Dialogue in Philosophical Hermeneutics

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Abstract

It is well known that the concept of dialogue plays an indispensable role in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. That is, philosophical hermeneutics is usually characterized by a dialogical structure of interpretation wherein the status of the text is elevated to a personified "thou" with whom the interpreter is engaged in a conversation. The first half of this work is an investigation of the notion of dialogue in terms of its connection with classical philosophy and Gadamer's critique of methodology in the natural sciences. Yet, from the deconstructive perspective, a tinge of phonocentricism is unmistakable in Gadamer because of his constant emphasis on "dialogue." On the other hand, Ricoeur, holding an entirely different perspective toward the dialectic between speaking and writing, also voices his doubt about Gadamer's dialogical model. Thus, beginning with Ricoeur and Derrida, the second half will focus on the validity as well as the limits of the dialogical model.

It is generally acknowledged that the concept of dialogue plays an indispensable role in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. As a distinctive paradigm for contemporary hermeneutics, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is usually characterized by a dialogical structure of interpretation wherein the status of the text is elevated to a personified "thou" with whom the reader is engaged in a conversation. The first aim of the present work is to investigate the notion of dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics by tracing it back to classical philosophy and, at the same time, to shed light on the connection between this dialogical model and Gadamer's critique of methodology in the natural sciences. After a scrutiny of some generic issues that are associated with the problematic of dialogue in Gadamer's hermeneutics, this essay will move forward to examine "dialogue" in terms of Derridian deconstruction and Ricoeur's notion of "distanciation." From the deconstructive perspective, a tinge of phonocentricism is hard to mistake in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in view of his constant emphasis on "dialogue." Ricoeur, holding an entirely different perspective toward the written text, also voices his doubt about Gadamer's dialogical model. Thus, from a careful analysis of the confrontation (a form of dialogue!) between Gadamer on one side and Derrida and Ricoeur on the other, we might have a more accurate grasp of the validity as well as the limits of the dialogical model in philosophical hermeneutics.

I. Dialogue, Methodology, and Ethics

In order to probe more deeply into the interaction

between dialogue and philosophical hermeneutics, perhaps we have to answer a question first: in what sense can we say that Gadamerian hermeneutics is "dialogical"? That is, what distinguishes Gadamer's hermeneutics from those "less dialogical" ones? Or we can rephrase this question by asking why we seldom consider, for example, Dilthey's or others' hermeneutics as dialogical despite the fact that it is easy to tease out dialogical elements in them.[1] In "The Hermeneutics of the Human Sciences," Dilthey considers the primary goal of hermeneutics as relating hermeneutics to "the epistemological task of showing the possibility of historical knowledge and finding the means for acquiring it" (162). In this sense, Dilthey's hermeneutics is intimately bound up with his ambition to establish a firm epistemological ground for the human sciences. For Dilthey, the human sciences, like the natural sciences, depend upon interpretation. However, the similarity between the two systems of knowledge stops here, and the fundamental distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences is that while the natural sciences focus only on the "facts and phenomena which are silent about man," the human sciences are chiefly concerned with the phenomena that can contribute to the understanding of our inner experience (*HIT* 103). Thus, the key word for the human sciences,

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[1] For example, Richard E. Palmer in his investigation of Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), one of the most important forerunners of Romantic hermeneutics, explicitly points out that for Wolf, "Interpretation is dialogue, dialogue with an author. . . . Without an aptitude for dialogue, for entering into the mental world of another person, explanation therefore, hermeneutics is impossible" (*HIT* 81). *HIT* refers to Richard E. Palmer's *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1969).

according to Dilthey, should be "understanding" rather than "explaining" (*HIT* 105). Scientific explanation might to some extent succeed in arriving at some general principles through analyzing the individual particulars, but only through understanding can we grasp the real individuality of each entity. In the natural sciences, the subject mainly considers what he wants to explain as simply an object, and the relation between subject and object is one of antagonism. From the viewpoint of the human sciences, the ideal correlation between subject and object should be a dialogical one; in this respect, the object is no longer a dead object, but emerges as a living partner that can have a constructive dialogue with the subject.

On the other hand, though for Gadamer the ultimate goal of hermeneutics is also to achieve "a fusion of horizons" through a dialogue between reader and text, Dilthey's and Gadamer's hermeneutics involve different objectives and scopes. Dialogue in the Gadamerian sense is to trigger something new by virtue of the interfusion between text and interpreter. Dilthey's dialogue, by contrast, still regards a text as something waiting to be deciphered by an "empathic" subject. In other words, interpretation, as Dilthey conceives of it, comes to be none other than an effort trying to reconstruct the authorial original intention. [2] Yet in Gadamer the relation between interpreter and text is mainly a conversational one wherein the twain interrogate each other with a view to prompting the ongoing of interpretation. Any understanding, it must be emphasized, is in no way a final one; instead, any response to a

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[2] From the citation "Interpretation is dialogue, dialogue with an author . . ." in Note 1 we can easily witness a similar tendency in Wolf.

previous conclusion would be automatically transformed into a new departure point. Through this kind of infinite dialogue, interpretation has become an unending event in which the production of meaning in a text comes to be an always-ongoing process. In this sense, a dialogue in Gadamer's hermeneutics is supposed to be a meeting ground for a free exchange of ideas among the participants. While for Dilthey interpretation still remains a matter between subject and object, a true dialogue in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is best characterized as "an encounter between souls" (Maranhão 7). Likewise, on the difference between Diltheyan and Gadamerian dialogical models in hermeneutics, Aylesworth contends that Dilthey reduces the affinity between interpreter and text to merely "a similarity between a subject and its object" (64).[3]

To have a more comprehensive grasp of the dialogical nature of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, it is worthwhile to institute a comparison between Gadamer and Ricoeur. Swearingen points out that the term "dialogue," if understood in the context of modern hermeneutic tradition, is naturally redolent of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Bakhtin owing to their shared belief that "all speech is speech in and through others, intertextual, intervocal" (48).[4] However, even though

[3] David E. Linge, the editor of Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1976), also argues that Dilthey's hermeneutics considers a text as simply "a cipher for something lying *behind* the text" (xx). Gary B. Madison, in "Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur," *Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994), similarly indicates that for Dilthey, the task of a human scientist is "that of transporting himself or herself into an alien or distant life experience" (291).

[4] In his book on Martin Buber's dialogical hermeneutics *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Blooming-

Ricoeur and Gadamer look similar in aforementioned comparative readings, their respective attitudes toward "dialogue" are different. Ricoeur contends that Gadamer, under the influence of Heidegger, has completed a paradigm shift in hermeneutics. After Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutics can no longer be regarded as simply a certain set of reading strategies; instead, what hermeneutics really involves is the understanding of Being. Ricoeur unquestionably agrees with Heidegger and Gadamer that hermeneutics entails the understanding of Being (Yen 263), but the similarity between Gadamer and Ricoeur ends here. Whereas Gadamer's dialogical model conceives of a text as a "thou," Ricoeur holds that the text is "a distanciation of meaning from event." And Ricoeur, on at least two occasions, is explicit about the weakness of the dialogical model in philosophical hermeneutics. In *Interpretation Theory*, we can read Ricoeur's ideas: "The right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation. Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends" (32). In a similar vein, Ricoeur, with Gadamer in mind, writes:

> . . . the mediation of the text cannot be treated as an extension of the dialogical situation. For in dialogue, the *vis-à-vis* of discourse is given in advance by the setting itself ; with writing, the original addressee is transcended. The work itself creates an audience, which potentially includes anyone who can read. The emancipation of the text constitutes the most fundamental condition for the

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ton: Indiana UP, 1992), Steven Kepnes similarly links up Buber's theory with those of Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Bakhtin.

recognition of a critical instance at the heart of inter-
pretation.[5] (*HHS* 91)[6]

This divergence in the notion of dialogue can in no way be
considered as merely a trivial disagreement between Gadamer
and Ricoeur. On the contrary, this disparity, if under critical
scrutiny, might serve as an important indicator of the difference
between two paradigms of hermeneutics. According to Kirkland,
where Gadamer's hermeneutics entails "the original correlation
of the 'ontological density of reality' and the existential
appropriation of meaning," Ricoeur stresses the text as "an
alternate paradigm" (131). As mentioned earlier, Ricoeur agrees
with Gadamer and Heidegger that philosophical hermeneutics
involves the understanding of Being,[7] but he claims that it is
inappropriate of Gadamer to separate understanding from
methodology since this kind of separation overlooks the
function of distanciation in interpretation. Where Gadamer is
deeply convinced that any methodology is unavoidably
reminiscent of the control of technology over human beings and

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[5] This argument touches upon the fundamental difference between speech and
writing, a problematic I will return to in later sections.

[6] *HHS* refers to *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge:
Cambridge UP, 1981).

[7] To explicate this notion in a limited space is impossible. Yet the idea of
philosophical hermeneutics as connected with the understanding of Being
can be aptly epitomized in Gadamer's own words: in philosophical
hermeneutics, "the question is not what we do or what we should do, but
what happens beyond our willing and doing" (qtd. in Linge xi). Simply put,
Gadamer's hermeneutics is not prescriptive (giving rules to guide
interpretation), but descriptive (throwing light on what underlies the
phenomenon of understanding when we try to understand something)
(Madison 296).

therefore opts for Socratic dialogue as the authentic mode for understanding, Ricoeur mainly maintains that the dialogical relation in hermeneutics is not ontological, but an epistemological one (Aylesworth 69).

With the knowledge of the essential disparity between Gadamer's and Ricoeur's conceptions of dialogue, the next task awaiting us is to characterize dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics. Why dialogue? In reestablishing the Socratic discipline of dialogue in philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer comes to the conclusion that each and every experience involves the logic of question and answer: "Interpretation, like conversation, is a closed circle of question and answer" (*TM* 351).[8] The understanding of something, for Gadamer, is thus a dialogical and interactive process. The primary hermeneutic task is therefore "coming into conversation with the text" (*TM* 331). Since dialogue necessitates "an essential symmetry of the dialogical relation" and "an essential selflessness of the partners" (Crowell 344), a particular I-Thou relation between interpreter and text naturally surfaces.[9] In this respect, Gadamer, in exalting the dialogical model,[10] affirms that truth is an event of human

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[8] *TM* refers to *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 1975).

[9] For a similar I-Thou relation in Martin Buber's hermeneutics, see *The Text as Thou*, pp. 19-40.

[10] In his reply to Francis J. Ambrosio's article "The Figure of Socrates in Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics" in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), Gadamer writes, "It is correct that language has its true reality only in dialogue. This is the guiding viewpoint of all of my studies on hermeneutics. This also holds for my studies on Greek philosophy with which I seek to freshen up and enrich my conceptuality" (1997: 274).

interaction which has nothing to do with methodology in the natural sciences.[11]

Gadamer's preference for the dialogical model as the royal road to true understanding is closely bound up with his reexamination of "experience" and his radical critique of the natural sciences. At the very outset of his analysis of the concept of experience, Gadamer reminds us of an important fact: "effective-historical consciousness" has the structure of experience (*TM* 310). Gadamer points out that because the concept of experience (*Erfahrung*) plays an important role in the logic of induction and has long been subjected to "an epistemological schematisation," its original meaning has been, unfortunately, forgotten (*TM* 310). The greatest weakness of this kind of schematization lies in the fact that it fails to take the inner historicity of experience into consideration (*TM* 311). In the natural sciences, methodical procedures are exclusively concerned with making sure that experiences can be repeated by anyone; in Gadamer's own words, scientific experience "is valid only if it is confirmed; hence its dignity depends on its fundamental repeatability" (*TM* 311). For Gadamer, it is Bacon who is primarily responsible for the separation of experience from historicity. Bacon's method of induction, adds Gadamer,

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[11] Since its publication, the title of Gadamer's magnum opus *Truth and Method* has raised incessant debates. Palmer might be the first one who interprets this title as an irony, since for Gadamer, "truth eludes the methodical man" (*HIT* 163). Similarly, Weinsheimer in his *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) contends that the title of *Truth and Method* in its own right casts suspicion upon method (1). In *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, Ricoeur suggests that the title of *Truth and Method* embodies a confrontation between "the Heideggerian concept of truth and the Diltheyan concept of method" (60).

"seeks to rise above the unruly and accidental way in which daily experience takes place and certainly above its dialectical use" (*TM* 312).

Opposed to Bacon's methodology, which rules out the inner historicity in experience, Gadamer believes that the acquisition of experience is a historical process because all human experience, in a certain sense, is tantamount to the experience of human finitude:

> Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced man is one who is aware of this, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced man knows the limitedness of all prediction and the uncertainty of all plans. In him is realised the truth-value of experience. If it is characteristic of every phase of the process of experience that the experienced person acquires a new openness to new experiences, this is certainly true of the idea of complete experience. . . . Ex-perience teaches us to recognise reality. What is properly gained from all experience, then, is to know what is. But "what is," here, is not this or that thing, but "what cannot be done away with." (*TM* 320)

In this respect, experience for Gadamer always bears a negative element (Ambrosio 1987: 23). That is, an authentic experience presupposes the disillusionment of our expectations and is therefore the experience of one's own historicity.[12]

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[12] Georgia Warnke's remark will help clarify the two senses of experience (*Erfahrung*) in Gadamer: "the scientific sense, emphasizing the way in which experiences or experiments confirm one another, and a dialectical or historical sense that emphasizes negativity. The concept of experience established in the natural sciences focuses on the repeatability of procedures and results, on the confirmation that one experience is able to give to

For Gadamer, the recognition of historicity in experience constitutes the highest type of hermeneutical experience: "the openness to tradition possessed by effective-historical consciousness" (*TM* 324). In human relations, according to Gadamer, one important thing is to experience the "Thou" as a true "Thou." In other words, but for this kind of openness no genuine human relationship would be possible (*TM* 324). Gadamer asserts that the acknowledgement of the importance of openness is crucial in understanding the hermeneutic experience: openness to tradition is in no event merely accepting the tradition in its otherness, but involves a willingness to hearken to the tradition. In the words of Linge, "This awareness of our historicity and finitude — our consciousness of effective history — brings with it an openness to new possibilities that is the precondition of genuine understanding" (xxi). That is why tradition is by no means a collection of events to be reconstructed by the interpreter, but serves as the effective-historical consciousness that prompts the conversation between interpreter and text. Following Heidegger, Gadamer puts into question the idea of an Archimedean point in interpretation by debunking its naive presuppositions. In this regard, for Gadamer the very first task of interpretation should be none other than a self-critique: "working out one's own fore-projections so that the subject matter to be understood can affirm its own validity in regard to

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another. The concept of *Erfahrung* that interests Gadamer, however, is articulated by the notion of a 'learning' experience, an experience that in a sense cannot be repeated and serves to negate our previous views. Indeed, what we learn through experience in this sense involves such a radical transformation of our views that we cannot go back to them to re-experience the experience of their negation" (26).

them" (Grondin 111-12). [13] Prejudice, therefore, should be viewed as a positive factor in the task of interpretation since it forces us to face our finitude. This acknowledgment of human limits comes to be more constructive than the unrealistic illusion of historicism that there exists a timeless basis whereby we can escape our temporality and historicity. Gadamer therefore indicates that it is our prejudgments rather than our judgments that determine our Being (Linge xvii).

The foregoing analysis of "openness" in hermeneutical experience necessarily leads to the logic of question and answer in philosophical hermeneutics: "It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience (sic). We cannot have experiences without asking questions" (*TM* 325). With the notion that each and every experience involves the logic of question and answer, Gadamer contends that interpretation is a circle of question and answer. Understanding of something is thus a dialogical process rather than a monologue. Once holding conversation or dialogue as his golden rule, the interpreter would never inflict any dogma on the text since he is aware of the fact that dialogue acts as one thing that "pre-dates his own consciousness and will post-date it" (Weinsheimer 211).

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[13] Jean Grondin, in his *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994), considers Gadamer's hermeneutics as a "hermeneutics of finitude" that demonstrates "the universal and specifically *hermeneutical* character of our experience of the world" (115). In a similar way, James Risser claims that "finitude" might be "*the* term around which the discourse of philosophical hermeneutics is organized" (1997: 119). For Risser, Gadamer's hermeneutics is "a hermeneutics of existence as a hermeneutics of finitude" (119). For a more detailed analysis, see James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other: Re-reading Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997), pp. 119-138.

Gadamer himself writes, "Thus, it is part of any genuine conversation that one submits to the other, allows his viewpoint really to count and gets inside the other far enough to understand him, to be sure, as this individuality but rather what he says" (*TM* 347).

All preceding arguments concerning finitude and effective-historical consciousness lead to another important notion in philosophical hermeneutics: Socratic docta ignorantia (the knowledge of not knowing). [14] Viewed from this perspective, Gadamer's predilection for dialogue as the departure point of philosophical hermeneutics cannot be a coincidence. Here dialogue means at least two things for Gadamer. Genuine dialogue is based upon the recognition of our finitude. The knowledge we are expected to own is simply that we do not have absolute knowledge. Yet, it should be remembered that the recognition of one's lack of knowledge is merely a necessary but not sufficient condition for true understanding. What is still needed is a willingness to listen to the interlocutor. In other words, goodwill and willingness to learn are among the indispensable conditions for an ideal dialogue: "To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (*TM* 330).

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[14] A very short but useful definition of "docta ignorantia" is provided by P. Christopher Smith: docta ignorantia, which is "far from being a mere ploy, establishes the interrogative spirit of inquiry (*zētēsis*) needed for any *dialegesthai*" (37).

As a distinguished classicist,[15] Gadamer has absorbed a host of classical elements into philosophical hermeneutics.[16] For Gadamer, Socratic dialogue is a very special case of dialogue. In Socratic dialogue, raising questions is much more difficult and important than giving an answer to them: "To question is to lay open and to pose as an open question" (*TM* 349).[17] Since the

[15] Gadamer's doctoral dissertation *Das Wesen der Lust nach platonischen Dialogen* is on Plato (Sullivan 194), and he has authored many works on Greek philosophy. For the development of Gadamer's lifelong career, see his own *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1989); and, most importantly, Gadamer's 1995 "Reflections on My Philosophical Journey," in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), pp. 3-63. For the close relationship between Gadamer and Greek philosophy, see Chang, "Heidegger, Gadamer, and the Greeks," *Philosophical Forum*, No. 21 (1997), pp. 110-120.

[16] There is much debate concerning who in the history of western philosophy has the greatest influence on Gadamer. It is generally acknowledged that Plato (Socrates), Aristotle, Hegel, and Heidegger are the primary sources for Gadamer's work. P. Christopher Smith contends that Platonic dialogue is the most distinctive influence for Gadamer (23). Nicholas Davey, however, responds to Smith in arguing that Plato's influence is unmistakable, but it would be less visible except for Heidegger (1991: 42). In a word, it is Heideggerian notions, such as "language is the House of Being" and "discourse is the existential foundation of languages," that help shape Gadamer's approach to Plato (1991: 42). Ambrosio, on the other hand, asserts that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is for the most part centered upon the figure of Socrates (1997: 259). It is nevertheless interesting to find that Gadamer, in response to Ambrosio, points out that it is Kant who teaches him "what the Socratic wisdom basically was: to leave questions open and to keep them open" (sic) (1997: 274). In the present work, Platonic dialogue and Socratic dialogue would be regarded as almost interchangeable despite the fact that the two terms, if subject to cautious inspection, are not entirely congruent.

[17] This preference for the question over the answer, according to Smith, might

only knowledge we have, as we have mentioned, is that we do not know anything, each interlocutor must share the responsibility to carry on a dialogue by listening to the other.

In addition to the metaphorical analogy between philosophical hermeneutics and Socratic dialogue in their shared emphasis on a genuine interaction between interlocutors, some ethical and (non)methodological implications evoked by Socratic dialogue are hard to mistake in Gadamer. As we have known, symmetry of participation and goodwill are indispensable conditions for a genuine dialogue. In an important essay "Text and Interpretation,"[18] Gadamer, with Derrida in mind, contends that whether in "a written conversation" or "an oral exchange," the participants must have "the good will to try to understand one another" (TI 33). When Derrida puts into question the Kantian idea "good will" by arguing that this idea is still embedded in some metaphysical presuppositions (1989: 53), Gadamer refutes back in claiming that the notion of good will has nothing to do with metaphysics, but is of Platonic derivation. In a genuine conversation, Gadamer argues, the primary task of each participant is by no means to prove himself always right by teasing out the weakness in the other's speech; on the contrary, to achieve an informative understanding one should spare no effort to "strengthen the other's viewpoint" (RJD 55).[19] Thus, for Gadamer the readiness to know the other

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help us clarify the interaction between Socrates and his rival sophists. The function of Socratic "negative midwifery" is none other than putting sophists' assumed certitude into question (37).

[18] Hereafter cited as TI.

[19] RJD refers to "Reply to Jacques Derrida," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1989), pp. 55-57.

is among the most fundamental conditions for any understanding. This idea becomes more manifest when Gadamer argues that Derrida's act of raising questions to him is in its own right a good piece of evidence for the desire to understand the other and to be understood (RJD 55).[20] Near the end of Gadamer's retort to Derrida, the importance of dialogue is elevated to the utmost: "Just between two people this would require a never-ending dialogue. And the same would apply with regard to the inner dialogue the soul has with itself. Of course we encounter limits again and again. . . . All human solidarity, all social stability, presupposes this [dialogue]" (RJD 57).[21] This position, as Ambrosio argues, is evocative of another ethical consideration in philosophical hermeneutics: Gadamer's hermeneutics, in adopting the dialogical form, embodies "the *aretē* (excellence) of the philosophical way of life, dedicated to the 'care of the soul,' through understanding" (1997: 259). For Gadamer, along with Socrates and Plato, the aim of philosophy is clear: "the aim of philosophy   the new discourse embodied in the dialogues   was to unearth knowledge in a practice qualified as ethical" (Maranhão 7). With respect to the importance of dialogue in philosophy, Gadamer, in *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy*, also writes, "Philosophy is a

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[20] It is interesting to find that Gadamer, in his confrontation with Derrida, seems to identify himself as another Socrates and Derrida as a sophist when he claims that Kant's "good will" marks a difference between "dialectic and sophistics" (RJD 55).

[21] For a further understanding of the debate over "good will," see Josef Simon, "Good Will to Understand and the Will to Power: Remarks on an 'Improbable Debate,'" and James Risser, "The Two Faces of Socrates: Gadamer/Derrida," both of which appear in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 162-175 and pp. 176-191.

human experience that remains the same and that characterizes the human being as such, and that there is no *progress* in it, but only *participation*. That these things still hold, even for a civilization like ours that is molded by science, sounds hard to believe, but to me it seems true nonetheless" (6; emphasis added).

Besides the ethical overtone in philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer's penchant for dialogue also entails a methodological consideration. Here we will start with Gadamer's critique of methodology in the natural sciences. As we have mentioned, the establishment of modern methodology, according to Gadamer, is largely attributed to Francis Bacon, who worked out the method of induction in his *Novum Organum* (1620). Before long French philosopher Descartes developed the method of deduction in *Discours de la Methode* (1637). Despite the substantial disparity between induction and deduction, they have at least one thing in common: the preliminary supposition of the separation between subject and object (Yen 15). Along with the gigantic progress of modern science, modern methodology has gradually evolved into a dominant ideology according to which human beings believe that they can arrive at the truth as long as they grasp a "right" method.[22] Gadamer, however, warns us that modern methodology and truth are

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[22] In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes offers a classica analogy between method and road: with the guidance of method, "like a man who walks alone in the darkness, I resolved to go slowly and circumspectly that if I did not get ahead very rapidly I was at least safe from falling" (14). Baconian emphasis on method can also be seen in Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), whose *On the Study Methods of Our Time* and *New Science* are deeply influenced by Bacon's *Novum Organum*.

diametrically opposed to each other.

While the skills of textual exegesis had already been widely adopted in the patristic age,[23] the earliest recorded occurrence of "hermeneutics" as a book title did not appear until 1654.[24] This date is significant in that it is contemporaneous with the emergence of modern science. Modern hermeneutics is therefore congenial to the outgrowth of modern natural sciences. For example, hermeneutics, in the hands of Ast and Wolf,[25] has been transformed into a kind of philology. In the case of Ast (1778-1841), the task of hermeneutics is "the clarification of the work through the development of its meaning internally and the relationship of its inner parts to each other and to the larger spirit of the age" (*HIT* 77). Similarly, for Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), the definition of hermeneutics is "the science of the rules by which the meaning of signs is recognized" (qtd. in *HIT* 77). In addition to this definition, a positivistic tinge is hard to mistake in Wolf; for him, every rule must be arrived at through practice, and hermeneutics therefore comes to be none other than a collection of rules (*HIT* 77). Following these two forerunners and going further, Schleiermacher intends to develop a hermeneutics   a science of understanding   in which understanding operates according to specific laws that can be

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[23] Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, for example, is an introduction to the interpretation and explanation of the Bible. For an understanding of the patristic hermeneutical theories propounded by Clement (150-215), Origen (185-254), and Jerome (347-420), see Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1970), pp. 31-34.

[24] It is J. C. Dannhauser's *Hermeneutica sacra sive methodus exponendarum sacrarum litterarum* (*HIT* 34).

[25] For a more detailed discussion of Ast and Wolf, see *HIT*, pp. 75-83.

discovered and generalized (*HIT* 91). More importantly, according to Gadamer most of these methods are crudely engrafted from modern sciences and technology, and that reduces hermeneutics to simply an epistemology. Therefore, the dialogical model in philosophical hermeneutics can act as a vantage point from which we can look into the fundamental disparity between deductive logic and dialogical reasoning. Rommetveit, in his "On Axiomatic Features of a Dialogical Approach to Language and Mind," has offered us a brief but valuable survey of dialogical and monological approaches to cognition and communication. Monologism, as the dominant epistemology in modern Western thought, mainly conceives of language as "a ready-made, normative and static systems of signs" (Markovà 5). The most significant foible of deductive logic, according to Rommetveit (and of course Gadamer), consists in its blindness to the inner historicity in all cultural phenomena. The best solution, asserts Rommetveit, to this kind of blindness is a dialogism that regards the development of language and social interaction as inseparable. Likewise, Hintikka points out that everyday reasoning is in no way merely a linear chain of deductive inferences (25), so he encourages a consideration of the possible link between Gadamerian logic of question and answer and deductive inferences (35). Thus, for Hintikka a more efficient and comprehensive reasoning needs the combination of interrogative (dialogical) moves and deductive (monological) ones.

Though it would be premature to conclude from the previous paragraph that Gadamer and theorists of cognitive science have much in common in their respective attitudes toward interpretation, they at least agree on one thing: deductive logic, in its ruling out all historical and cultural

factors, is applicable only to those experiences that can be replicated. Gadamer, following Heidegger, regards the construction of logic on the basis of proposition as one of "the most fateful decisions of Western culture" (*TM* 341).[26] In this respect, dialogue, as opposed to propositional logic, is the only possible solution to the astray privileging of method in modern consciousness. Grondin contends that for Gadamer the idea of method mainly derives from the supposition that objects can be "experimentally" isolated and controlled (118).[27] The logic of question and answer is therefore a matter of mutual

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[26] Some scholars have pointed out that for Gadamer methods refer exclusively to scientific methods, especially the methods of induction and deduction (Yen 17, 20, 26). Therefore, critics of Gadamer tend to claim that for Gadamer methodology is almost synonymous with "induction" or "deduction." David Tracy, in his *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), notes that Gadamer's work reveals a "strained polemic against all 'method'" (sic) (136). Similarly, Weinsheimer points out that some of Gadamer's characterizations of method in the natural sciences are obsolete now (20). The most significant weakness in Gadamer's characterization, according to Weinsheimer, is Gadamer's ignorance of recent developments in the philosophy of science (20). To be precise, Gadamer's understanding of methodology in the natural sciences "remains fundamentally Baconian" (Weinsheimer 20). Moreover, Nicholas Davey holds that Gadamer's indiscriminate dichotomy between statemental (scientific) and discursive languages reveals his narrow conception of method in the natural sciences (1993: 259). For a more recent evaluation of Bacon's status in the history of science, see Barry Gower, *Scientific Method: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 40-62. The references to Tracy and Weinsheimer in this note come from Yen (40).

[27] Gadamer's idea that scientific experience involves only events that can be controlled or predicted is challenged by Davey. Borrowing Lyotard's notion of *agonistics*, which views scientific discoveries as unpredictable, Davey argues that hermeneutical and scientific discourses are actually complementary to each other (1993: 253).

participation rather than of linear deductions: "There are no propositions which can be understood exclusively with respect to the content that they present . . . there is no possible statement that cannot be understood as the answer to a question, and can only be understood thus" (*TM* 329). Gadamer's trust in conversation is of course connected with his nostalgia for classical Greek tradition. In *Dialogue and Dialectic* Gadamer writes:

> If we find in Plato's dialogues and in Socrates' argument all manner of violations of logic false inferences, the omis-   sion of necessary steps, equivocations, the interchanging of one concept with another the reasonable hermeneutic assumption on which to proceed is that we are dealing with a discussion. And we ourselves do not conduct our discussion *more geometrico*. . . . Thus, it does not seem at all reasonable to me to study Plato primarily with an eye to logical consistency. . . . The real task can only be to activate for ourselves wholes of meaning, contexts within which a discussion moves even where its logic offends us.(5)

From this passage we are informed that the conflict between dialogue and logic had already been an important issue in Plato's time. Yet it should be noted that despite the fact that "false inferences, the omission of necessary steps, equivocations, the interchanging of one concept with another" undoubtedly appear inadequate in terms of logic, Gadamer still accepts them as positive elements as long as they can contribute to the ongoing of dialogue. Moreover, the phrase "*more geometrico*" expressly reveals the antithesis between the understanding

reached through *dialegesthai* [28] and that reached in propositional logic.[29] It is here that we once again feel the echo from Greek philosophy in Gadamer. Dialogue, for both Socrates and Gadamer, is therefore an unending process; the primary task of each interlocutor in a conversation is to keep the dialogue moving forward instead of finding the ultimate answer. Swearingen once adduces Plato's *Letter VII* to elucidate the essence of dialogue as a process. In *Letter VII,* one of Plato's students is reproached for publishing a summary of his mentor's teachings. This anecdote, as Swearingen interprets it, implies that Plato's teachings should be regarded as "the product of a lifelong process, not a quantity of information" (65).

Another important but sometimes overlooked influence on Gadamer's dialogical model in philosophical hermeneutics is Aristotle. Gadamer himself indicates that Aristotle's practical philosophy, along with Kierkegaard and Heidegger, helps him reach the point of "seeing the essence of language in conversation" (HL 117).[30] This view of language, according to

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[28] "Dialectic" comes from the Greek word *dialegesthai*, which means "talking something through with another" (Smith 34).

[29] The idea "*more geometrico*" is of course a Cartesian one. According to Perelman, the idea of a philosophy *more geometrico* is "to build a system which, moving from one self-evidence to another, would leave no room for any disputable opinion" (155). Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a contemporary of Descartes, similarly contends in "De l'esprit géométrique et de l'art de persuader" that reasoning *more geometrico* is "almost the only mode of reasoning that is infallible, because it is the only one to adhere to the true method, whereas all other ones are by natural necessity in a degree of confusion of which only geometrical minds can be aware" (qtd. in de Man 13).

[30] HL refers to "Hermeneutics and Logocentricism," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 114-125.

Gadamer, "goes beyond Heidegger's analysis of Dasein's 'very ownness' ['*Jemeinigkeit*'] and its fallenness [*Verfallenheit*] into the world, it represents a more important experience: namely, dialogue" (HL 117). A more useful way to understand the importance of Aristotle for Gadamer can begin with the knowledge of the polarity between *phronesis* and *techne.* According to Aylesworth, *techne* is mainly concerned with "methodological application of universal principles," whereas *phronesis* refers to "the non-methodological application of general principles to particular situations" (67). The most decisive difference between the twain, adds Aylesworth, is that *techne* is guided by "method and a pre-given object" while *phronesis* "the particulars of the situation" (67). For Gadamer, the significance of Socratic dialogue and Aristotelian phronesis partly consists in the simple fact that they are non-methodological. To be more precise, the import of *phronesis* as an integral source for Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that it cannot be reduced to a fixed set of methods or rules,[31] but, more importantly, inevitably involves an other. As a moral principle originally, *phronesis* is unique in different contexts and its application cannot be regulated by any pre-given concepts. In this light, *phronesis* can always remain open to the contingencies of different situations.[32]

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[31] For a more thorough understanding of *phronesis,* see Robert Bernasconi, "'You Don't Know What I'm Talking About': Alterity and the Hermeneutical Ideal," in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1995), pp. 178-194.

[32] It is worthwhile to institute a comparison between *phronesis* and "equity," both of which are important notions in Aristotle. As a hermeneutical concept, "equity" is best characterized by its taking into account the

From the notion that *phronesis* is a general disposition that "is reconstituted in every concrete application" (Aylesworth 72), we can shed new light on another fundamental thesis in philosophical hermeneutics: understanding a text is inseparable from its application. While his predecessors pay little or no attention to application, Gadamer nevertheless emphasizes that application be an intrinsic part of interpretation. By adducing the examples of legal and theological exegesis, [33] Gadamer intends to reaffirm that any interpretation is in its own right an effort "to span the distance between a text and the present situation" (*HIT* 188). In this regard, extending the idea that understanding a text is tantamount to applying it in the present context, Gadamer in fact effects a negation of the Romantic myth that a text should be understood on the basis of the author's intention. Thus, Gadamer views those efforts, including locating the ground of meaning through a reconstruction of the authorial intention, to establish an absolute and unchanging meaning in a text as erroneous from the very start. [34]

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infinitive variety of human circumstances and by its power to accommodate the individual case. For the origin of "equity" and its development in Greek classical philosophy, see Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), pp. 7-19.

[33] That application is a necessary moment in interpretation is not exempt from criticism. David Tracy acknowledges that Gadamer is absolutely right in interpreting the role of application in legal or theological matters, but he adds that these special cases are not "representative of the role of application in all interpretation" (136).

[34] Whether it is possible to reconstruct the author's original intention is the most considerable divergence between Gadamer and Hirsch. For Hirsch's argument on this controversy, see E. D. Hirsch, "Gadamer's Theory of Interpretation," in *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1967),

II. Phonocentricism in Philosophical Hermeneutics ?

In the first part, the focus is on the characteristics of dialogue and its attendant ethical and epistemological implications in philosophical hermeneutics. Yet one problematic concerning dialogue might arise: Is Gadamer's privileging dialogue not a symptom of "phonocentricism" in the Derridian sense if we acknowledge the essential proximity between dialogue and speech? Moreover, is it possible that there exist some self-contradictions in Gadamer's dialogical model? Before we offer any definite answers to these questions, it is beneficial for us to trace the etymology of "hermeneutics" in its Greek origin. According to Palmer, speech enjoys a dominant position over writing in the most primitive form of hermeneutics in the Greek tradition.[35] Palmer points out that three aspects are associated with the idea of *hermēneurin or hermēneia*: hermeneutics, put simply, is an art concerned with "to say," "to express," and "to translate" (*HIT* 13). In his analysis, Palmer, however, reveals an unusual emphasis on saying and oral recitation as an indispensable part in interpretation: "Yet

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pp. 245-264.

[35] That speech enjoys a superior position does not occur in every hermeneutics tradition. The hermeneutics of Midrash, for example, is a hermeneutics mainly based on writing. For an overview of the hermeneutics of Midrash, see Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), pp. 104-123. Besides, for an exploration of the links between Derrida's exegetical strategy and the hermeneutics of Midrash, see Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1982), pp. 163-178.

literature derives much of its dynamism from the power of the spoken word. . . . The powers of spoken language should remind us of an important phenomenon: the weakness of written language. Written language lacks the primordial 'expressiveness' of the spoken word" (*HIT* 15). Though Palmer acknowledges that it is writing that adds valuable contributions to the preservation of history, he still laments that writing should be responsible for the loss of the dynamism of history (*HIT* 15). More importantly, Palmer, citing at once Plato and Gadamer, contends that the "weakness and helplessness" of writing are closely bound up with the fact that writing is essentially an alienation of language from its living power (*HIT* 15-16). In a brief but crucial conclusion that speech should be the main concern in hermeneutics, we come across the following argument: "A literary criticism which aspires to be an 'enabling act' is in part an effort to make up for the weakness and helplessness of the written word; it tries to put back in the work the dimensions of speech" (*HIT* 17).

It should be noted that even in a text-centered religion such as Christianity, the power of the oral word cannot be overemphasized. As Palmer argues, besides the well-known examples of St. Paul and Luther (*HIT* 18), [36] Bultmannian notion of *kerygma* marks the revival of speech in modern hermeneutics (*HIT* 19). [37] Palmer's consideration of the

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[36] Both St. Paul and Luther, according to Palmer, have claimed that "salvation comes through the ears" (*HIT* 18). Besides, according to Palmer, Pauline Letters were written "to be read aloud, not silently" and silent reading is "a modern phenomenon brought on by printing" (*HIT* 18-19).

[37] The Greek word *kerygma* is usually translated as "proclamation," "preaching," or "announcement." It refers to "a public notice proclaimed by a herald whereby that which was announced became effective by the act of

expressive aspect of *hermēneurin* is inevitably reminiscent of phonocentricism in Western philosophy. From such an assertion that language is essentially to be heard and would lose some "expressive power" when "reduced to visual images" (*HIT* 20), it is not difficult to conclude that speech occupies a dominant position in hermeneutics.

More importantly, Palmer's assertion that any silent reading of a literary text is merely "a disguised form of oral interpretation" (*HIT* 17) can serve as another vantage point from which we can look more deeply into the problematic of speech and writing in hermeneutics. And since Palmer contends that silent reading is a modern phenomenon (*HIT* 17), perhaps we can begin with Augustine. As Manguel points out (44), in a seemingly insignificant passage in *Confessions*, Augustine, with unusual amazement, describes the scene in which his spiritual mentor Ambrose is devoted to reading a book: "When he [Ambrose] read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart explored the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still . . . for he never read aloud" (6.3). What is hinted by Augustine's depiction is that silent reading was still something extraordinary in Augustine's time and that the normal way of reading a text at that time was to read it aloud.[38] On this issue, Manguel contends that not until the tenth century did silent

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announcing it" (*New Dictionary of Theology* 364).

[38] Augustine himself has offered two explanations for Ambrose's silent reading: "Perhaps he was afraid that, if he read aloud, some obscure passage in the author he was reading might raise a question in the mind of an attentive listener. . . . Perhaps a more likely reason why he read to himself was that he needed to spare his voice . . ." (6.3). Whatever the real reason is, the pivotal point is that silent reading is a very unusual phenomenon for Augustine.

reading become a prevalent phenomenon.[39] Besides, Manguel, though never directly touching upon the problematic of interpretation, contends that in the ancient world even written words were meant to be read aloud: "The classic phrase *scripta manent, verba volent* . . . was coined in praise of the word said out loud, which has wings and can fly, as compared to the silent word on the page, which is motionless, dead. Faced with a written text, the reader had a duty to *the silent letters*, the *scripta*, and to allow them, to become . . . *verba*, *spoken words*—spirit (45; emphasis added).[40]

From the brief survey of the arguments of Manguel, Palmer, and Augustine, we are informed that hermeneutics in its primitive form is mainly a matter of orality. Yet the question posed here is whether Gadamer's dialogical model can be regarded as another example of phonocentricism. Or we can rephrase the question by asking what Gadamer's attitude toward speech and writing is. In this problematic, there is an inherent contradiction in Gadamer's hermeneutics.[41] Gradamer

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[39] According to Manguel, Augustine's depiction of Ambrose's silent reading is "the first definite instance recorded in Western literature" (43). "The first" is significant in that the truth of those earlier examples of silent reading, as Manguel suggests, is still open to doubt. In an erudite analysis, Manguel enumerates the "uncertain" examples of silent reading in the works of Euripides, Aristophanes, Plutarch, and Ptolemy (43). Manguel himself, however, notes that Bernard M. W. Knox, in his "Silent Reading in Antiquity," argues against the thesis that silent reading was almost unknown in the ancient world (326).

[40] Through an erudite analysis of "living word" (*ἃ μύὲὺὃἱ*) in Greek, Risser has offered an insightful argument on the connection between Gadamer and classical Greek philosophy on "the voice in the breath" (1997: 175-82).

[41] Horst Turk contends that in *Truth and Method* Gadamer reveals a vacillation between "a conversation- and a text-oriented hermeneutic" (qtd. in Weinsheimer 221).

emphasizes that writing is incapable of yielding any significant meaning unless transformed back into speech. But on the other hand he maintains that it is only in the written text that the non-immediacy of language can be most fully realized. With Plato in mind,[42] Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, has argued that writing is an inferior medium for understanding:

> All writing is, as we have said, a kind of alienated speech, and its signs need to be transformed back into speech and meaning. Because the meaning has undergone a kind of self-alienation through being written down, this transformation back is the real hermeneutical task. . . . In contrast to the spoken word there is no other aid in the interpretation of the written word. The spoken word interprets itself to an astonishing degree, by the way of speaking, the tone of voice, the tempo etc, but also by the circumstance in which it is spoken. (354-55)

Any sensible reader can detect almost all the basic tenets of phonocentricism in this quotation.[43] As we know, writing for Plato is a dangerous thing since it merely substitutes inscriptions for the authentic living presence of spoken language. Aristotle holds a similar view that spoken words act as the ideal signs that we should adopt in communicating our thoughts, whereas writing is merely a derivative and therefore inferior sign system that stands for speech. Even Saussurian structural linguistics,

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[42] Here Gadamer is referring to Plato's *Seventh Letter* and *Phaedrus* (*TM* 528).

[43] It should be emphasized that Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* was published in 1960, several years earlier than the appearance of Derrida's *De la Grammatologie* (1967), *L'ecriture et la difference* (1967), and *La Voix et le Phénomène* (1967).

according to Derrida, fails to get rid of the obsession with speech:

> Writing, though unrelated to its inner system, is used continually to represent language. We cannot simply disregard it. We must be acquainted with its usefulness, shortcomings, and dangers. . . . Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object. (Saussure 23-24)

Generally speaking, in the history of Western philosophy speech, with its immediate relation to thought, has always been considered as the most appropriate sort of sign to reflect mental thought. For Derrida, this is the constitutive gesture of Western philosophy. As a medium of signification, speech can erase itself and evaporate in the air as soon as it finishes the task of representation. By contrast, the irreducible materiality of writing, together with the sense of absence it provokes, prevents writing from being regarded as an ideal medium. And almost all these elements can be easily found in Gadamer.[44]

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[44] In "Interview: Writing and the Living Voice," in *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1992), a text based on two interviews with Gadamer carried out in 1985 and 1986 respectively, Gadamer expressed himself very positively that "I would define hermeneutics as the skill to let things speak which come to us in a fixed, petrified form, that of the text. So one has to modulate, use intonation" (65). Besides, in another important work on interpretation "Text and Interpretation," Gadamer presents a contrast between speech and writing: "one cannot say certain things in letters that one can say in the immediacy of conversation, even when one sends them to a partner with whom one is very close. There is too much that is omitted in

Thus, for Gadamer the overcoming of the written text has become the fundamental task for understanding: "Even the pure signs of an inscription can be seen properly and articulated correctly only if the text can be transformed into language" (*TM* 352). [45] In other words, because of the "weakness of writing," interpretation is, as Froman points out, "an understanding of what is question-worthy in its being on the interpreter's historical situation" (137). However, for Gadamer writing is paradigmatic of the assertion that interpretation is not to reproduce or reconstruct the authorial intent: "The under-standing of something written is not a reproduction of something that is past, but the sharing of a present meaning" (*TM* 354). In other words, if for Gadamer the primary task in the act of interpretation is not to locate the author's intention at the instant of composition but to prompt a dialogue between the past and the present, writing is unquestionably the more proper medium simply because of its very repeatability:

> But that language is capable of being written is by no means identical to its nature. Rather, this capacity of being

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a letter that, in the immediacy of conversation, carries the proper understanding; and furthermore, in conversation one always has the opportunity to clarify or defend what was meant on the basis of some response. . . . The *logoi* [sayings] which present themselves cut loose from any specific situation of communication [*Verständigungssituation*]—and this is collectively true of written words—risk misuse and misunderstanding because they dispense with the obvious corrections resident within living conversation" (34).

[45] The German original for "language" is *Sprache*. Smith notes that by *Sprache* Gadamer refers to "language" in its everyday sense (24). Yet Smith reminds the reader that "etymologically *Sprache* is closer to the English 'speech,' and like 'speech' it belongs together with 'speaking' and what is 'spoken'" (24).

> written down is based on the fact that speech itself shares in the pure ideality of the meaning that communicates itself in it. In writing, this meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication. A text is not to be understood as an expression of life, but in what it says. Writing is the abstract ideality of language. . . . Writing has the methodological advantage that it presents the hermeneutical problem in all its purity, detached from everything psychological. (*TM* 354)

It is easy to tease out a contradiction in Gadamer's treatment of speech and writing from this citation. That is, on the one hand Gadamer, following Plato, holds that writing is nothing more than a kind of alienated speech and the real hermeneutical task therefore consists in transforming this dangerous writing back into speech: "the text is a mere intermediate product [*Zwischenprodukt*], a phase in the event of understanding that, as such, certainly includes a definite abstraction, namely, the isolation and reification involved in this very phase" (TI 31). On the other hand, owing to his insistence that interpretation is never a psychological reconstruction of the authorial intent, the emphasis on writing seems to be a natural corollary. Is this vacillation not a typical symptom of logocentricism or phonocentricism that Derrida exposes as the origin of metaphysics?[46] In view of this contradiction, a conclusion can

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[46] In his confrontation with Derrida, Gadamer considers "metaphysics" as a negative word. However, in *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), Gadamer, citing Hegel, asserts that "a people without a metaphysics would be like a temple without a sanctuary, an empty temple, a temple in which nothing dwells any longer and hence is itself nothing any more" (3). The reference to *Reason in the Age of Science* is from Yen (279).

be reached that Gadamer's dialogical model, even understood only metaphorically, contains an incongruity in it.

Another inherent limitation in Gadamer's dialogical model involves its inadequate identification of the text as a person. It is well known that Gadamer's dialogical model is predicated on the presupposition that the text is like a personified "thou" with whom the interpreter is engaged in a conversation. Moreover, the fundamental conditions for an ideal dialogue between interpreter and text should be, in Crowell's words, "an essential symmetry of the dialogical relation" and "an essential selflessness of the partners" (344). And the "Thou" quality, contends DiCenso, indicates "the reflexive potential" that "allows the text to address and challenge the standpoints of the interpreter" (109). According to DiCenso, in dialogical hermeneutics there exists a moral quality resulting from Gadamer's endowing the text with a capacity to function as a "person" (109). Yet the key point here is that even if Gadamer's critique of methodological objectivism and his advocacy of the moral sense in the hermeneutical experience are justifiable, it does not mean that the text needs to be personified (DiCenso 109). For DiCenso, a tension naturally rises in the wake of Gadamer's consideration of the text as a Thou (109). As we know well, an interlocutor in a dialogue is supposed to be an independent subject with his unique ideas and the caliber to prompt the conversation when necessary. According to this model, the act of understanding is compared to a conversation, yet it is Gadamer himself, suggests DiCenso (110), who betrays an unbridgeable incompatibility between a hermeneutical act and a dialogue: "one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, is expressed only through the other partner, the

interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back into meaning. Nevertheless, by being changed back into intelligible terms, the object of which the text speaks finds expression" (*TM* 349). In this argument, what we witness is a passive and unresponsive text confronted with an active and domineering interpreter. An inequality between interpreter and text, which Gadamer makes little effort to correct or fails to take notice of, is therefore easy to locate if we acknowledge that "the text does *not* possess the qualities of animation and direct responsiveness required to assert itself against the appropriations of the reader or to react spontaneously to the new interpretive contexts into which it is placed" (DiCenso 110).[47] DiCenso therefore interprets Gadamer's penchant for dialogue as resulting from a traditional paradigm that regards language as dependent upon the presence of human beings (110).

In this sense, there are in fact two contradictory models of understanding present in Gadamer's work: a model based on disclosure and a model on conversation (DiCenso 111).

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[47] A dialogue, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "a conversation carried on between two or more persons; a colloquy, talk together." DiCenso's definition of the human subject as the entity with "direct responsiveness required to assert himself or to react spontaneously" to the always-changing contexts is reminiscent of Turing test. A pioneer in the field of artificial intelligence, Alan Turing, in his 1950 epoch-making "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind,* Vol. LIX, No. 236 (1950), pp. 433-460, proposed a criterion to decide whether machines could think as human beings. In the so-called "Imitation Game," a machine and a human assistant are in a room, and in another room is an interrogator whose goal is to determine which of the other two is a machine and which is the human subject through a series of questions posed to them. In a word, whether in Gadamer or artificial intelligence, the ability to dialogue is a necessary condition for a human subject.

DiCenso argues, "It is because language has a disclosive capacity, and is not simply a tool, that the critical and ethical developments of which Gadamer speaks can occur within hermeneutical inquiry. However, this disclosive capacity becomes distorted and curtailed by the model of understanding based upon the conversation between individuals" (111). That is, an inconsistency can be teased out in Gadamer's hermeneutics. While Gadamer maintains that language transcends (inter) subjectivity, he, however, also asserts that understanding is achieved only through a model based on the conversational interactions among subjects: "language has its true being only in conversation, in the exercise of understanding between people" (*TM* 404).[48]

Up to this point we are informed of two interrelated self-contradictions in Gadamerian dialogue in philosophical

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[48] In his book focusing on Martin Buber's dialogical hermeneutics *The Text as Thou,* Kepnes enumerates three different I-Thou relationships described by Gadamer. In the first type, the text as a Thou is treated as merely a silent object (Kepnes 27). This attitude might be best exemplified by New Criticism, according to which the core concern of literary criticism is to perform an anatomical dissection of literary works. In New Criticism, "one's perception of the work is considered to be separate from the work itself, and the task of literary interpretation is to speak about the 'work itself.' The author's intentions, too, are held rigidly separate from the work; the work is a 'being' in itself, a being with its own powers and dynamics" (*HIT* 5). The second type of I-Thou relationship is to consider the text as "a historically unique entity" (Kepnes 27). Since in this case the primary task of the interpreter is understanding the text in his own terms instead of being open to the otherness of the Thou, Kepnes asserts that for Gadamer this inauthentic dialogical model is typified by Romantic hermeneutics (28). The third type is of course the dialogical model Gadamer himself proposes. And because they are not totally open to conversation, the first two types possess the "I-It" relationship as Buber calls it (Kepnes 27).

hermeneutics. The first one refers to the vacillation in Gadamer's attitude toward writing, and the other involves the inherent conflict between language's disclosive and conversational natures. But a deeper and further scrutiny of dialogue can still usher in more results to help us clarify the nature of dialogue. David Couzens Hoy, for example, issues several challenges to the validity and propriety of the dialogical model in philosophical hermeneutics.[49] Despite the differences among these problems, they are all centered upon the distinction between speech and writing. In order to shed new light on this notion, we shall draw upon the work of Ricoeur and Derrida to offer a more distinct articulation.

For Ricoeur, the difference between writing and speech acts as a pivotal issue in hermeneutics. Ricoeur asserts that the problem of interpretation arises "not so much because of the incommunicability of the psychic experience of the author, but because of the very nature of the verbal intention of the text" (*IT* 76).[50] For Ricoeur, a hermeneutics without taking into consideration the unique attributes of the text is almost unimaginable: "To the extent that hermeneutics is text-oriented interpretation . . . no interpretation theory is possible that does

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[49] I am not to address myself to all the problems raised by Hoy, but it is worthwhile to cite the problems he raises: "Is dialogue . . . an appropriate model for the task of generating a hermeneutic theory of poetic interpretation? Is dialogue only a metaphor for the process of interpretation, and a limited one because of the obvious difference between speaking and writing? . . . Can the text 'tell' us when an interpretation is 'out of context'? Is dialogue an appropriate model for the hermeneutical investigation of texts?" (1978: 77)

[50] *IT* refers to *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian UP, 1976).

not come to grips with the problem of writing" (*IT* 25). What makes writing as a medium so different from, let us say, the human voice, countenance, or gesticulation? Ricoeur's answer, if compared to that of Derrida, is quite simple: "What happens in writing is the full manifestation of something that is in a virtual state, something nascent and inchoate, in living speech, namely the detachment of meaning from the event" (*IT* 25).[51] Nevertheless, it is worth our attention that instead of taking a philosophical path, Ricoeur resorts to Roman Jakobson in his discussion of writing.[52] Ricoeur basically holds that when it comes to a written text the dialogical model needs some modifications: "The dialogical situation has been exploded. The relation writing-reading is no longer a particular case of the relation speaking-hearing" (*IT* 29). It is true that in the dialogical situation all references are "situational," yet writing brings with it the capability to smash the ground of reference due to the spatial and temporal distance between reader and writer (*IT* 35).[53] This extension of the extent of reference

[51] When Ricoeur claims that writing marks the detachment of meaning from the event, Derrida is in his mind. Yet Ricoeur does not totally agree with Derrida over the issue of writing; for Ricoeur, Derrida's argument about writing overlooks "the grounding of . . . the actualization of discourse in the dialectical constitution of discourse" (*IT* 26).

[52] According to Jakobson, there are six factors in communicative discourse: "the speaker, hearer, medium or channel, code, situation, and message" (*IT* 26). In addition, Jakobson relates six correlative functions to each of the factors: "the emotive, conative, phatic, metalinguistic, referential, and poetic functions" (*IT* 26). And it is noticeable that besides Jakobson, Ricoeur has cited Benveniste, Saussure, Hjelmslev, Chomsky, Austin, and Searle in his examination of philosophical hermeneutics.

[53] Therefore, writing "*remains* in a monumentality which we shall soon see linked to death" (Bennington and Derrida 45). Derrida has proposed the

beyond the dialogical situation, argues Ricoeur, marks a milestone in human history:

> Thanks to writing, man and only man has a world and not just a situation. This extension is one more example of the spiritual implications of the substitution of material marks for the bodily support of oral discourse. In the same manner that the text frees its meaning from the tutelage of the mental intention, it frees its reference from the limits of situational reference. (*IT* 36)

In other words, Ricoeur maintains that only writing, in its surpassing the limitations set by the dialogical situation, can reveal "[the] destination of discourse as projecting a world" (*IT* 37).

More importantly, the obvious difference between speech and writing serves as another departure point to look into the distinction between Gadamer's and Ricoeur's hermeneutical paradigms. Aylesworth is right in the observation that Ricoeur, unlike Gadamer, lays insistence on "the reflective distance of the text as a linguistic object" (63). In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, interpretation is mainly seen as an understanding of Being rather than a matter of methodology. Ricoeur does not completely deny this point, yet he believes that it is unnecessary or, more precisely, inappropriate to completely disconnect understanding from methodology. On the contrary, hermen-

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example of writing letters to explicate the possible linkage between death and writing: it is not necessary for the writer to be dead for the reader to be able to read the letter, but it is necessary for the reader to be able to read the letter even if the writer is dead. For Derrida, this kind of possibility is an "essential or necessary possibility" and the mortality of the writer is thus inscribed in everything he inscribes (Bennington and Derrida 51).

eutics, according to Ricoeur, should entail "an epistemological function vis-à-vis the human sciences" (Aylesworth 63).[54] Put simply, for Ricoeur the text is in no way a "thou," but signifies a distanciation of meaning from event. What is distanciation? In "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,"[55] Ricoeur, unquestionably with Gadamer in mind, does not offer a clear-cut definition. Yet he explicitly asserts that the written text is "the paradigm of the distanciation in all communication" (HFD 130). For Ricoeur, the autonomy of the written text from the intention of the author is hermeneutically important: "Distanciation is not the product of our methodology and therefore is not something added and parasitic, rather it is constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as written. At the same time, it is also the condition of interpretation. 'Distanciation' is not only what understanding must conquer, but also its condition" (HFD 133). Moreover, this quotation perhaps reveals one of Ricoeur's most important contributions

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[54] Though not entirely applicable to the confrontation between Gadamer and Ricoeur, Hoy's analysis of the key differences between epistemology and hermeneutics can still serve as a useful reference. According to Hoy, the theory of knowledge (epistemology) presupposes "(1) a privileged standpoint as the guarantee of certainty; (2) perception as the paradigm case; (3) the atemporal truth of instances of knowledge claims; and (4) the impotence of reflection to disrupt self-evident tenets" (1986: 399). On the contrary, hermeneutics maintains "(1) that there is no uniquely privileged standpoint for understanding; (2) that reading rather than seeing is the paradigm case for the phenomenon of understanding; (3) that understanding changes, and thus interpretations require continual reexamination; and (4) that any interpretive understanding is laden with self-understanding, however implicit, so that changes in the latter eventuate in changes in the former" (399).

[55] Hereafter cited as HFD.

to hermeneutics: a text does not necessarily lead to the real world; instead, a text simply refers to its own world as a starting point for "self-understanding and a potential mode of existing" (Pellauer 104). On the other hand, in emphasizing the importance of the text in hermeneutics, Ricoeur once again makes clear his detachment from the Romantic hermeneutics' belief that the purpose of interpretation is to understand the author better than he understood himself. The assertion that the written text owns its own universe in fact reveals the fundamental difference between Gadamer and Ricoeur in terms of their respective attitudes toward the dialogical model. Where Gadamer asserts that the elimination of distanciation is the prerequisite for an authentic understanding, Ricoeur maintains that it is distanciation that makes understanding possible. In the words of Aylesworth, Gadamerian "exclusively ontological hermeneutics . . . divorces philosophy from its integrative function and leaves the humanistic disciplines without a general hermeneutics to mediate their difference" (65).

Like Ricoeur, Derrida is not in agreement with Gadamer's dialogical model. However, many critics have pointed out that Gadamer and Derrida have more in common than imagined. Both of them, following Heidegger, allow no room for "a transcendental, language-free standpoint for human under-standing" (MP 1).[56] Besides this similarity, for Gadamer and Derrida, language, as "the scene of our finitude" (MP 1) is in its own right a primary philosophical concern. Gadamer himself once claims that within the French scene, it is Derrida with

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[56] MP refers to the "Introduction" written by Diane Michelfelder and Richard Palmer in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 1-18.

whom he shares the most starting points due to the simple fact that Derrida also comes from Heidegger (HL 114). Moreover, Derrida's critique of French structuralism is not incompatible with Gadamer in every aspect. For example, in a significant essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss sounds somewhat like an echo of Gadamer's radical division between truth and method (Hoy 1978: 83). That is, Lévi-Strauss' admiration for methodological rigor and scientific objectivity[57] is, according to Derrida, doomed to failure in view of the fact that this kind of act is still caught in a myth that the right method leads necessarily to truth.[58] But the similarity between Gadamer and Derrida stops here and the point of conflict, ironically, also begins with Heidegger. Where Derrida accuses Heidegger of misinterpreting Nietzsche, Gadamer defends Heidegger by arguing that Heidegger has in fact proposed a remarkable and appropriate interpretation of Nietzsche.[59] However, the pivotal divergence between Gadamer and Derrida is not limited to their different interpretations of Heidegger. What really matter are

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[57] In an interview whose source I cannot provide now, Lévi-Strauss remarked that the only journal he would carefully read from start to end for every issue is *Scientific American*. In addition, Lévi-Strauss asserts in *The Naked Man* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990) that scientific knowledge, despite some negative effects in its applications, is "a mode of knowledge whose absolute superiority cannot be denied" (636).

[58] Gadamer, in fact, once claims that the principle of deconstruction is quite similar to what he is doing: "Derrida, too, is endeavoring to supersede any metaphysical realm of meaning which governs words and their meanings" ("Destruktion and Deconstruction" 112). Henceforth cited as DD.

[59] For a further understanding of this confrontation, see David Farrel Krell, "'Ashes, ashes, we all fall . . .': Encountering Nietzsche," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, pp. 222-232.

their conflicting concepts of interpretation. Gadamer's model for the act of interpretation is a dialogical one between the interpreter and the text. Derrida, by contrast, argues that since language is always already writing, the dialogical model is unavoidably infiltrated by logocentricism. Seebohm even asserts that for Derrida hermeneutics fails to remove all the fetters of metaphysics: "logocentricism, priority of presence, wholeness, and identity" (278).

It is noteworthy that Gadamer is fully aware of Derrida's attack against him. In almost every essay he authors in *Dialogue and Deconstruction*, Gadamer never fails to touch upon the problematic of logocentricism. But it is in "Destruktion and Deconstruction" that Gadamer makes a vigorous defense of himself by, at the same time, laying bare the weakness in Derrida's approach. Asserting that there are two ways to "overcome the ontological self-determination belonging to dialectic," Gadamer points out:

> One is the path from dialectic back to dialogue, back to conversation. This(sic) the way I myself have attempted to travel in my philosophical hermeneutics. The other is the way shown primarily by Derrida, the path of deconstruction. On this path, the awakening of a meaning hidden in the life and liveliness of conversation is not an issue. Rather, it is in an ontological concept of *écriture*—not idle chatter nor even true conversation but the background network of meaning-relations lying at the basis of all speech—that the very integrity of sense as such is to be dissolved, thereby accomplishing the authentic shattering of metaphysics. (109)

Here it is easy to detect Gadamer's insistence on the superiority

of dialogue over deconstruction from his assertion that he goes beyond Derrida because "a word exists only in conversation . . . as the totality of a way of accounting by means of speaking and answering" (DD 112).[60]

Up to this point, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that Gadamer's hermeneutics is, as Risser calls it, a hermeneutics of

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[60] Perhaps to the surprise of many, Gadamer, in arguing that dialogue is synonymous with the logic of question and answer, alludes to Jacques Lacan: "Jacques Lacan was right when he said that the word not directed to another person is such an empty word. Just this suggests the primacy that must be accorded to the kind of conversation that evolves as question and answer and builds up a common language" (DD 106). This quotation is redolent of Lacan's assertion that "A signifier represents the subject for another signifier." The first half of this formula "a signifier represents the subject" would be easier to understand if we grasp the point that Lacan designates the one who speaks as the "subject." The ego, for Lacan, is still the one who *sees* oneself in the other; on the other hand, the subject is the one who *speaks* to the other (Borch-Jakobsen 78). This definition is quite important for Lacan; in other words, speaking is the prerequisite for the constitution of a subject. Since speaking is the indispensable condition for the constitution of the subject, Lacan contends that to speak presupposes an intention to signify (Borch-Jakobsen 78). Therefore, there is no speech without signifying a subject expressing oneself even though this speech is absurd, nonsensical, or simply insignificant (in fact, such kind of speech is a common occurrence in the analytic situation). That is why "language, before signifying something, signifies for someone" (Borch-Jakobsen 78). Therefore, it would not be imprudent to conclude that for both Gadamer and Lacan language serves as the indispensable medium through which a subject expresses oneself through the other. For a more thorough understanding of "A signifier represents the subject for another signifier," see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 21-27. For a possible link between Gadamer and psychoanalysis, see Sven Daelemans and Tullio Maranhão, "Psychoanalytic Dialogue and the Dialogical Principle," in *The Interpretation of Dialogue* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990), pp. 219-241.

the voice (1997: 172).[61] For Gadamer, language is tantamount to living voice—the only proper medium of dialogue. Risser, citing both Augustine and Aquinas, argues that the voice in the Gadamerian sense is some kind of inner word (*verbum interius*) (176). The implication of this assertion is that dialogue, in the hands of Gadamer, has been elevated to a mystical level:

> The mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps us to break up our own bias and narrowness, even before he opens his mouth to make a reply. That which becomes a dialogical experience for us here is not limited to the sphere of arguments and counterarguments the exchange and unification of which may be the end meaning of every confrontation. Rather, as the experiences that have been described indicate, there is something else in this experience, namely, a potentiality for being other [*Andersseins*] that lies beyond every coming to agreement about what is common. (TI 26)

The most significant limitation of Gadamerian dialogue might be epitomized by this quotation. Gadamer's claim that his hermeneutics is descriptive rather than exegetical is absolutely justifiable,[62] but the overemphasis on dialogue might counteract

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[61] As Risser notes, Gadamer in "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences" argues that the goal of hermeneutics is "to let what is alienated by the character of the written word or by the character of being distanciated by cultural or historical distances speak again. This is hermeneutics: to let what seems to be far and alienated speak again. But in all the effort to bring the far near . . . we should never forget that the ultimate justification or end is to bring it near so that it speaks in a new voice. Moreover, it should speak not only in a new voice but in a clearer voice" (qtd. in Risser 1997: 212-13).

[62] Gadamer, in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*,

the considerable contributions it has made to philosophical hermeneutics. In a word, as an unquestionably elegant and beautiful metaphor for what underlies the phenomenon of understanding, dialogue is eligible in terms of ethical and aesthetic considerations. However, it should be remembered that whatever hermeneutics is, it should be something different from ethics.

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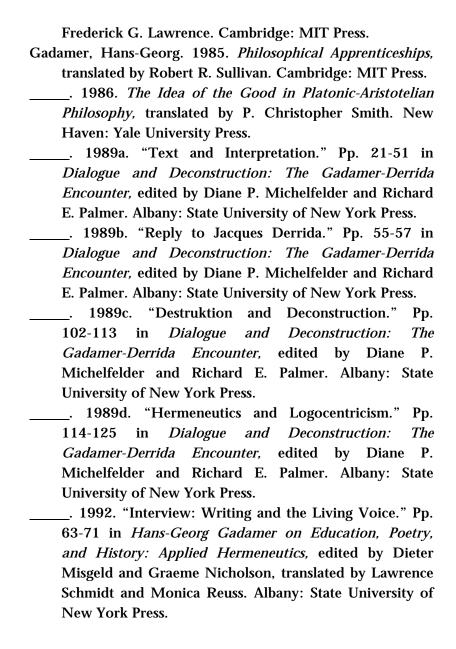
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contends that he is not proposing a new or better method for finding the correct meaning of texts (xvi).

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Hans-Georg Gadamer

Jacques Derrida   phonocentricism

                                                                Paul

Ricoeur   distanciation