of ethical theory as a means to defend or attack Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi's. Gadamer notes that,

it does seem surprising that people keep on confronting this philosopher with the question of an ethic. I interpret that as a sign of distress, or even as evidence of moral poverty in a society which needs to ask others what is honorable, what is decent and what is human, and wants to hear from someone else, from the philosopher, the answer to that question. That only goes to show that society has lost all sense of direction.¹⁸

The lack of ethical theory in Heidegger and a criterion by which to choose prejudices in Gadamer is meant to safeguard the genuine pursuit of these questions. Gadamer interprets the search for someone else's ethical theory as a distressing sign because it indicates a lack of desire or strength to generate our own inquiries into moral situations.

Gadamer also describes the basic contours of the role of philosophers in society in these essays. He asks why a figure such as Heidegger or any philosopher should be thought to specialize in an aspect of life which we all participate. Gadamer finds little distinction between philosophers and other people in this respect and Heidegger's mistake simply proves this for Gadamer. For Gadamer, philosophers hold a very qualified bearing upon political and moral matters because these are rightly the domain of everyone.

In such circumstances in life philosophers can perhaps help us formulate better the questions that concern us all, but they can only be of assistance if they are able to show other people how much we are faced with tasks whose resolution cannot be treated as the sole responsibility of others. It is never solely the other person who is guilty.¹⁹

Philosophers hold no more authority in this domain than anyone else. Heidegger's mistaken involvement with the Nazi party demonstrates that even those of us who are committed to a rigorous awareness of the unfolding of understanding still succumb to the finite limitations imposed by our prejudices. For Gadamer, Heidegger's mistake was seeing the possibility of National Socialism. Heidegger's rectoral address risked an inquiry into the possibilities of National Socialism and this risk failed²⁰, however, it was Heidegger's ability to see the possibilities that motivated him to risk this error. Blinded by this prejudiced image he tepidly resisted the more radical discourse of Hitler and his followers.

This is typical of the diplomatic character that Grondin attributes to Gadamer. Gadamer is able to understand Heidegger's actions because he is able to see the moments where understanding forgot its finite limitations. However, this moment of

error and misunderstanding is also hermeneutically productive. In error as in misunderstanding there is also the possibility of new understanding. Gadamer outlines this possibility when he claims that prejudice is a condition for understanding. Gadamer does not float an ethical theory because it would curb possibilities rather than encourage people to authentically pursue those possibilities actually presented to them. He is not necessarily conservative because he encourages the risky pursuit of these possibilities in inquiry. However, there does seem to be an issue between balancing the recognition of hermeneutically productive moments and sincerely pursuing a moral inquiry of our prejudices.

A Problem with Productivity

The problem with a hermeneutical philosophy that searches for the various ways that novel understanding occurs valorizes all understanding regardless of its moral or political content. This is most readily identifiable in his suggestion of an attitude of openness. How open should we be to all prejudices? Should the novel emergence of understanding be more or less interesting based upon the content of the understanding? If we are purely descriptive in our analysis then the content seems to matter little. This seems to be a problematic position for a university. While the university should be the kind of environment that cultivates the risky venturing of our prejudices is this venturing an unbridled and unfocused movement in thought?

Gadamer has the resources for outlining a basic response to these concerns in his essay "Friendship and Solidarity." In this essay Gadamer describes the highly relational character of our political and moral obligations. Gadamer asks what light the Greek

notions of friendship shed upon our current situation. He utilizes the Greek notion of friendship in order to inquire into the current state of affairs. In particular, he wants to inquire into the obligation that our historical circumstances, as a society increasingly favoring anonymity, demand if we want to maintain certain aspects of the Greek tradition. He argues, “Thus the tasks presented to us are to be just as much one with oneself and to remain united with Others. There is no possible natural ability that is able to carry this out for us. It requires self-knowledge and grateful learning from models.”²¹ The closest thing to a natural ability in the pursuit of these tasks is conversation.

As stated earlier, conversation is the site of linguistic play. Conversations instigated by the tasks of being one with oneself and to remain united with others would produce something that is not wholly the possession of either of the participants. The task of self-knowledge is Heidegger’s task of self-assertion. This task can only be pursued in tension with others, we must be confronted and forced to linguistically situate ourselves in relation to what has confronted us. In knowing ourselves we remain one with others. If we wish to resist the onslaught of anonymous responsibility then we must converse in order to become one with ourselves by also remaining united with others. The unification with others is based upon the agreement of language. In light of the fact that we seem to be capable of obtaining overlapping understandings, there is a basic unification that our participation in a language ensures. Engaging in the task of self-assertion or self-knowledge unifies because it must occur in language and conversation. While introspection can yield self-knowledge there will always be unchallenged prejudices that guide any knowledge obtained. Confrontation requires the other.

Inquiry is never unregulated because it occurs in language. Moral and political problems often admit real solutions; however, these solutions cannot be dogmatically employed when a similar problem arises. This does not directly address the metaphysical concern expressed in critics who claim that Gadamer is a moral relativist. However, Grondin argues that hermeneutics renders the relativistic question relative.²² Grondin claims that relativist arguments presuppose an absolute or fixed answer because, “Only one who claims an absolutist standard can speak of relativism. There is relativism only with respect to an absolute truth.”²³ Essentially Gadamer’s critics formulate their criterion for being a relativist on their prejudices towards moral and political absolutes. Gadamer could never meet this criterion because he feels the entire debate oscillates between two untenable poles.

For Gadamer, openness to possibilities and the courage to risk the pursuit of these possibilities is not a relativist stance because to sincerely believe in possibilities, to sincerely risk their pursuit is something that cannot be done if we think those possibilities are merely arbitrary. If Heidegger could have realized that the possibility he saw was not arbitrary but rather the product of his prejudices he may have been able to recognize the genuine threat and obstacle that Hitler’s anti-Semitic propaganda represented to his vision of National Socialism.²⁴ However, Heidegger did not do this. Heidegger saw genuine possibility and chased it as the answer for the situation. He could not turn away from it because the situation was pressing and required action, unfortunately this immediacy blinded him to some of the risk associated with his choice.

There is still a lingering question concerning the wisdom in prescribing this openness and courage to risk to minorities and in particular minority students. If critical race scholars' are correct there is a tradition of marginalization that systematically silences the voices of minorities in the university.²⁵ What good is being open to dogmatic marginalization? Why should a minority risk conversing when his or her position is immediately identified as political? I think Gadamer can respond in two different ways to these questions. The first is by identifying the areas of hermeneutic productivity. Perhaps the other in a conversation will not listen to you, however, the incongruence between your concerns and his or hers reveals a moment of hermeneutic productivity. This is a one-sided affair if the other person refuses to listen, however, a minority can glean his or her own historical position by hearing the ways in which their concerns are being silenced. This does not necessarily speak to the moral concern present in my question. If the conversation is traditionally one sided and more often than not your voice cannot or will not be heard what obligation is there to be open or to risk, what obligation is there to converse at all? Without some criterion to choose between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices Gadamer seems to leave us at the mercy of normative linguistic structures that often seem to silence the minority.

I think Gadamer's interpretation of those who sought Heidegger's ethics is telling for in this case. Those of us who constantly seek out morals in others are maladjusted and morally impoverished. We are distressed and this speaks to our society and our situation. If the question is constantly oriented back towards issues of justice or morality then this should point back to the circumstances that continually generate these

questions. If there are members a group who consistently find themselves asking the same questions then this should point us back to the circumstances that evokes these concerns across the entire group. If this points back to a tradition that dogmatically terminates conversations before they can begin then we must inquire into our relationship with that tradition and act accordingly.

Acting accordingly may, however, entail a constant struggle to be heard or resistance by other means. Derrick Bell retells a story in both *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* and *Silent Covenants*. Bell remembers his summer working towards the desegregation of the schools in Harmony Mississippi in 1964. He asked Mrs. Biona MacDonald, a fellow civil rights worker, how in the face of physical, economic, and psychological dangers she found the courage to go on.

I realized that Mrs. MacDonald didn't say she risked everything not because she hoped or expected to win out over the whites who, as she well knew, held all the economic and political power, and the guns as well. Rather she recognized that—powerless as she was—she had and intended to use courage and determination as a weapon to, in her words, 'harass white folks.'²⁶

Bell perceives resistance in the act of struggling. Deriving our position from misunderstanding is resistance because it is the constant struggle of understanding our own position in relation to a one-sided conversation. The continual act of locating a marginalized position in relation to a dominant tradition constitutes some of the courage and determination that Bell respects in Mrs. MacDonald. However, minorities do not face the same severity of threats and at most our struggle to locate ourselves in relation to a dominant tradition or text produces a recognition and tolerance for the marginalized position. The effectiveness of this recognition in causing tangible changes is unknown,

however, critical race scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw and Gary Peller suggest such recognition is impotent in causing actual changes.²⁷

Notes for Chapter IV

¹ (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 529)

² (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 529)

³ (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 537)

⁴ (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 535-536)

⁵ Gadamer discusses the non-verbal communication between a mother and their unborn child as an occurrence of education in (Gadamer, "Education Is Self-Education" 2001, 529-530).

⁶ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 440)

⁷ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 16-17)

⁸ (U.S Census Bureau 2010)

⁹ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 484)

¹⁰ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 385)

¹¹ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 484)

¹² (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 16)

¹³ (Gadamer, "On the Primordially of Science: A Rectoral Address" 1992, 16)

¹⁴ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 305)

¹⁵ (Gadamer, "On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy" 1998, 16)

¹⁶ (Carter 1993, 85)

¹⁷ (Grondin, "Hermeneutics and Relativism" 1990, 56)

¹⁸ (Gadamer, "On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy" 1998, 9)

¹⁹ (Gadamer, "On the Political Incompetence of Philosophy" 1998, 11)

²⁰ This is most apparent in Heidegger explicit gesture towards the possibility represented by the passing of the Neue Studentenrech see (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 475)

²¹ (Gadamer, "Friendship and Solidarity" 1999, 12)

²² Grondin discusses this in (Grondin, "Hermeneutics and Relativism" 1990, 46-48)

²³ (Grondin, "Hermeneutics and Relativism" 1990, 47)

²⁴ I do not mean to imply that Heidegger necessarily harbored an anti-Semitic prejudice that is a task for a psychological biography of Heidegger. However, the lack of any overt stance towards this issue of Hitler's racism in his address that he admits was meant to curb the less the amenable aspects of National Socialism (Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University and the Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" 1985, 482-485) lends itself to the conclusion that Heidegger did not recognize this as a serious obstacle.

²⁵ See (Carter 1993) for an discussion of the shortcoming of *Brown v. Board* and the tendency that whites have to decide matters of integration in their favor.

²⁶ (D. Bell *Faces at the the Bottom of the Well*. 2004, xii)

²⁷ The impotence of merely raising racial awareness is discussed in (Crenshaw 1995) and (Peller 1995). Crenshaw and Peller locate a mechanism for the justification of the status quo in the liberal integrationist strategy because it posits the true root of racism as a personal bias. This effectively lets the institutional or legal practices that discriminate free to continue unchecked. Simply raising awareness of the problem seems to have either no effect or at the most a glacial like speed in achieving social justice.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Gadamer presents a compelling way to view the university and his hermeneutical insights provide the university with a model for exploiting the hermeneutic productivity of misunderstanding. His philosophy of education provides for an interesting way to conceive of the common goals of most American universities, however, the American academic system requires a racial component for its application. Implicit in the concerns that critical race scholars raise about the university admission policies is a concern for social justice. While Gadamer does provide a way to learn from misunderstanding he still leaves a void in how to evaluate the differential concerns that result in misunderstanding. The void is philosophically purposeful in that it is meant to ensure that people embark on genuine inquiries towards the concerns that require understanding. The void ensures that we must risk openness to new possibilities rather than rely upon a formalistic method by which to judge prejudices. However, this still seems to leave those that are historically marginalized in a perilous position. The marginalized position is at the mercy of the dominant historical trends and those who preserve it to be open to new applications and concerns brought to the tradition. While this may occur in some grand cosmic scale of human history it seems to miss the imminent need for justice.

Gadamer supplies the outlines for a response to this in a discussion focused upon the critical ability of reflection to break societal trends that seem dogmatic he claims,

It [emancipating reflection] thereby accords with the law of gradualness that governs historical and social life itself. It would become vacuous and undialectical, I think, if I tried to think the idea of a completed reflection, in

which society would lift itself out of the containing process of emancipation—the process of loosening itself from the traditional ties and binding itself to newly constructed validities—so as to achieve an ultimate, free and rational self-possession.¹

For Gadamer this incremental change is going on all the time. The reflective freedom sought in a process or method capable of determining false prejudices from true prejudices is the process of understanding and there is no single method for understanding. Such a method would be vacuous and undialectical for Gadamer. However, without a criteria or method minorities are left to the mercy of the glacial speed with which human understanding is capable of rendering judgment on these prejudices.

I am ambivalent to Gadamer's position with regards to this issue. Hermeneutics does not provide a method to determine true prejudices from false prejudices. While there is a hermeneutical productivity to misunderstanding, there is not necessarily a recommendation for how to process who is right and wrong in these misunderstandings. These misunderstandings leave minorities at the mercy of forces that have traditionally rendered them a minority. This is untenable as it leaves an impressive opening for a single dominant group or tradition to dominate another through silence and marginalization. However, the philosophical import of Gadamer's ethical void suggests that Gadamer is deeply concerned with the imminent needs our prejudices embody in understanding. By leaving this space purposefully empty, Gadamer dares his readers to risk their own understanding in order to address moral questions rather than solely relying upon a formalistic method. This is pedagogically instructive because Gadamer seems to offer a strategy for one of the more fundamental challenges of educators;

cultivating the desire to learn. Supplying a methodological approach to these questions terminates the questioning. Leaving a void in place of an ethical methodology forces an interpreter to mire on in doubt struggling to understand without recourse to an undialectical and vacuous method to supply a criterion of judgment. And while this struggle may be largely ineffective in causing social change, it may be a form of resistance. If universities can maintain an attitude of openness in order to hear minorities then the university can become an environment that nurtures this resistance.

Notes for Chapter V

¹ (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 1975, 573)

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