

Philosophical Hermeneutics: Between Gadamer and Ricoeur

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is a comparison between the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and that of Paul Ricoeur. The first part delineates the origins and background of their approaches: Heideggerian ontology; philosophical anthropology and Husserlian phenomenology. The respective views on the nature of language are examined with focus on motivations. In outlining two variants of philosophical hermeneutics the attention is on the vision for a discourse of the human sciences. Here is also traced a complex idea (Ricoeur) for the role of 'imagination' in-between 'text' and 'action'. A summary-segment at this stage prepares for the inquiry on the relevance of temporality. In a second part, juxtaposing the aspects of the latter makes possible a clarity for the guiding motifs of the two thinkers. The concluding part is an overview of the option for critique and correspondingly of the advantages of different hermeneutical tasks.

I. *Two foundations of the human sciences*

1. A preliminary comparison: backgrounds and reasons

The philosophical projects of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur originate in the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Gary Madison (1994) lists several concepts of such a background. With the conception of '*reduction*' (1) Husserl displaced the constitutive notions of epistemological problematic: 'objective,' 'external', 'world in-itself' and correlative 'knowledge' consisting in 'representations' on the part of a subjectivity which 'transcends' itself - 'cognizing' by means of ideas (within the 'mind') that 'refer to' facts or states of affairs. This framework (Husserl 1990: 19; 1983: 57) effects the insight that consciousness has its own essence which is not touched by the phenomenological bracketing. The result of such clarification is that "only transcendental subjectivity has ontologically the meaning of Absolute Being [...]; whereas the real world indeed exists, but in respect of essence is relative to transcendental subjectivity" (Husserl 1983: 14) The latter is the ultimate source of meaning-constitution for all transcendencies (1983: 113). In *Cartesian Meditations*, the world shifts (via reduction) firstly from the being-outside-me to the being-for-me; then from the being-for-me to the being-in-me (Husserl 1977: 60, 100). Heidegger rejected the primacy of pure consciousness as basis for constitutional analysis. As Man-to Tang (2016: 70) recalls, this type of constitution needs no extra-mental thing. He writes (2016: 68-69) that, for Alfred Schutz (1959: 88), Husserl did not engage with a concrete problem like the place of the other. Taking for granted the status of being of consciousness, its attributions are self-positing (Heidegger 2009: 108, 112). According to Paul Ricoeur (1983: 190) the development of the

notion of *Lebenswelt* (2) played a role for the evolution of Husserl's method towards hermeneutics. Ricoeur (1966: 14) adds that the transcendental *ego* tends to posit itself and remains in the circle of self's return to itself. He recalls (1981: 54) that it is part of the structure of *Dasein* as being (Heidegger) to have an ontological pre-understanding of being. Ricoeur's main contributions are theories of symbols (embedded in myths), metaphor and narrative. He develops a detour account of the meaning constitution in the human sciences.

Additional contextual topic is the so-called divide between existential phenomenology and theory of *Erkenntnis* (Gordon 2010). Thora Ilin Bayer (2010: 10-12) notes that while Martin Heidegger's book on Kant (1929) approached the first Critique not as an epistemology of scientific cognition, on issues of human condition and freedom Ernst Cassirer's later approach also went beyond epistemology of science. The fourth volume of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1928) confronted *Lebensphilosophie*. On Cassirer's view, *Geist* is a transformation of the movement of *Leben* (Bayer 2010: 8). A reference close to this theme (Buttigieg 2014: 4-6) points to antiquity's view upon the self-maintaining totality of nature. In such lineage for Gadamer our condition holds both expertise and freedom (1996: 102-3, 109; Buttigieg 10-12), but re-connects to the explication of fore-structuring; *fore-having*, *fore-sight*, *fore-conception* (Heidegger 1962: 191). By virtue of our existence, we possess a 'pre-ontological,' never fully thematizable understanding of 'being'. 'Pre-understanding' is also a rejection of the idealistic "project of self-constitution and self-transparency" (Jervolino 1990: 24). Understanding itself is rather that which we most fundamentally are, including our being inseparable from the other *Dasein* (*Mitsein*) (Heidegger 1962: 149-168); '*being-in-the-world*' (3) is a relation prior the level of cognition (1962: 90). Another hermeneutical notion, which Madison refers to in this context, is '*facticity*' (4) - the sense that our interpretations can never achieve transparency, and that there can be no traditional 'science' of existence (Madison 1994: 247). The conception of *Dasein* opposes the view that affirms the power of man to make the world of *Geist* through symbolic forms (Bayer 2010). In his 1928 review of Cassirer's analysis of mythical thought, Heidegger concluded: "But with all that the fundamental philosophical problem of myth is not yet attained: in what way does myth belong to *Dasein* as such; in what respect, after all, is it an essential phenomenon within a universal interpretation of being (*Sein*) and its modifications?" (Bayer 2010: 13; Verene 1979: 34-6). Accordingly, any self-driven activity must meet the terms of finite existence. For Peter Gordon (2010: 7), "[...] we discover ourselves in the midst of conditions we had no share in creating and cannot hope to control. [...] The phenomenon of 'disclosedness' rejects the sense of human consciousness that is free to make a world". "The experience in question cannot be a project of *Geist*; it depends upon a breakthrough (*Einbruch*). For Heidegger, man exists only in very few glimpses of the pinnacle of his own possibility, but otherwise moves in the midst of his beings." (Gordon 2010: 194-95; Bayer, 14). Cassirer (1946: 293) developed a counter-critique. The final chapter of *The Myth of the State* refers to the ethical sense of action - a free agent's motives, judgment and conviction of what moral duty is (Bayer 13-14); what is identified as '*thrownness*' is not a solution. For Cassirer (1946: 293) a crucial dialectic -

between life and the possibility of spirit - depends on self-determination. Looking for the term of “spontaneity” (*Spontaneität*) around this formulation, Bayer notes that he adopts the term “symbolic pregnance” from the “law of pregnance” of *Gestalt* psychology. Symbolic form might be regarded as the product of the human condition, not the condition itself. Gordon (2010: 17) finds this theme in an early study, *Freiheit und Form* (1916), which connects Kant’s concept of ‘autonomy’ and ‘self-legislation of spirit’ (*Selbstgesetzlichkeit des Geistes*). Bayer (2010: 15) refers to “the process of man’s progressive *self-liberation*” (Cassirer 1944: 228) and emphasizes the role of a project of philosophical idealism for the philosophy of culture. In other words, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hegel’s conception for the development of consciousness) without its telos of *absolute knowledge*. In Bayer’s summary, forms of spirit (*Geist*) resonate with symbolic forms of culture: Hegel’s conception of the self as building upon its own acts is affirmed in Cassirer’s idea for the self-active process of symbolic formation of experience.

As Madison states, the recognition of the above-discussed feature – *finitude* (5) - explains why it is impossible to posit a correct interpretation of a text (traditional hermeneutics). Ontological hermeneutics has for its object an elucidation of the basic structures of human existence (Madison 1994: 247; Heidegger 1962: 183-94): the mode of becoming, that is, possible ways in which we could be (‘potentiality-for being’). *Auslegung* (explication, laying-out) belongs to our pre-predicative understanding and becomes interpretation - a derivative disclosure of what is already ‘understood in fore-structures.’ Heidegger’s example of textual interpretation (as starting from the undiscussed assumption of the interpreter) accentuates that ‘anticipatory’ character ‘must...already operate in that which is understood’ (Madison: 248). This circle is the condition of possibility of our understanding anything at all. The hermeneutics of Gadamer emphasizes ‘*historicity*’ and the ‘rehabilitation’ of *prejudice* (pre-reflective judgment) as integral (1976: 58; Madison, 250). He shows that understanding aims towards *effective history* of the subject-matter - the history of an influence. His concern is with “what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing,” with what occurs whenever we seek to understand something (Gadamer 1989: xvi, xix; Madison, 244); the perspective of the being of that which is understood. Understanding happens to us by means of our ‘belonging’ to history. That consciousness is situated within a process of tradition marks a different knowledge in the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) and the ontological status of their questioning (Gadamer 1979: 106, 112-13; 1989: 325, 329, 333). They thematize something handed down to us by the tradition(s) to which we belong. The hermeneutical ‘*consciousness of effective history*’ is ‘the consciousness in which history is effectively at work’; ‘both what seems to us worth enquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation’ are pre-determined (Gadamer 1989: 267, 268; Madison, 252). Such conception encompasses the horizons where (in the case of intercultural understanding) we attain to a ‘hermeneutical consciousness’ of the other. The example is ‘conversation’: thinking historically is not necessarily agreeing with, or seeing oneself in the meaning of what is been handed down. This implies that an *Aufhebung*

of differences is not total. In practical or pragmatic terms, “old and new continually grow together to make something of living value” (Gadamer 1989: 270, 273; Madison: 253).

Ricoeur admits that hermeneutics acknowledges “the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed” (1981: 87, 96), but he does not accept the opposition of *Naturwissenschaften* to *Geisteswissenschaften*. Wilhelm Dilthey maintained that the proper object of the latter is the lived experience of agents; as it manifests itself in ‘written monuments’ and other expressions of their inner psychic life and world-views. Accordingly, as reconstruction of objectifications of life, ‘understanding’ is a matter of interpretation of outward ‘expressions’, or imaginative re-living of the ‘experience’ of others. Ricoeur aligns himself with what he sees as “an integral part of hermeneutics as it is of the Husserlian phenomenology from which it derives” (1990: 201–2) – an opposition to objectivism. This includes ‘desubjectivizing’ the notion of meaning, specifying ‘explanation’ in the human sciences and incorporating the idea of the text’s independence of both author and reader (Ricoeur 1983: 194-95). While for Ricoeur “consciousness, even before its awakening as such, belongs to and depends on that which affects it” (1981: 74), he is also attentive to methodology against the authority of tradition. Gadamer states that continually presupposed history is not an obstacle to genuine understanding. Respectively, ‘truth’ is an existential concept which designates a possible mode of being-in-the-world – a dialectical ‘openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself’ (Gadamer 1989: 319). Ricoeur concurs that tradition and investigation are fused by a bond which no critique could resolve without destroying the research (1981: 76; Madison: 252). While “the tension between the other and oneself is unsurpassable” (1981: 75), Ricoeur (1979a) also claims a place where to live and think with our opponents. He argues for a notion of subject recovered via a detour - subjectivity “must be lost as radical origin, if it is to be recovered” (1981: 113). The human sciences can attain this sense of foundation - “[...]to transcend the ego would be both to retain it and to suspend it as the supreme instance” - “only after the intersubjective detour of interpretation” (Ricoeur 1967: 232-33). Thus, from existential interrelationship, Ricoeur moves to the ‘I’ as a ‘self’ being with and interpreted by the others (Kearney 2004: 5). He marks reflexive verbs to illustrate a form of “*relation, at once active and reflective, of the self with the self*” (Tang 2016: 73-74).

How does Ricoeur appropriate Husserl’s model of *Paarung* in the context of the word? In this process of ante-predicative experience (*analogical transfer* brought into play in the experience of the Other), a new experience is always founded in an originary one. It provides the association of the analogy between similarities (ego – alter-ego) through passive synthesis. Here *apperception* is the meaning-constitution of the Other in virtue of *pairing* between my body here and the other body there. As the index of an alien life, concordant behavior remains the only ‘verification’. As a modification of my ego in an “asymmetrical or non-reciprocal” relation (1967: 131, 197), the Other cannot be reduced to my ‘sphere of ownness’. Ricoeur opts for a couple configuration (Tang 2016: 74-76): taking an alien body as a symbol-body with literal and symbolic meanings (1974: 31). According to non-idealistic resources in

Husserl's *Ideas II*, the body, as organ of the will, cannot be fully explicated through *pairing*. The spiritual life of the Other is sedimented in imprinted sense (a cultural object) which cannot be reduced to my primordial sphere. Therefore the justification of the 'I' is found in the co-presence of others (1981: 203). The meaning of *self-esteem* is established as a reciprocal relationship - *through opinion*. For Ricoeur, the embodied, affected '*self*' is among others who are "seeking for mutual recognition" (1986: 121, 128). The "I"'s quest for itself is never complete, because team work is of "a different ontological style" (1967: 126, 211). In Ricoeur's early approach, for each of these features of man's existence there is a style (of description) which may also be ideological (1981: 226-27, 230).

2. Philosophical hermeneutics and the nature of language

On Gadamer's view the phenomenological method teaches us that the relation between language and world parallels that between consciousness and world, or that there is an 'affiliation': language has no independent life apart from the world that comes within it. As a postulate of meaningfulness (expressibility) he sums up: "*Being that can be understood is language*" (Gadamer 1989: 432). Not merely 'signs' that 'refer' to a pre-given reality, the words are the means by which things exist for us. Practically or pragmatically speaking, there is no totally extra-linguistic reality (Madison: 257). On this thesis for '*linguisticity of the world*' (*Sprachlichkeit* of experience) not linguistic forms of interpretation presuppose language. Understanding is *linguistic* through and through. Language is the effective-historical mediation of tradition. The quality of the past that continues to be present is the concretion of both (Gadamer 1989: 350-51), and this applies even to the presence of art. Gadamer elaborates that the linguistic form which the interpretation of understanding finds must contain within it an infinite dimension that transcends all bounds. But also: "Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, i.e., it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates" (1989: 245). Still, experience is infinitely expressible - there is always 'an infinity of what is not said' (Gadamer, 1989: 365, 426; Madison: 256). From this point of view, the 'conversation that we ourselves are' is the example for what is itself an instance of language as *praxis* (1989: 340, 404). Its commonality (the arrival at *agreement*) is made by what is the 'topic' or 'subject' (*die Sache*).

For Ricoeur, self-understanding is mediated by signs, symbols and texts; language is the primary condition of human experience (1983: 191). According to Van Leeuwen (1981), this position implies a super-abundant meaning and an abundance of non-sense (Ricoeur 1974: 411). That is, bringing experience to language is making it become itself (Ricoeur 1981: 115; Madison, 256); discourse strives to bring into language a way of Being-in-the-world (1983: 196). In his plea for analytical precision, Ricoeur accepts the semiological inside-code of the system - neither subject, nor reference, nor communication - into a 'phenomenology of language' which is based on the pair of *epoche* and symbolic function

(1974: 242-53). As a parallel to the ‘actualisation of our linguistic competence in performance,’ what text communicates to a subject is a possible mode of being-in-the-world. Ricoeur articulates the ‘effect’ of the subject’s encounters with text and ‘other’ (Madison 1994: 259).

According to Gadamer text-interpretation seeks to let speak again what was alienated or distanced (1989: 260). It aims to articulate what is ontologically presupposed; objectivity is “confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out” (Gadamer 1989: 237). But in the first place, what is being communicated to a reader is ‘the meaning of the text itself’ (1989: 335; Madison, 260). In order to understand what constitutes the significance of a traditional text, an interpreter must relate it to particular hermeneutical situation. We have grasped a meaning, only when we are able to relate (*‘apply’*) what a text says to our own (historical) situation (Gadamer 1989: 275-76, 289). As explicating textual meanings in *‘application,’* interpretation is an encounter equivalent to joining the author in a conversation on the issue at stake (1989: 259-60, 345). To the extent that there occurs a ‘fusion’ of the ‘horizon’ of the text with the ‘horizon’ of the reader, the *meaning of the text* exists in the form of an event – a challenge to our presupposition expands our horizon (Madison: 261). In his lectures at the University of Louvain (1957), Gadamer argues that “[...] in reality, it [time] is the ground which supports the arrival of the past and where the present takes its roots. ‘Temporal distance’ is not a distance in the sense of a distance to be overcome... Actually, it is rather a matter of considering *‘temporal distance’* as a fundament of *positive and productive* possibilities for understanding” (1979: 155-56). The inseparability of *understanding, interpretation* and *application* rejects the ‘representation’ of an in-itself state of affairs. If the ‘hermeneutical situation’ is productive, a tradition must always be understood differently. Because they don’t deny ‘becoming’, effective history of language and conversation are not obstacles to reason. Tradition is not uncritical acceptance (Gadamer 1979: 108). We examine presuppositions beyond the insistence upon what is held to be true, yet, a total critique of what is being handed-down is impossible. Gadamer retrieves Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis* - “situated judgment” which seeks to determine ‘what is feasible, what is possible, what is correct’ (1989: xxv; Madison, 263-64). A codetermining relation obtains between a text (universal that has no real meaning apart from its application and yet is not reducible to its particular) and various interpretations (*‘applications’*) of it. Hence, ‘the procedure of the human sciences’ is to discover and recognise a valid meaning by restatement through the present. If text-interpretation is an instance of practical reasoning, it must be possible to make a claim and argue beyond both objectivism and relativism (Gadamer 1981: 111).

To some extent the stance of Ricoeur shares Gadamer’s attempt at a ‘non-subjective’ theory of meaning. Both draw upon section 32 of *Being and Time*, which locates the primacy of judgement in the structure of understanding as a structure of anticipation in which the world is never approached without some previous notion of that world (*‘fore-structure of understanding’*). “*This structure contains the seeds both of a certain rehabilitation of prejudice as pre-judgment and of a critical requirement in regard to prejudices insofar as they create an obstacle*

for an authentic relationship with the thing itself. In other words, the critical moment is required by the work of partitioning into authentic and inauthentic experience; this work takes place at the level of the structure of anticipation, at the level of pre-understanding.” (Ricoeur 1978:18). According to Ricoeur, the methodical expression of this structure consists in *judgment upon tradition*. Such attention elucidates the meaning of the past, which lies within tradition, *by a remaking* of this world of human action *through the narration*. The latter provides a connection between our ‘belonging-to-history’ and the Husserlian method of *Rückfrage* or of ‘questioning back’ (from the idealizations of the natural sciences to the ‘life-world’). In this way, for Ricoeur, the discipline of (narrated) history is the objectification of the primary relation.

Madison (265) differentiates respective accents on text-interpretation. (1) Ricoeur insists that the notion of ‘experiential truth’ (Gadamer) neglects scientific concern. His own ‘methodological’ hermeneutics aims to mediate the ‘conflict of interpretations’ and to incorporate validation into interpretation theory (1981: 212–13). (2) According to Ricoeur, ‘the dialogical model’ cannot conceptualize the relationship between reader and text; ‘the paradigm of reading’ is rather the concrete act in which the destiny of a text is fulfilled (1981: 146-7, 203, 210). Ricoeur accentuates the written ‘fixation’ of discourse: with the text’s emancipation, the intention of the author and the meaning of the text cease to coincide (1981: 139, 145, 200, 201). (3) In Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* is discerned an opposition between ‘belonging’ (participation within tradition) and ‘distantiation’. For Ricoeur, the latter is a perspective for objectivity via the phenomenon of ‘textuality’. This mode is *productive*, because in ‘alienating’ a text from its original context, it frees the text for being ‘reactualized.’ *Distanciation* constitutes the written text, in which hermeneutics incorporates a critical moment. Ricoeur calls this reactualization ‘*appropriation*’, or ““to make one’s own” what was initially “alien”” (1981: 185). Madison notes that the preferred term underscores the central role of the reader, but the text’s audience is one “that it (the text) itself creates” (1981: 139, 202). We might say that the text’s ‘about-ness’ is the ‘*world of the text*’ - an ensemble of meanings (opened up by the text) which eventually meet someone’s particular understanding. For this, its functionality connects up with reality; the ‘intended reference’ is the projecting – “the process which is at work in the text” (1981: 164, 202). The central task of interpretation is the ‘second-order reference’, that is, to explicate the type of being-in-the-world unfolded in front of poetry and novels (1981: 132, 141). Ricoeur’s view of ‘*world of the work*’ aims to approach the *life-world* (Husserl). By opening up, a text suggests ways we ourselves could be (1981: 202, 218). Thus, text-interpretation upgrades the articulation of a theory of subjectivity: the self re-appropriates itself in a two-way relation where the text’s actualization depends on a reader, who (in the process) is given an ‘enlarged’ self. In exposing themselves, readers undergo ‘imaginative variations’ of their selves and receive the existence corresponding to the world proposed’ (Ricoeur 1981: 143, 182, 189). For Madison (268) by linking up the problem of meaning with self-understanding, Ricoeur’s interpretation theory holds a motive of ‘reflexive’ philosophy - the search for meaning of a self’s own life (1981: 158, 192).

3. In-between text and action (Ricoeur)

Ricoeur sketches the methodological relevance of the humanities - their practice and object - as the what, why, how and the consequences of *action*. As 'applied' hermeneutics of texts, the human sciences must *read* the pervasive element of *meaning* (Madison 1994: 269). Following the thesis of cultural anthropology - agents are 'suspended in webs of significance' spun by themselves (Geertz 1973: 5-9), - human action is significative (intention, teleology, purpose). For Ricoeur, this issue is also methodological. According to *The Model of the Text* (1984b), 'objectifying' comes with the 'fixation' of meaning by writing. Text-interpretation reveals 'the internal dynamic which governs the structuring of the work' (Ricoeur 1983: 193). Action can only be viewed as a 'quasi text.' For Ricoeur, the social dimension is constituted in action's detachment from its agent. As a phenomenon that has unintended effects, our deeds are drawn or rather 'inscribed' (Ricoeur 1981: 206). An autonomous meaning that is not reducible to agents' intentions becomes the object of social sciences. Madison (1994: 270) summarizes that their objects are social orders (equivalent to texts) which result from action but are not necessarily of human design. Like texts, the patterns of action are intersubjective. The sociologist explicates objective human events. These 'wholes' are *objective logics*, socio-culturally instituted via plural activities. As object embedded in practices, *meaningful action* surpasses self-interpretations (Madison: 271-72). Because the actors' side of interpretation bears discrepancies (between what people do and what they say they do), the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Nietzsche, Marx, Freud) is re-introduced. Such a critique is integral to Ricoeur's conceptualization of a way to resolve the conflict between 'explanation' and 'understanding'. Because meaning is not 'subjective,' there is a place for explanatory techniques, but their intelligibility is one-sided. The results must be integrated into a wider scope. '*Explanation*', which amounts to a *distanciation* from what is 'said' in the 'world of the text', is necessary for the process of 'appropriation'. This method consists in a transition from primal understanding, through distantiation, to comprehension. The goal is to integrate the stages of the *hermeneutical arc* within a conception of Interpretation (Ricoeur 1981: 218). With due intent on self-understanding, "the final brace of the bridge [is] anchorage of the arc in the ground of lived experience". From this point, social structures must appear as "attempts to cope with perplexities, predicaments and deep-rooted conflicts" (1981: 164, 220). Including such acts into procedures which mediate personal commitment (Ricoeur 1981: 221), expresses the relation between 'teleological nature of action' and 'emplotment' where the measured data achieve intelligibility; "this retrospective glance is made possible by the ideologically guided movement of our expectations when we follow the story" (1981: 277; Madison: 273).

If we juxtapose, Gadamer argues for the universality of hermeneutics on the grounds of *linguisticity*, the range of which is coextensive with 'being that can be understood'. Ricoeur maintains that the object of hermeneutics is *textuality*. In this way, narrative understanding (in storytelling) undermines the opposition between the 'real' and the

'imaginary' - truth becomes a result of productive imagination. In this way, with an accent on the role of the latter in 'fixating' action into institutionalized patterns and in generating historical processes, poetic imagination brings an utopian "force" that is subversive to the 'real'. At the same time, Ricoeur conceives of text-interpretation as a '*hermeneutics of the power-to-be*' (1981: 94) - a basis for a critique of ideology and a possible correction of the illusions of consciousness.

4. Towards a discourse of the human sciences

Commenting on the approach of Gadamer, Gary Aylesworth (1991: 79) points out that the meaning of the *word*, because of its temporality, is realized only historically. This implies a continuity of discourse and rootedness in a common context of experience, through which an integration of the humanities can be achieved via moral-political "solidarity", rather than on epistemological basis (Gadamer 1980b: 74-75). If rhetoric and scientific knowledge are monological, they need the counterbalance of dialogical hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975: 316). On this level, appropriation of texts is more like a "becoming other," that is, a response to the question of the subject-matter of the historical tradition (Aylesworth 1991: 81). Ricoeur's appreciation of methods and techniques leads to *constructing* a "ground" from various discourses, without presupposing a common mediator. Hermeneutics depends upon their legitimate differences. It reflects upon them and attempts (on a cultural-historical level) to recover the self from its 'dispersion' among languages, signs, symbols and texts. As Aylesworth summarizes (1991: 80), the unity of an individual ego is the "ideal *telos*" of hermeneutical practice. In this context Ricoeur's interest (1978: 3) has been in establishing connections between inquiry (research; *Historie*) and its dependency of on the human condition.

Ricoeur describes the historical discipline as a relation between '*belonging-to-history*' and a capacity to place this experience at a *distance* (reflectively). The former is rather to be conceived as co-existence, connectedness, acknowledging each other as similar (simultaneously or in temporal parallel). Thus, subjectivity cannot be made into the foundation of historical experience and knowledge (Langford 2012: 14). This kind of history reflects "*a multitude of temporal fields themselves related as contemporaneous, anterior and posterior within an all encompassing temporal field...*"[1] and is an existential condition. The past becomes the *already* existing process of the transmission of traditions within which individuals are related to their predecessors and successors (Langford 2012: 17-8). Ricoeur (1978: 11) completes his analysis with the so-called "interest for communication" or openness and capacity to be affected by 'belonging-to-history'. The historian is actively involved in producing a knowledge of the past, but if his understanding must become identical with that of others (as experiencing the individual's life which lies behind the particular text), it will elude the specifics of the survival of the past in the present (Ricoeur 1984: 17). For Dilthey, cultural science consists in the theoretical resources that build up upon the general

preconditions for understanding itself. He defines the interest in communication (with the past) as ‘*empathetic understanding*.’ This activity operates upon the externalisation of experience (personal, interior life of another individual) into written signs, in order to produce an objective understanding of the past in the form of an internal experience.[2] For Ricoeur, this conception restricts the capacity of autonomous text and works for the recovery of meaning which remains unchangeable over the course of history. Ricoeur replaces the notion of ‘empathetic understanding’ with a reciprocal relation between the historian’s recounting and the follower of his narrative (Langford 2012: 19). On Dilthey’s view, a transportation into the past (a reader is made contemporary with the author) has a psychological and existential effect (recognition of a life which lies behind the language) - the internal manifestation of the irreducible, vital meaning within the texts of which the domain of the cultural sciences is composed (Langford 2012: 20). Such a conception of the text stems from the view that the expressible is contained in language, in the difference between the act of ‘*saying*’ (event in which experience is externalised) and the ‘*said*’ which continues to have meaning (Ricoeur 1978b: 151–52). The meaning of the written is located solely in a text regarded as a specific entity in its own right (Ricoeur 1978b: 153). Such an autonomy is a condition for thematisation of history. It situates both the historian and the reader as essential elements in the generation of understanding which takes place through the medium of the text. This is also the break made with a mere living in tradition and the acknowledgement of the *distance* that separates those in the present from those in the past. Reflective distance extends individuals’ experience. By recomposing the past histories provide answers to a lack of identification. According to Ricoeur, reconstruction of tradition is the methodical expression of the primacy of judgement in relation to the world (1978: 16). Objectification is that moment in which the relation of ‘belonging-to-history’ is explicitly thematised (Ricoeur 1978b: 165). Such reflection (upon tradition) is textually embedded and transferred to the reader. This process is only completed through ‘appropriation’ engendered from the narrative competence.

Ricoeur’s reformulation of the hermeneutic circle proceeds from a connection between the discourse of text and the interpretation. What has to be interpreted is the kind of world which a text opens up or discloses. In the openness of the historical narration to the reading (Ricoeur 1978b: 164) the act of ‘*appropriation*’ is an intersection between the world of the reader and the world of the text. The synthetic character of narration (coherent structure, contingency and plausibility; not deductible, unpredictable conclusion) makes the activity of following in which the initial progression is replaced by an interest in the reasons, motives and causes. As Langford sums up (2012: 23-24), the autonomous *textual location* is a checking point for the appropriation of the world reconstructed by a historian.

II. Meaning, time and the task of hermeneutics

In examining the views of Gadamer Leonard Lawlor (1991: 90) marks a Hegelian conception of language: 1) the applicability of words to the world is presented in statements (1976: 32; 1989: 467); 2) generalization and concretization of concepts take place in the movement of language (1976b: 13-14); *Darstellung* (presentation) is the event of differentiation between infinite and finite; 3) that the word or statement disappears before what is presented is not just a passage from thought to the here and now (1989: 423-24). When externalized, the word reflects both memory and thinking – in speech the word is simultaneous with formation of intellect (Lawlor 1991: 87-88). When he estimates the thesis of Ricoeur, which keeps also a place for ‘ideal meaning’ in Husserlian terms (1978b: 114) [3], Lawlor (1991: 86) marks a Kantian sense of Idea.

We can outline divergences between the positions of Gadamer and Ricoeur:

(A) in regard to the role of text;

(B) on notions of self and its constitution (in the respective adaptations of Aristotle);

(C) on the work of ‘historicity’ (respectively in dialogue and in narrative).

We might expect that both philosophers agree that the model for hermeneutic understanding must be adequate to the experience of time, but their choices - when specifying the problematic of time and meaning - draw two different tasks for hermeneutics.

1. Gadamer’s way

A. With regard to the text, Gadamer develops sources of non-methodological type. But if mutual understanding is possible only through the mediation of the subject-matter, for him hermeneutics must correct the methodological alienation of the human sciences’ subject matter (Aylesworth 1991: 63-64). The dialectical nature of language attends to the thing itself (the subject-matter of a dialogue between text and reader) and does not arrive at scientific certainty (1980c: 198). Therefore, meaning itself is temporal; being not fixed, it is produced as a third moment that is not already contained (Aylesworth: 73). As something that speaks, the text is inalienable from concomitant historicity; there is no subjugation of discourse to method (1981: 11-2, 72).

B. For Gadamer, the truth about ourselves (self-understanding) is not a matter of knowledge *a posteriori* (1981: 11-5; Aylesworth: 66-67). According to his understanding, experience in terms of practical reason does not culminate in a moment of reflection and remains open (1990: 319; Aylesworth: 68). In Aristotle’s conception *phronesis* (practical judgement) must reconstitute itself in concrete - application to new situation (1990: 278-89; Aylesworth: 67). The constitution of the self as moral character (*ethos*) involves interaction with other/s. This general disposition to act is reconstituted in every concrete application; the *production of meaning* is derivative upon *phronesis*, but is not predetermined (Gadamer 1990: 419, 459).

C. Gadamer suggests that one of our most fundamental experiences of time is that of becoming-other (1970: 348). One of the *epochal experiences* he outlines is the “absolute

epoch” (1972: 235). *Epochal experiences* introduce temporal discontinuity into our self-understanding. Such an understanding of time relates to an event establishing a “caesure” (“brings the flow of time to a standstill”), that is, between what precedes (old) and everything which now comes as new (Gadamer 1970: 349-351). It is not an atemporal objectification, but an opening within temporality itself; occasioned by the poetic word, which dissolves conventional forms of language. According to Aylesworth (75-76), for Gadamer the word of historical tradition can address us in the same way. What is implied is the structure of that which endures in every alteration and articulation of its phases (Gadamer 1990: 346, 349). The notion of *aion* refers to something prior the reflective difference between the soul and the cosmos.

As Lawlor points out (1991:87), for Gadamer conforming one’s speech to the pre-established meanings of words does not imply simple repetition. The *word* also comes to participate in the particular of the situation, in the production and interpretation of works of art and poetry (Gadamer 1989: 428-29). The perspective of “*concept formation*” opposes pre-existing meaning and the teleology in which the end or concept stands outside the process of time (1989: 459, 465-66; Lawlor 1991: 82-3). Gadamer describes presentation as the perfect understanding of a finite listener/reader into the thing itself; the word brings about a new creative event in which meaning discloses itself. This is a peak of the text: “the full equivalency of sense and sound, which turns the text into an eminent text, finds very different kinds of fulfillment in different literary genres” (Gadamer 1980: 8; Ross 2003: 156).

2. Ricoeur’s way

Conversation repeats codified formulas of words’ polysemy, but singularity and wholeness direct the hearer to “screen” the unintended (1977: 130-131, 151-152). Ricoeur points out the nature of hermeneutical experience as presentation (1981: 193), but describes the text as “a kind of atemporal object” which channels both the ‘*distanciation*’ (from discourse as event) and ‘*appropriation*’ of meaning (1976: 91; 1981: 185).[4] Metaphoric utterance leaps away from the trajectory of codes and creates a novel configuration (1977: 151, 299). Such imaginative production attempts an univocity via deviation, and thus overcomes *distanciation*. It makes present something more than the shock of “the said” (1981: 132, 134) – a meaning reidentifiable across time. Its *content* achieves universality by cancelling and preserving the irregularity (1978b: 127; Lawlor: 85-86).

A. Ricoeur insists that philosophical hermeneutics must be critical (1974: 15-6). The relevance of its discourse lies in the “conflict of interpretations”, which includes structural linguistics, semiotics and psychoanalysis. The dialectics between explanation and understanding must relate to the human self and its *life-world* (Ricoeur 1981: 158). The ‘*distanciation*’ through inter-textuality is a means for a critique of ideology (1981: 182-193). This epistemic breach with the author and the circumstances of her/his work applies also to

the subject and is an effect of 'the world of text'. While he agrees that *text* and *reader* belong together unreflectively, Ricoeur claims that their "struggle" generates "the whole dynamic of interpretation" (1976: 32). He does not see the encounter with a text in terms of dialogue which is mostly determined by ostensive reference to "here" and "now" (1981: 141). Ricoeur agrees that appropriation is historical (Aylesworth: 69-70), but in expanding the notion of *poiesis* (Aristotle), he appeals to productive imagination which is summoned in the opposition between 'hermeneutics of belonging' and 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. Thus, productive *mimesis* is essentially dialectical. Narrative schematism (*emplotment*) works on a cultural-historical level. Given the concept of 'distanciation', the *intelligibility* of the world of narrative "has more to do with imagination than with reason" (1983b: 155; Aylesworth: 71). The plot emerges as a configuration (upon the '*pre-given world of action*') and offers a world of possibilities to be refigured through the '*reader's appropriation*.' Even though narratives are a part of unreflected, "anonymous" historical tradition, after an alienation from itself in the text (the objective moment), the subject can go back to the *life-world* with a new idea (a possible transfiguration) of the world of action (Ricoeur 1984a: 77).

B. How the reading subject recovers itself from the alienation of the text? On Ricoeur's critical intention, "belonging" is characterized as an adherence to "lived experience" (1981: 76-77). In the reflective tradition this term denotes the foundation for objectivity - pertains to a pre-linguistic noetic plane, or to the substance of objective spirit (Hegel), in relation to which Ricoeur takes linguistic meaning to be derivative (Aylesworth: 69). He suggests that narrative *intelligibility* "neighbours" on *phronesis* (Aristotle). Its teleology leads to the individuation of the subject through production or appropriation, insofar as the plot provides for understanding the end in the beginning and vice versa. Along this line of thoughts, *identity* is constituted in practical terms: the reader must become an agent (Ricoeur 1988: 246). The subject becomes *responsible* (moral person) through the encounter with ideal meaning (of the text), or the imaginative variation (upon her/his ego). This is a question "of entering into an alien work, of divesting oneself of earlier 'me' in order to receive, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself" (Ricoeur 1981: 152).

C. Appropriation must return to the event of speech, but reading cannot exhaust the possibilities of the ideal meaning of the text (Aylesworth: 74). Nonetheless, the latter projects knowable ways of being. For Ricoeur, ideality, as a distance from temporality, is necessary for a critical mediation (Ricoeur 1981: 147, 154). In *Time and Narrative* (1988: 21) he claims to improve on this problematic of time by setting a bridge – the mediating role of three features of time - between lived time and the time of the external world. Accordingly, through a fictional projection or mythological construction, the reader can take a glimpse at another temporal dimension (Aylesworth: 77-78). This 'fictive experience' may affect also our historical consciousness.

III. Conclusion: hermeneutics as critique

In a text for a volume dedicated to hermeneutical philosophy Jurgen Habermas [5] argues that if the language of oppression is both institutional and unobjectifiable within the hermeneutical situation, then Gadamer's lacks a possibility for critique. For Gadamer, Habermas reverts to "objectification inherent in the idealist conception of reflection" [brackets experience to posit the ideal situation wherein the authority of tradition can be viewed from an 'outside'] (1986b: 288, 291). Gadamer also refers to narrative knowledge by making the distinction between the 'thematic' and 'effective' reflection: "...one must distinguish *"effective reflection" (die "effektive" Reflexion), which is that in which the unfolding of language takes place, from expressive and thematic reflection, which is the type out of which Occidental linguistic history has been formed.*" (1986b: 292; Ross 2003: 17-19). Ricoeur sees the debate as an opposition between a hermeneutics of tradition - finitude can only be acknowledged and consciousness carries the mark of humility - and an emancipatory consciousness - suspicion acts against false consciousness (1986b: 300, 325). Ricoeur aims at a dialectical encompassing of both a "recollection of tradition" (belonging) and an "anticipation of freedom" (distanciation) (328, 337-8). An option for critique brackets the experiential aspect of the text's subject-matter. For Gadamer, the sought for critical moment occurs within the same element we inhabit - language (289). The logical orientation to the experience of understanding is difficult; our interpretive condition is insurmountable (Ross 2003: 19-20). The mode of being in history implies the participatory, dialogical experience in which the truth, viz., the coming forth of the past, happens with phenomenological clarity (Gadamer 1972: 232; Ross: 79-80). From the point of "*the operativeness of history in our conditionedness and finitude*", the attachment to critique is for Gadamer "*a dogmatic objectivism that distorts the very concept of hermeneutical reflection itself. In this objectivism the understander is seen [...] in such a way as to imply that his own understanding does not enter into the event.*" (1986b: 284-6; Ross: 25-26). Ricoeur proposes the category of "the awareness of history" – "the reflective consciousness of [historical] methodology" (1986b: 310). The relation of structure to hermeneutics is the subject of a later exchange between the two philosophers (Bruzina & Wiltshire 1982: 299-320). Gadamer's reply to dialectic - between deconstructive and teleological hermeneutics - is to elaborate on their irreconcilability on the level of truth-experience in religion and arts; in these fields there isn't unbridgeable gap between oneself, another and truth. In asking about how to reconcile radical [Nietzschean/Marxian/Freudian] interpretation with participation in the process of culture, Gadamer recalls Heidegger's view that interpretation follows *facticity* (301-2). Applying dialectic to the contrast between hermeneutics and structuralism is hard to combine with the temporality of eventful understanding (Bruzina & Wiltshire 1982: 316 Ross 2003: 143).

On Ricoeur's alternative one has to be a 'pupil of the text' (1986c: 60, 129; Figal 2012: 537). This side of his conception of self-understanding involves an overlap of 'imagination' and '*epoché*' (Husserl). According to *The Hermeneutic Function of Distanciation*, fictional discourse releases *what* discloses the horizon of our life and our project (1981: 72, 101), with the statement texts suspend subjectivity, or let it become unreal

(1986c: 130-31), Ricoeur suggests a pure potentiality of subjectivity. In reading it is “a question of... divesting oneself of the earlier ‘me’ in order to receive, as in play, the self confined by the work itself” (Ricoeur 1981: 152-53; MacAvoy 2016: 17). While it is unclear what kind of *world* it is that is opened up by a text - whether it is ‘the world of the reader’ or the *world of the work* (Figueroa: 536), - the referential capacity is placed under that of poetic work in general; “[p]oetic narrative resignifies the world in its temporal dimension to the extent that narrating, telling, reciting is a way of remaking action following the poem’s invention” (Ricoeur 1984a: 80-82). Imagination is presupposed as the pre-narrative human capacity acting in a symbolically significant manner (Kearney 1998: 153-54). According to George Taylor, this suggests that any transformative fiction – utopia, scientific model, or a poem – must have elements of reproductive imagination, must draw from existing reality sufficiently so that its distance is not too great, yet, productive imagination must introduce something without an original, from nowhere; only in this way is it transformative of existing reality (Taylor 2006: 97-8). The theory of metaphor is a further clarification (1977: 173-216) here, but grasping Ricoeur’s idea amounts to a controversial dichotomy - between the two types of imagination. [6] His account - “images are spoken [heard] before they are seen” (1991: 121) - suggests that language is the sphere of productive imagination (1979: 129, 134). What the latter brings to fulfilment is founded in language. Ricoeur’s distinction - free images (characteristic of reproductive) can be seen before they are spoken, bound images (must be spoken before they are seen) (1977: 211; 1979: 133) - belongs with a theory for which it is necessary that perception and language constitute two irreconcilable origins of images.

After the exposition of the afore-mentioned specifics, we must say that there are deep differences between the guiding intuitions of Gadamer and Ricoeur. The German philosopher is steadfast on the phenomenological significance of pre-predicative experience, transferred into his own elaboration on non-arbitrary prejudices. His French colleague strives to expound a ‘situation’ where the regular, social mode of perception is subdued so that linguistic productive imagination can take over and project a new vision. In juxtaposition these two approaches, and the respective ideas about the task of hermeneutics, are difficult to reconcile.

[1] By means of Husserl’s *Paarung* (pairing), my temporality is primordially related to that of others, whom I apprehend as subjects analogous to myself. That ‘one temporal flux accompanies another temporal flux’ corresponds to the way in which *I can* accompanies an *I can*, analogous in its capacity to ascribe experiences to itself’ (Ricoeur 1978: 7-8).

[2] A process of externalisation represents the transition to a milieu which seeks to understand itself and offers itself for the understanding by others. This inner connection (between signs and the expressed life-experience) is basic for the cultural sciences. It is the condition for the text’s stable, unchanging meaning and presupposes that texts never break their link with the author’s intention nor with the original audience they addressed. This transcendence of the past has as its first model the alien psychic life carried outside by

‘signitive conduct’. Expression crosses the gap separating the outside and the inside. The transfer in imagination into alien psychic life spans the gap separating the self and the other. Thus, from two converging externalisations results the first objectification by which a private life and an alien life open up one to the other. Onto this is grafted the second-order objectification resulting from the inscription (writing) of the expression (Ricoeur 1984: 16–17; 1978: 14–15).

[3] Husserl articulates the *sense* of a physical thing (1982: 90-2, 197-9, 342-3) as still presented finitely (our intuition); essentially given only in perspectives (“closed appearances”), its kernel (Idea) of sameness comes to presence in its own type of evidence (Lawlor 1991: 86).

[4] “It is the task of hermeneutics... to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting and suffering.” Ricoeur, P. 1984a. *Time and Narrative vol. I*, trans. K. Blamey & D. Pellauer. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 53.

[5] See Wachterhauser (1986b). Jurgen, H. A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, trans. F. Dallmayr and T. McCarthy, 243-276.

[6] For a detailed discussion see Saulius, G. 2015. and Taylor, G. 2006.

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