1 THE ELEVATION OF THE HISTORICITY OF UNDERSTANDING TO THE STATUS OF A HERMENEUTIC PRINCIPLE

(A) THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE AND THE PROBLEM OF PREJUDICES

(i) Heidegger's Disclosure of the Fore-Structure of Understanding

Heidegger entered into the problems of historical hermeneutics and critique only in order to explicate the fore-structure of understanding for the purposes of ontology.¹ Our question, by contrast, is how hermeneutics, once freed from the ontological obstructions of the scientific concept of objectivity, can do justice to the historicity of understanding. Hermeneutics has traditionally understood itself as an art or technique.² This is true even of Dilthey's expansion of hermeneutics into an organon of the human sciences. One might wonder whether there is such an art or technique of understanding—we shall come back to the point. But at any rate we can inquire into the consequences for the hermeneutics of the human sciences of the fact that Heidegger derives the circular structure of understanding from the temporality of Dasein. These consequences do not need to be such that a theory is applied to practice so that the latter is performed differently—i.e., in a way that is technically correct. They could also consist in correcting (and refining) the way in which constantly exercised understanding understands itself—a process that would benefit the art of understanding at most only indirectly.
Hence we will once more examine Heidegger's description of the hermeneutical circle in order to make its new fundamental significance fruitful for our purposes. Heidegger writes, "It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing, and we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves" (Being and Time, p.153).

What Heidegger is working out here is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way interpretive understanding is achieved. The point of Heidegger's hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance. The description as such will be obvious to every interpreter who knows what he is about. All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze "on the things themselves" (which, in the case of the literary critic, are meaningful texts, which themselves are again concerned with objects). For the interpreter to let himself be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, "conscientious" decision, but is "the first, last, and constant task." For it is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself. A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.

This description is, of course, a rough abbreviation of the whole. The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation.
A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed “by the things” themselves, is the constant task of understanding. The only “objectivity” here is the confirmation of a fore-meaning in its being worked out. Indeed, what characterizes the arbitrariness of inappropriate fore-meanings if not that they come to nothing in being worked out? But understanding realizes its full potential only when the fore-meanings that it begins with are not arbitrary. Thus it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy—i.e., the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within him.

This basic requirement must be seen as the radicalization of a procedure that we in fact exercise whenever we understand anything. Every text presents the task of not simply leaving our own linguistic usage unexamined—or in the case of a foreign language the usage that we are familiar with from writers or from daily intercourse. Rather, we regard our task as deriving our understanding of the text from the linguistic usage of the time or of the author. The question is, of course, how this general requirement can be fulfilled. Especially in the field of semantics we are confronted with the problem that our own use of language is unconscious. How do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage and that of the text?

I think we must say that generally we do so in the experience of being pulled up short by the text. Either it does not yield any meaning at all or its meaning is not compatible with what we had expected. This is what brings us up short and alerts us to a possible difference in usage. Someone who speaks the same language as I do uses the words in the sense familiar to me—this is a general presupposition that can be questioned only in particular cases. The same thing is true in the case of a foreign language: we all think we have a standard knowledge of it and assume this standard usage when we are reading a text.

What is true of fore-meanings that stem from usage, however, is equally true of the fore-meanings concerning content with which we read texts, and which make up our fore-understanding. Here too we may ask how we can break the spell of our own fore-meanings. There can, of course, be a general expectation that what the text says will fit perfectly with my own meanings and expectations. But what another person tells me, whether in
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conversation, letter, book, or whatever, is generally supposed to be his own and not my opinion; and this is what I am to take note of without necessarily having to share it. Yet this presupposition is not something that makes understanding easier, but harder, since the fore-meanings that determine my own understanding can go entirely unnoticed. If they give rise to misunderstandings, how can our misunderstandings of a text be perceived at all if there is nothing to contradict them? How can a text be protected against misunderstanding from the start?

If we examine the situation more closely, however, we find that meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way. Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another. Of course this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. Now, the fact is that meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities (in comparison to the agreement presented by a language and a vocabulary), but within this multiplicity of what can be thought—i.e., of what a reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find—not everything is possible; and if a person fails to hear what the other person is really saying, he will not be able to fit what he has misunderstood into the range of his own various expectations of meaning. Thus there is a criterion here also. The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things and is always in part so defined. This places hermeneutical work on a firm basis. A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither “neutrality” with respect to content nor the extinction of one’s self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one’s own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can
present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.

When Heidegger disclosed the fore-structure of understanding in what is considered merely “reading what is there,” this was a completely correct phenomenological description. He also exemplified the task that follows from this. In Being and Time he gave the general hermeneutical problem a concrete form in the question of being.4 In order to explain the hermeneutical situation of the question of being in terms of fore-having, foresight, and fore-conception, he critically tested his question, directed at metaphysics, on important turning points in the history of metaphysics. Here he was only doing what historical-hermeneutical consciousness requires in every case. Methodologically conscious understanding will be concerned not merely to form anticipatory ideas, but to make them conscious, so as to check them and thus acquire right understanding from the things themselves. This is what Heidegger means when he talks about making our scientific theme “secure” by deriving our fore-having, foresight and fore-conception from the things themselves.

It is not at all a matter of securing ourselves against the tradition that speaks out of the text then, but, on the contrary, of excluding everything that could hinder us from understanding it in terms of the subject matter. It is the tyranny of hidden prejudices that makes us deaf to what speaks to us in tradition. Heidegger’s demonstration that the concept of consciousness in Descartes and of spirit in Hegel is still influenced by Greek substance ontology, which sees being in terms of what is present, undoubtedly surpasses the self-understanding of modern metaphysics, yet not in an arbitrary, willful way, but on the basis of a “fore-having” that in fact makes this tradition intelligible by revealing the ontological premises of the concept of subjectivity. On the other hand, Heidegger discovers in Kant’s critique of “dogmatic” metaphysics the idea of a metaphysics of finitude which is a challenge to his own ontological scheme. Thus he “secures” the scientific theme by framing it within the understanding of tradition and so putting it, in a sense, at risk. All of this is a concretization of the historical consciousness involved in understanding.

The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. In light of this insight it appears that historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices. And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its
essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power.

The history of ideas shows that not until the Enlightenment does the concept of prejudice acquire the negative connotation familiar today. Actually “prejudice” means a judgment that is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined. In German legal terminology a “prejudice” is a provisional legal verdict before the final verdict is reached. For someone involved in a legal dispute, this kind of judgment against him affects his chances adversely. Accordingly, the French préjudice, as well as the Latin praejudicium, means simply “adverse effect,” “disadvantage,” “harm.” But this negative sense is only derivative. The negative consequence depends precisely on the positive validity. the value of the provisional decision as a prejudgment, like that of any precedent.

Thus “prejudice” certainly does not necessarily mean a false judgment, but part of the idea is that it can have either a positive or a negative value. This is clearly due to the influence of the Latin praejudicium. There are such things as préjugés légitimes. This seems a long way from our current use of the word. The German Vorurteil, like the English “prejudice” and even more than the French préjugé, seems to have been limited in its meaning by the Enlightenment critique of religion simply to the sense of an “unfounded judgment.” The only thing that gives a judgment dignity is its having a basis, a methodological justification (and not the fact that it may actually be correct). For the Enlightenment the absence of such a basis does not mean that there might be other kinds of certainty, but rather that the judgment has no foundation in the things themselves—i.e., that it is “unfounded.” This conclusion follows only in the spirit of rationalism. It is the reason for discrediting prejudices and the reason scientific knowledge claims to exclude them completely.

In adopting this principle, modern science is following the rule of Cartesian doubt, accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule. In our introductory observations we have already pointed out how difficult it is to harmonize the historical knowledge that helps to shape our historical consciousness with this ideal and how difficult it is, for that reason, to comprehend its true nature on the basis of the modern conception of method. This is the place to turn those negative statements into positive ones. The concept of “prejudice” is where we can start.
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(ii) The Discrediting of Prejudice by the Enlightenment

If we consider the Enlightenment doctrine of prejudice, we find that it makes the following division: we must make a basic distinction between the prejudice due to human authority and that due to overhastiness. This distinction is based on the origin of prejudices in the persons who have them. Either the respect we have for others and their authority leads us into error, or else an overhastiness in ourselves. That authority is a source of prejudices accords with the well-known principle of the Enlightenment that Kant formulated: Have the courage to make use of your own understanding. Although this distinction is certainly not limited to the role that prejudices play in understanding texts, its chief application is still in the sphere of hermeneutics, for Enlightenment critique is primarily directed against the religious tradition of Christianity—i.e., the Bible. By treating the Bible as a historical document, biblical criticism endangers its own dogmatic claims. This is the real radicality of the modern Enlightenment compared to all other movements of enlightenment: it must assert itself against the Bible and dogmatic interpretation of it. It is therefore particularly concerned with the hermeneutical problem. It wants to understand tradition correctly—i.e., rationally and without prejudice. But there is a special difficulty about this, since the sheer fact that something is written down gives it special authority. It is not altogether easy to realize that what is written down can be untrue. The written word has the tangible quality of something that can be demonstrated and is like a proof. It requires a special critical effort to free oneself from the prejudice in favor of what is written down and to distinguish here also, no less than in the case of oral assertions, between opinion and truth. In general, the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason. Thus the written tradition of Scripture, like any other historical document, can claim no absolute validity; the possible truth of the tradition depends on the credibility that reason accords it. It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source of all authority. What is written down is not necessarily true. We can know better: this is the maxim with which the modern Enlightenment approaches tradition and which ultimately leads it to undertake historical research. It takes tradition as an object of critique, just as the natural sciences do with the evidence of the senses. This does not necessarily mean that the "prejudice against prejudices" was everywhere taken to the extremes of free thinking and atheism, as in England and France.
contrary, the German Enlightenment recognized the "true prejudices" of the Christian religion. Since the human intellect is too weak to manage without prejudices, it is at least fortunate to have been educated with true prejudices.

It would be valuable to investigate to what extent this kind of modification and moderation of the Enlightenment prepared the way for the rise of the romantic movement in Germany, as undoubtedly did the critique of the Enlightenment and the revolution by Edmund Burke. But none of this alters the fundamental fact. True prejudices must still finally be justified by rational knowledge, even though the task can never be fully completed.

Thus the criteria of the modern Enlightenment still determine the self-understanding of historicism. They do so not directly, but through a curious refraction caused by romanticism. This can be seen with particular clarity in the fundamental schema of the philosophy of history that romanticism shares with the Enlightenment and that precisely through the romantic reaction to the Enlightenment became an unshakable premise: the schema of the conquest of mythos by logos. What gives this schema its validity is the presupposition of the progressive retreat of magic in the world. It is supposed to represent progress in the history of the mind, and precisely because romanticism disparages this development, it takes over the schema itself as a self-evident truth. It shares the presupposition of the Enlightenment and only reverses its values, seeking to establish the validity of what is old simply on the fact that it is old: the "gothic" Middle Ages, the Christian European community of states, the permanent structure of society, but also the simplicity of peasant life and closeness to nature.

In contrast to the Enlightenment's faith in perfection, which thinks in terms of complete freedom from "superstition" and the prejudices of the past, we now find that olden times—the world of myth, unreflective life, not yet analyzed away by consciousness, in a "society close to nature," the world of Christian chivalry—all these acquire a romantic magic, even a priority over truth. Reversing the Enlightenment's presupposition results in the paradoxical tendency toward restoration—i.e., the tendency to reconstruct the old because it is old, the conscious return to the unconscious, culminating in the recognition of the superior wisdom of the primeval age of myth. But the romantic reversal of the Enlightenment's criteria of value actually perpetuates the abstract contrast between myth and reason. All criticism of the Enlightenment now proceeds via this romantic mirror image of the Enlightenment. Belief in the perfectibility of

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reason suddenly changes into the perfection of the “mythical” consciousness and finds itself reflected in a paradisiacal primal state before the “fall” of thought.  

In fact the presupposition of a mysterious darkness in which there was a mythical collective consciousness that preceded all thought is just as dogmatic and abstract as that of a state of perfect enlightenment or of absolute knowledge. Primeval wisdom is only the counterimage of “primeval stupidity.” All mythical consciousness is still knowledge, and if it knows about divine powers, then it has progressed beyond mere trembling before power (if this is to be regarded as the primeval state), but also beyond a collective life contained in magic rituals (as we find in the early Orient). It knows about itself, and in this knowledge it is no longer simply outside itself.

There is the related point that even the contrast between genuine mythical thinking and pseudomythical poetic thinking is a romantic illusion based on a prejudice of the Enlightenment: namely that the poetic act no longer shares the binding quality of myth because it is a creation of the free imagination. It is the old quarrel between the poets and the philosophers in the modern garb appropriate to the age of belief in science. It is now said, not that poets tell lies, but that they are incapable of saying anything true; they have only an aesthetic effect and, through their imaginative creations, they merely seek to stimulate the imagination and vitality of their hearers or readers.

Another case of romantic refraction is probably to be found in the concept of an “organic society,” which Ladendorf says was introduced by H. Leo. In Karl Marx it appears as a kind of relic of natural law that limits the validity of his socio-economic theory of the class struggle. Does the idea go back to Rousseau’s description of society before the division of labor and the introduction of property? At any rate, Plato had already demonstrated the illusory nature of this political theory in his ironical account of a state of nature in the third book of the Republic.

These romantic revaluations give rise to historical science in the nineteenth century. It no longer measures the past by the standards of the present, as if they were an absolute, but it ascribes to past ages a value of their own and can even acknowledge their superiority in one respect or another. The great achievements of romanticism—the revival of the past, the discovery of the voices of the peoples in their songs, the collecting of fairy tales and legends, the cultivation of ancient customs, the discovery of the worldviews implicit in languages, the study of the “religion and
wisdom of India”—all contributed to the rise of historical research, which was slowly, step by step, transformed from intuitive revival into detached historical knowledge. The fact that it was romanticism that gave birth to the historical school confirms that the romantic retrieval of origins is itself based on the Enlightenment. Nineteenth-century historiography is its finest fruit and sees itself precisely as the fulfillment of the Enlightenment, as the last step in the liberation of the mind from the trammels of dogma, the step to objective knowledge of the historical world, which stands on a par with the knowledge of nature achieved by modern science.

The fact that the restorative tendency of romanticism could combine with the fundamental concerns of the Enlightenment to create the historical sciences simply indicates that the same break with the continuity of meaning in tradition lies behind both. If the Enlightenment considers it an established fact that all tradition that reason shows to be impossible (i.e., nonsense) can only be understood historically—i.e., by going back to the past’s way of looking at things—then the historical consciousness that emerges in romanticism involves a radicalization of the Enlightenment. For nonsensical tradition, which had been the exception, has become the general rule for historical consciousness. Meaning that is generally accessible through reason is so little believed that the whole of the past—even, ultimately, all the thinking of one’s contemporaries—is understood only “historically.” Thus the romantic critique of the Enlightenment itself ends in Enlightenment, for it evolves as historical science and draws everything into the orbit of historicism. The basic discreditation of all prejudices, which unites the experimental fervor of the new natural sciences during the Enlightenment, is universalized and radicalized in the historical Enlightenment.

This is the point at which the attempt to critique historical hermeneutics has to start. The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.

Does being situated within traditions really mean being subject to prejudices and limited in one’s freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. 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. This is true not only in the sense in
which Kant, under the influence of the skeptical critique of Hume, limited the claims of rationalism to the a priori element in the knowledge of nature; it is still truer of historical consciousness and the possibility of historical knowledge. For that man is concerned here with himself and his own creations (Vico) is only an apparent solution of the problem posed by historical knowledge. Man is alien to himself and his historical fate in a way quite different from the way nature, which knows nothing of him, is alien to him.

The epistemological question must be asked here in a fundamentally different way. We have shown above that Dilthey probably saw this, but he was not able to escape his entanglement in traditional epistemology. Since he started from the awareness of "experiences" (Erlebnisse), he was unable to build a bridge to the historical realities, because the great historical realities of society and state always have a predeterminate influence on any "experience." Self-reflection and autobiography—Dilthey's starting points—are not primary and are therefore not an adequate basis for the hermeneutical problem, because through them history is made private once more. In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.

(b) PREJUDICES AS CONDITIONS OF UNDERSTANDING

(i) The Rehabilitation of Authority and Tradition

Here is the point of departure for the hermeneutical problem. This is why we examined the Enlightenment's discredit of the concept of "prejudice." What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices. Thus we can formulate the fundamental epistemological question for a truly historical hermeneutics as follows: what is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from the countless others which it is the undeniable task of critical reason to overcome?
We can approach this question by taking the Enlightenment's critical theory of prejudices, as set out above, and giving it a positive value. The division of prejudices into those of "authority" and those of "overhastiness" is obviously based on the fundamental presupposition of the Enlightenment, namely that methodologically disciplined use of reason can safeguard us from all error. This was Descartes' idea of method. Overhastiness is the source of errors that arise in the use of one's own reason. Authority, however, is responsible for one's not using one's own reason at all. Thus the division is based on a mutually exclusive antithesis between authority and reason. The false prepossession in favor of what is old, in favor of authorities, is what has to be fought. Thus the Enlightenment attributes to Luther's reforms the fact that "the prejudice of human prestige, especially that of the philosophical [he means Aristotle] and the Roman pope, was greatly weakened."¹⁹ The Reformation, then, gives rise to a flourishing hermeneutics which teaches the right use of reason in understanding traditionary texts. Neither the doctrinal authority of the pope nor the appeal to tradition can obviate the work of hermeneutics, which can safeguard the reasonable meaning of a text against all imposition.

This kind of hermeneutics need not lead to the radical critique of religion that we found, for example, in Spinoza. Rather, the possibility of supernatural truth can remain entirely open. Thus especially in the field of German popular philosophy, the Enlightenment limited the claims of reason and acknowledged the authority of Bible and church. We read in Walch, for example, that he distinguishes between the two classes of prejudice—authority and overhastiness—but considers them two extremes, between which it is necessary to find the right middle path, namely a mediation between reason and biblical authority. Accordingly, he regards prejudices deriving from overhastiness as prejudices in favor of the new, a predisposition to the overhasty rejection of truths simply because they are old and attested by authorities.²⁰ Thus he disputes the British free thinkers (such as Collins and others) and defends the historical faith against the norm of reason. Here the meaning of prejudice deriving from overhastiness is given a conservative reinterpretation.

There can be no doubt, however, that the real consequence of the Enlightenment is different: namely the subjection of all authority to reason. Accordingly, prejudice from overhastiness is to be understood as Descartes understood it—i.e., as the source of all error in the use of reason. This fits in with the fact that after the victory of the Enlightenment, when
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hermeneutics was freed from all dogmatic ties, the old division returns in a new guise. Thus Schleiermacher distinguishes between partiality and overhastiness as the causes of misunderstanding. To the lasting prejudices due to partiality he contrasts the momentary ones due to overhastiness, but only the former are of interest to those concerned with scientific method. It no longer even occurs to Schleiermacher that among the prejudices in favor of authorities there might be some that are true—yet this was implied in the concept of authority in the first place. His alteration of the traditional division of prejudices documents the victory of the Enlightenment. Partiality now means only an individual limitation of understanding: “The one-sided preference for what is close to one’s own sphere of ideas.”

In fact, however, the decisive question is concealed behind the concept of partiality. That the prejudices determining what I think are due to my own partiality is a judgment based on the standpoint of their having been dissolved and enlightened, and it holds only for unjustified prejudices. If, on the other hand, there are justified prejudices productive of knowledge, then we are back to the problem of authority. Hence the radical consequences of the Enlightenment, which are still to be found in Schleiermacher’s faith in method, are not tenable.

The Enlightenment’s distinction between faith in authority and using one’s own reason is, in itself, legitimate. If the prestige of authority displaces one’s own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not preclude its being a source of truth, and that is what the Enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority. To be convinced of this, we need only consider one of the greatest forerunners of the European Enlightenment, namely Descartes. Despite the radicalness of his methodological thinking, we know that Descartes excluded morality from the total reconstruction of all truths by reason. This was what he meant by his provisional morality. It seems to me symptomatic that he did not in fact elaborate his definitive morality and that its principles, as far as we can judge from his letters to Elizabeth, contain hardly anything new. It is obviously unthinkable to defer morality until modern science has progressed enough to provide a new basis for it. In fact the denigration of authority is not the only prejudice established by the Enlightenment. It also distorted the very concept of authority. Based on the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind
obedience. This is the meaning that we find in the language critical of modern dictatorships.

But this is not the essence of authority. Admittedly, it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgment and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence—i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge. It is true that authority implies the capacity to command and be obeyed. But this proceeds only from the authority that a person has. Even the anonymous and impersonal authority of a superior which derives from his office is not ultimately based on this hierarchy, but is what makes it possible. Here also its true basis is an act of freedom and reason that grants the authority of a superior fundamentally because he has a wider view of things or is better informed—i.e., once again, because he knows more. Thus, acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who presents them. But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content, since they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about in other ways—e.g., by good reasons. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the Enlightenment.

Here we can find support in the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment; for there is one form of authority particularly defended by romanticism, namely tradition. That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our attitudes and behavior. All education depends on this, and even though, in the case of education, the educator loses his function when his charge comes of age.
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and sets his own insight and decisions in the place of the authority of the educator, becoming mature does not mean that a person becomes his own master in the sense that he is freed from all tradition. The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity. And in fact it is to romanticism that we owe this correction of the Enlightenment: that tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes. What makes classical ethics superior to modern moral philosophy is that it grounds the transition from ethics to “politics,” the art of right legislation, on the indispensable of tradition. By comparison, the modern Enlightenment is abstract and revolutionary.

The concept of tradition, however, has become no less ambiguous than that of authority, and for the same reason—namely that what determines the romantic understanding of tradition is its abstract opposition to the principle of enlightenment. Romanticism conceives of tradition as an antithesis to the freedom of reason and regards it as something historically given, like nature. And whether one wants to be revolutionary and oppose it or preserve it, tradition is still viewed as the abstract opposite of free self-determination, since its validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it. Of course, the romantic critique of the Enlightenment is not an instance of tradition’s automatic dominance of tradition, of its persisting unaffected by doubt and criticism. Rather, a particular critical attitude again addresses itself to the truth of tradition and seeks to renew it. We can call it “traditionalism.”

It seems to me, however, that there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. However problematical the conscious restoration of old or the creation of new traditions may be, the romantic faith in the “growth of tradition,” before which all reason must remain silent, is fundamentally like the Enlightenment, and just as prejudiced. The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change. But preservation is an act of reason, though an inconspicuous one. For this reason, only innovation and planning appear to be the result of reason. But this is an illusion. Even where life changes violently, as in ages
of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value. At any rate, preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal. That is why both the Enlightenment’s critique of tradition and the romantic rehabilitation of it lag behind their true historical being.

These thoughts raise the question of whether in the hermeneutics of the human sciences the element of tradition should not be given its full value. Research in the human sciences cannot regard itself as in an absolute antithesis to the way in which we, as historical beings, relate to the past. At any rate, our usual relationship to the past is not characterized by distancing and freeing ourselves from tradition. Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process—i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance that our later historical judgment would hardly regard as a kind of knowledge but as the most ingenuous affinity with tradition.

Hence in regard to the dominant epistemological methodologism we must ask: has the rise of historical consciousness really divorced our scholarship from this natural relation to the past? Does understanding in the human sciences understand itself correctly when it relegates the whole of its own historicality to the position of prejudices from which we must free ourselves? Or does “unprejudiced scholarship” share more than it realizes with that naive openness and reflection in which traditions live and the past is present?

In any case, understanding in the human sciences shares one fundamental condition with the life of tradition: it lets itself be addressed by tradition. Is it not true of the objects that the human sciences investigate, just as for the contents of tradition, that what they are really about can be experienced only when one is addressed by them? However mediated this significance may be, and though it may proceed from a historical interest that appears to bear no relation to the present—even in the extreme case of “objective” historical research—the real fulfillment of the historical task is to determine anew the significance of what is examined. But the significance exists at the beginning of any such research as well as at the end: in choosing the theme to be investigated, awakening the desire to investigate, gaining a new problematic.

At the beginning of all historical hermeneutics, then, the abstract antithesis between tradition and historical research, between history and the knowledge of it,
*must be discarded.* The effect (Wirkung) of a living tradition and the effect of historical study must constitute a unity of effect, the analysis of which would reveal only a texture of reciprocal effects.\(^2^4\) Hence we would do well not to regard historical consciousness as something radically new—as it seems at first—but as a new element in what has always constituted the human relation to the past. In other words, we have to recognize the element of tradition in historical research and inquire into its hermeneutic productivity.

That an element of tradition affects the human sciences despite the methodological purity of their procedures, an element that constitutes their real nature and distinguishing mark, is immediately clear if we examine the history of research and note the difference between the human and natural sciences with regard to their history. Of course none of man's finite historical endeavors can completely erase the traces of this finitude. The history of mathematics or of the natural sciences is also a part of the history of the human spirit and reflects its destinies. Nevertheless, it is not just historical naivety when the natural scientist writes the history of his subject in terms of the present state of knowledge. For him errors and wrong turnings are of historical interest only, because the progress of research is the self-evident standard of examination. Thus it is only of secondary interest to see how advances in the natural sciences or in mathematics belong to the moment in history at which they took place. This interest does not affect the epistemic value of discoveries in those fields.

There is, then, no need to deny that elements of tradition can also affect the natural sciences—e.g., particular lines of research are preferred at particular places. But scientific research as such derives the law of its development not from these circumstances but from the law of the object it is investigating, which conceals its methodical efforts.\(^2^5\)

It is clear that the human sciences cannot be adequately described in terms of this conception of research and progress. Of course it is possible to write a history of the solution of a problem—e.g., the deciphering of barely legible inscriptions—in which the only interest is in ultimately reaching the final result. Were this not so, it would have been impossible for the human sciences to have borrowed the methodology of the natural ones, as happened in the last century. But what the human sciences share with the natural is only a subordinate element of the work done in the human sciences.
This is shown by the fact that the great achievements in the human sciences almost never become outdated. A modern reader can easily make allowances for the fact that, a hundred years ago, less knowledge was available to a historian, and he therefore made judgments that were incorrect in some details. On the whole, he would still rather read Droysen or Mommsen than the latest account of the subject from the pen of a historian living today. What is the criterion here? Obviously the value and importance of research cannot be measured by a criterion based in the subject matter. Rather, the subject matter appears truly significant only when it is properly portrayed for us. Thus we are certainly interested in the subject matter, but it acquires its life only from the light in which it is presented to us. We accept the fact that the subject presents different aspects of itself at different times or from different standpoints. We accept the fact that these aspects do not simply cancel one another out as research proceeds, but are like mutually exclusive conditions that exist by themselves and combine only in us. Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part. Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the handing down of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of progress and verified results; in it we have, as it were, a new experience of history whenever the past resounds in a new voice.

Why is this so? Obviously, in the human sciences we cannot speak of an object of research in the same sense as in the natural sciences, where research penetrates more and more deeply into nature. Rather, in the human sciences the particular research questions concerning tradition that we are interested in pursuing are motivated in a special way by the present and its interests. The theme and object of research are actually constituted by the motivation of the inquiry. Hence historical research is carried along by the historical movement of life itself and cannot be understood teleologically in terms of the object into which it is inquiring. Such an “object in itself” clearly does not exist at all. This is precisely what distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences. Whereas the object of the natural sciences can be described idealiter as what would be known in the perfect knowledge of nature, it is senseless to speak of a perfect knowledge of history, and for this reason it is not possible to speak of an “object in itself” toward which its research is directed.
(ii) The Example of the Classical

Of course it is a lot to ask that the self-understanding of the human sciences detach itself, in the whole of its activity, from the model of the natural sciences and regard the historical movement of the things they are concerned with not simply as an impairment of their objectivity, but as something of positive value. In the recent development of the human sciences, however, there are starting points for a reflection that would really do justice to the problem. The naive schema of history-as-research no longer dominates the way the human sciences conceive of themselves. The advancement of inquiry is no longer universally conceived of as an expansion or penetration into new fields or material, but instead as raising the inquiry to a higher stage of reflection. But even where this happens, one is still thinking teleologically, from the viewpoint of progressive research, in a way appropriate to a research scientist. But a hermeneutical consciousness is gradually growing that is infusing research with a spirit of self-reflection; this is true, above all, in those human sciences that have the oldest tradition. Thus the study of classical antiquity, after it had worked over the whole extent of the available transmitted texts, continually applied itself again, with more subtle questions, to its favorite objects of study. This introduced something of an element of self-criticism by inviting reflection on what constituted the real merit of its favorite objects. The concept of the classical, which since Droysen's discovery of Hellenism had been reduced by historical thinking to a mere stylistic concept, now acquired a new scholarly legitimacy.

It requires hermeneutical reflection of some sophistication to discover how it is possible for a normative concept such as the classical to acquire or regain its scholarly legitimacy. For it follows from the self-understanding of historical consciousness that all of the past's normative significance has been finally dissolved by sovereign historical reason. Only at the beginnings of historicism, as for example in Winckelmann's epoch-making work, had the normative element been a real motive of historical research.

The concept of classical antiquity and of the classical—which dominated pedagogical thought in particular since the days of German classicism—combined both a normative and a historical side. A particular stage in the historical development of humanity was thought to have produced a mature and perfect form of the human. This mediation between the normative and historical senses of the concept goes back to Herder. But
Hegel still preserved this mediation, even though he gave it a different emphasis, namely in terms of the history of philosophy. For him classical art retained its special distinction by being regarded as the "religion of art." Since this form of spirit is past, it is exemplary only in a qualified sense. The fact that it is a past art testifies to the "past" character of art in general. In this way Hegel systematically justified the historicization of the concept of the classical, and he began the process of development that finally changed the classical into a descriptive stylistic concept—one that describes the short lived harmony of measure and fullness that comes between archaic rigidity and baroque dissolution. Since it became part of the aesthetic vocabulary of historical studies, the concept of the classical retains the sense of a normative content only in an unacknowledged way.29

Symptomatic of renewed historical self-criticism was that after the First World War classical philology started to examine itself under the banner of a new humanism, and hesitantly again acknowledged the combination of normative and historical elements in "the classical."30 In so doing, it proved impossible (however one tried) to interpret the concept of the classical—which arose in antiquity and canonized certain writers—as if it expressed the unity of a stylistic ideal.31 On the contrary, as a stylistic term the ancient concept was wholly ambiguous. Today when we use classical as a historical stylistic concept whose clear meaning is defined by its being set against what came before and after, this concept has become quite detached from the ancient one. The concept of the classical now signifies a period of time, a phase of historical development but not a suprahistorical value.

In fact, however, the normative element in the concept of the classical has never completely disappeared. Even today it is still the basis of the idea of liberal education. The philologist is rightly dissatisfied with simply applying to his texts the historical stylistic concept that developed through the history of the plastic arts. The question whether Homer too is "classical" shatters the notion that the classical is merely a historical category of style analogous to categories of style used in the history of art—an instance of the fact that historical consciousness always includes more than it admits of itself.

If we try to see what this implies, we might say that the classical is a truly historical category, precisely because it is more than a concept of a period or of a historical style, and yet it nevertheless does not try to be the concept of a suprahistorical value. It does not refer to a quality that we ascribe to particular historical phenomena but to a notable mode of being historical:
the historical process of preservation (Bewahrung) that, through constantly proving itself (Bewährung), allows something true (ein Wahres) to come into being. It is not at all the case, as the historical mode of thought would have us believe, that the value judgment which accords something the status of a classic was in fact destroyed by historical reflection and its criticism of all teleological construals of the process of history. Rather, through this criticism the value judgment implicit in the concept of the classical acquires a new, special legitimacy. The classical is something that resists historical criticism because its historical dominion, the binding power of the validity that is preserved and handed down, precedes all historical reflection and continues in it.

To take the key example of the blanket concept of “classical antiquity,” it is, of course, unhistorical to devalue Hellenism as an age of the decline and fall of classicism, and Droysen has rightly emphasized its place in the continuity of world history and stressed the importance of Hellenism for the birth and spread of Christianity. But he would not have needed to undertake this historical theodicy if there had not always been a prejudice in favor of the classical and if the culture of “humanism” had not held on to “classical antiquity” and preserved it within Western culture as the heritage of the past. The classical is fundamentally something quite different from a descriptive concept used by an objectivizing historical consciousness. It is a historical reality to which historical consciousness belongs and is subordinate. The “classical” is something raised above the vicissitudes of changing times and changing tastes. It is immediately accessible, not through that shock of recognition, as it were, that sometimes characterizes a work of art for its contemporaries and in which the beholder experiences a fulfilled apprehension of meaning that surpasses all conscious expectations. Rather, when we call something classical, there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all the circumstances of time—a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present.

So the most important thing about the concept of the classical (and this is wholly true of both the ancient and the modern use of the word) is the normative sense. But insofar as this norm is related retrospectively to a past greatness that fulfilled and embodied it, it always contains a temporal quality that articulates it historically. So it is not surprising that, with the rise of historical reflection in Germany which took Winckelmann’s classicism as its standard, a historical concept of a time or period detached itself from what was regarded as classical in Winckelmann’s sense. It denoted a
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quite specific stylistic ideal and, in a historically descriptive way, also a time or period that fulfilled this ideal. From the distance of the epigones who set up the criterion, this stylistic ideal seemed to designate a historic moment that belonged to the past. Accordingly, the concept of the classical came to be used in modern thought to describe the whole of "classical antiquity" when humanism again proclaimed the exemplarity of this antiquity. It was reviving an ancient usage, and with some justification, for those ancient authors who were "discovered" by humanism were the same ones who in late antiquity comprised the canon of classics.

They were preserved in the history of Western culture precisely because they became canonical as the writers of the "school." But it is easy to see how the historical stylistic concept was able to adopt this usage. For although there is a normative consciousness behind this concept, there is still a retrospective element. What gives birth to the classical norm is an awareness of decline and distance. It is not by accident that the concept of the classical and of classical style emerges in late periods. Callimachus and Tacitus' Dialogue on Oratory played a decisive role in this connection. But there is something else. The authors regarded as classical are, as we know, always the representatives of particular literary genres. They were considered the culmination of the norm of that literary genre, an ideal that literary criticism makes plain in retrospect. If we now examine these generic norms historically—i.e., if we consider their history—then the classical is seen as a stylistic phase, a climax that articulates the history of the genre in terms of before and after. Insofar as the climactic points in the history of genres belong largely within the same brief period of time, within the totality of the historical development of classical antiquity, the classical refers to such a period and thus also becomes a concept denoting a period and fuses with a concept of style.

As such a historical stylistic concept, the concept of the classical is capable of being extended to any "development" to which an immanent telos gives unity. And in fact all cultures have high periods, when a particular civilization is marked by special achievements in all fields. Thus, via its particular historical fulfillment, the classical as a general concept of value again becomes a general historical stylistic concept.

Although this is an understandable development, the historicization of the concept also involves its uprooting, and that is why when historical consciousness started to engage in self-criticism, it reinstated the normative element in the concept of the classical as well as the historical uniqueness of its fulfillment. Every "new humanism" shares with the first

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and oldest the consciousness of belonging in an immediate way and being bound to its model—which, as something past, is unattainable and yet present. Thus the classical epitomizes a general characteristic of historical being: preservation amid the ruins of time. The general nature of tradition is such that only the part of the past that is not past offers the possibility of historical knowledge. The classical, however, as Hegel says, is "that which is self-significant (selbst bedeutende) and hence also self-interpretive (selber Deutende)." But that ultimately means that the classical preserves itself precisely because it is significant in itself and interprets itself; i.e., it speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past—documentary evidence that still needs to be interpreted—rather, it says something to the present as if it were said specifically to it. What we call "classical" does not first require the overcoming of historical distance, for in its own constant mediation it overcomes this distance by itself. The classical, then, is certainly "timeless," but this timelessness is a mode of historical being.

Of course this is not to deny that works regarded as classical present tasks of historical understanding to a developed historical consciousness, one that is aware of historical distance. The aim of historical consciousness is not to use the classical model in the direct way, like Palladio or Corneille, but to know it as a historical phenomenon that can be understood solely in terms of its own time. But understanding it will always involve more than merely historically reconstructing the past "world" to which the work belongs. Our understanding will always retain the consciousness that we too belong to that world, and correlative, that the work too belongs to our world.

This is just what the word "classical" means: that the duration of a work's power to speak directly is fundamentally unlimited. However much the concept of the classical expresses distance and unattainability and is part of cultural consciousness, the phrase "classical culture" still implies something of the continuing validity of the classical. Cultural consciousness manifests an ultimate community and sharing with the world from which a classical work speaks.

This discussion of the concept of the classical claims no independent significance, but serves only to evoke a general question, namely: Does the kind of historical mediation between the past and the present that characterizes the classical ultimately underlie all historical activity as its effective substratum? Whereas romantic hermeneutics had taken homogeneous human nature as the unhistorical substratum of its theory of
understanding and hence had freed the con-genial interpreter from all historical conditions, the self-criticism of historical consciousness leads finally to recognizing historical movement not only in events but also in understanding itself. *Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition,* a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must be validated by hermeneutic theory, which is far too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method.

*(iii) The Hermeneutic Significance of Temporal Distance*\(^3\)

Let us next consider how hermeneutics goes about its work. What consequences for understanding follow from the fact that belonging to a tradition is a condition of hermeneutics? We recall the hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole. This principle stems from ancient rhetoric, and modern hermeneutics has transferred it to the art of understanding. It is a circular relationship in both cases. The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes actual understanding when the parts that are determined by the whole themselves also determine this whole.

We know this from learning ancient languages. We learn that we must "construe" a sentence before we attempt to understand the linguistic meaning of the individual parts of the sentence. But the process of construal is itself already governed by an expectation of meaning that follows from the context of what has gone before. It is of course necessary for this expectation to be adjusted if the text calls for it. This means, then, that the expectation changes and that the text unifies its meaning around another expectation. Thus the movement of understanding is constantly from the whole to the part and back to the whole. Our task is to expand the unity of the understood meaning centrifugally. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed.

Schleiermacher elaborated this hermeneutic circle of part and whole in both its objective and its subjective aspects. As the single word belongs in the total context of the sentence, so the single text belongs in the total context of a writer's work, and the latter in the whole of the literary genre or of literature. At the same time, however, the same text, as a manifestation of a creative moment, belongs to the whole of its author's inner life. Full understanding can take place only within this objective and subjective
whole. Following this theory, Dilthey speaks of "structure" and of the "centering in a mid-point," which permits one to understand the whole. In this (as we have already said above) he is applying to the historical world what has always been a principle of all textual interpretation: namely that a text must be understood in its own terms.

The question is, however, whether this is an adequate account of the circular movement of understanding. Here we must return to what we concluded from our analysis of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. We can set aside Schleiermacher's ideas on subjective interpretation. When we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but, if one wants to use this terminology, we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. If we want to understand, we will try to make his arguments even stronger. This happens even in conversation, and it is a fortiori true of understanding what is written down that we are moving in a dimension of meaning that is intelligible in itself and as such offers no reason for going back to the subjectivity of the author. The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning.

But even Schleiermacher's description of the objective side of this circle does not get to the heart of the matter. We have seen that the goal of all attempts to reach an understanding is agreement concerning the subject matter. Hence the task of hermeneutics has always been to establish agreement where there was none or where it had been disturbed in some way. The history of hermeneutics confirms this, if, for example, we think of Augustine, who sought to mediate the Gospel with the Old Testament; or early Protestantism, which faced the same problem; or, finally, the Enlightenment, when (almost as if renouncing the possibility of agreement) it was supposed that a text could be "fully understood" only by means of historical interpretation. It is something qualitatively new when romanticism and Schleiermacher universalize historical consciousness by denying that the binding form of the tradition from which they come and in which they are situated provides a solid basis for all hermeneutic endeavor.

One of the immediate predecessors of Schleiermacher, the philologist Friedrich Ast, still had a view of hermeneutical work that was markedly concerned with content, since for him its purpose was to establish harmony between the worlds of classical antiquity and Christianity,
between a newly discovered genuine antiquity and the Christian tradition. This is something new. In contrast to the Enlightenment, this hermeneutics no longer evaluates and rejects tradition according to the criterion of natural reason. But in its attempt to bring about a meaningful agreement between the two traditions to which it sees itself as belonging, this kind of hermeneutics is still pursuing the task of all preceding hermeneutics, namely to bring about agreement in content.

In going beyond the “particularity” of this reconciliation of the ancient classical world and Christianity, Schleiermacher and, following him, nineteenth-century science conceive the task of hermeneutics in a way that is formally universal. They were able to harmonize it with the natural sciences' ideal of objectivity, but only by ignoring the concretion of historical consciousness in hermeneutical theory.

Heidegger's description and existential grounding of the hermeneutic circle, by contrast, constitute a decisive turning point. Nineteenth-century hermeneutic theory often discussed the circular structure of understanding, but always within the framework of a formal relation between part and whole—or its subjective reflex, the intuitive anticipation of the whole and its subsequent articulation in the parts. According to this theory, the circular movement of understanding runs backward and forward along the text, and ceases when the text is perfectly understood. This view of understanding came to its logical culmination in Schleiermacher's theory of the divinatory act, by means of which one places oneself entirely within the writer's mind and from there resolves all that is strange and alien about the text. In contrast to this approach, Heidegger describes the circle in such a way that the understanding of the text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding. The circle of whole and part is not dissolved in perfect understanding but, on the contrary, is most fully realized.

The circle, then, is not formal in nature. It is neither subjective nor objective, but describes understanding as the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition. But this commonality is constantly being formed in our relation to tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. Thus the circle of
understanding is not a "methodological" circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding.

The circle, which is fundamental to all understanding, has a further hermeneutic implication which I call the "fore-conception of completeness." But this, too, is obviously a formal condition of all understanding. It states that only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible. So when we read a text we always assume its completeness, and only when this assumption proves mistaken—i.e., the text is not intelligible—do we begin to suspect the text and try to discover how it can be remedied. The rules of such textual criticism can be left aside, for the important thing to note is that applying them properly depends on understanding the content.

The fore-conception of completeness that guides all our understanding is, then, always determined by the specific content. Not only does the reader assume an immanent unity of meaning, but his understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning that proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said. Just as the recipient of a letter understands the news that it contains and first sees things with the eyes of the person who wrote the letter—i.e., considers what he writes as true, and is not trying to understand the writer's peculiar opinions as such—so also do we understand traditionary texts on the basis of expectations of meaning drawn from our own prior relation to the subject matter. And just as we believe the news reported by a correspondent because he was present or is better informed, so too are we fundamentally open to the possibility that the writer of a transmitted text is better informed than we are, with our prior opinion. It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to "understand" the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion. The prejudice of completeness, then, implies not only this formal element—that a text should completely express its meaning—but also that what it says should be the complete truth.

Here again we see that understanding means, primarily, to understand the content of what is said, and only secondarily to isolate and understand another's meaning as such. Hence the most basic of all hermeneutic preconditions remains one's own fore-understanding, which comes from being concerned with the same subject. This is what determines what can be realized as unified meaning and thus determines how the fore-conception of completeness is applied.
Thus the meaning of "belonging"—i.e., the element of tradition in our historical-hermeneutical activity—is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices. Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter that comes into language through the traditionary text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks. On the other hand, hermeneutical consciousness is aware that its bond to this subject matter does not consist in some self-evident, unquestioned unanimity, as is the case with the unbroken stream of tradition. Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness; but this polarity is not to be regarded psychologically, with Schleiermacher, as the range that covers the mystery of individuality, but truly hermeneutically—i.e., in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us. Here too there is a tension. It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*

Given the intermediate position in which hermeneutics operates, it follows that its work is not to develop a procedure of understanding, but to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place. But these conditions do not amount to a "procedure" or method which the interpreter must of himself bring to bear on the text; rather, they must be given. The prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter's consciousness are not at his free disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings.

Rather, this separation must take place in the process of understanding itself, and hence hermeneutics must ask how that happens. But that means it must foreground what has remained entirely peripheral in previous hermeneutics: temporal distance and its significance for understanding.

This point can be clarified by comparing it with the hermeneutic theory of romanticism. We recall that the latter conceived of understanding as the reproduction of an original production. Hence it was possible to say that one should be able to understand an author better than he understood himself. We examined the origin of this statement and its connection with the aesthetics of genius, but must now come back to it, since our present inquiry lends it a new importance.

That subsequent understanding is superior to the original production and hence can be described as superior understanding does not depend so
much on the conscious realization that places the interpreter on the same level as the author (as Schleiermacher said) but instead denotes an insuperable difference between the interpreter and the author that is created by historical distance. Every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history. A writer like Chladenius,41 who does not yet view understanding in terms of history, is saying the same thing in a naive, ingenious way when he says that an author does not need to know the real meaning of what he has written; and hence the interpreter can, and must, often understand more than he. But this is of fundamental importance. Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well. Perhaps it is not correct to refer to this productive element in understanding as “better understanding.” For this phrase is, as we have shown, a principle of criticism taken from the Enlightenment and revised on the basis of the aesthetics of genius. Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better, either in the sense of superior knowledge of the subject because of clearer ideas or in the sense of fundamental superiority of conscious over unconscious production. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all.

Such a conception of understanding breaks right through the circle drawn by romantic hermeneutics. Since we are now concerned not with individuality and what it thinks but with the truth of what is said, a text is not understood as a mere expression of life but is taken seriously in its claim to truth. That this is what is meant by “understanding” was once self-evident (we need only recall Chladenius).42 But this dimension of the hermeneutical problem was discredited by historical consciousness and the psychological turn that Schleiermacher gave to hermeneutics, and could only be regained when the aporias of historicism came to light and led finally to the fundamentally new development to which Heidegger, in my view, gave the decisive impetus. For the hermeneutic productivity of temporal distance could be understood only when Heidegger gave understanding an ontological orientation by interpreting it as an “existential” and when he interpreted Dasein’s mode of being in terms of time.
Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. Hence temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance toward historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us. Here it is not too much to speak of the genuine productivity of the course of events. Everyone is familiar with the curious impotence of our judgment where temporal distance has not given us sure criteria. Thus the judgment of contemporary works of art is desperately uncertain for the scholarly consciousness. Obviously we approach such creations with unverifiable prejudices, presuppositions that have too great an influence over us for us to know about them; these can give contemporary creations an extra resonance that does not correspond to their true content and significance. Only when all their relations to the present time have faded away can their real nature appear, so that the understanding of what is said in them can claim to be authoritative and universal.

In historical studies this experience has led to the idea that objective knowledge can be achieved only if there has been a certain historical distance. It is true that what a thing has to say, its intrinsic content, first appears only after it is divorced from the fleeting circumstances that gave rise to it. The positive conditions of historical understanding include the relative closure of a historical event, which allows us to view it as a whole, and its distance from contemporary opinions concerning its import. The implicit presupposition of historical method, then, is that the permanent significance of something can first be known objectively only when it belongs to a closed context—in other words, when it is dead enough to have only historical interest. Only then does it seem possible to exclude the subjective involvement of the observer. This is, in fact, a paradox, the epistemological counterpart to the old moral problem of whether anyone can be called happy before his death. Just as Aristotle showed how this kind of problem can serve to sharpen the powers of human judgment,\(^4\) so hermeneutical reflection cannot fail to find here a sharpening of the methodological self-consciousness of science. It is true that certain hermeneutic requirements are automatically fulfilled when a historical context
has come to be of only historical interest. Certain sources of error are automatically excluded. But it is questionable whether this is the end of the hermeneutical problem. Temporal distance obviously means something other than the extinction of our interest in the object. It lets the true meaning of the object emerge fully. But the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art is never finished; it is in fact an infinite process. Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning. The temporal distance that performs the filtering process is not fixed, but is itself undergoing constant movement and extension. And along with the negative side of the filtering process brought about by temporal distance there is also the positive side, namely the value it has for understanding. It not only lets local and limited prejudices die away, but allows those that bring about genuine understanding to emerge clearly as such.

Often temporal distance\textsuperscript{44} can solve question of critique in hermeneutics, namely how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones, by which we misunderstand. Hence the hermeneutically trained mind will also include historical consciousness. It will make conscious the prejudices governing our own understanding, so that the text, as another's meaning, can be isolated and valued on its own. Foregrounding (abheben) a prejudice clearly requires suspending its validity for us. For as long as our mind is influenced by a prejudice, we do not consider it a judgment. How then can we foreground it? It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked. The encounter with a traditionary text can provide this provocation. For what leads to understanding must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity. Understanding begins, as we have already said above,\textsuperscript{45} when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics. We now know what this requires, namely the fundamental suspension of our own prejudices. But all suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a question.

The essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open. If a prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us, this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person accepted as valid in its place. Rather, historical objectivism shows its naivete in accepting this disregarding of ourselves as
what actually happens. In fact our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk. Only by being given full play is it able to experience the other's claim to truth and make it possible for him to have full play himself.

The naivete of so-called historicism consists in the fact that it does not undertake this reflection, and in trusting to the fact that its procedure is methodical, it forgets its own historicity. We must here appeal from a badly understood historical thinking to one that can better perform the task of understanding. Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the object as the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding. A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself. I shall refer to this as "history of effect." Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.

(iv) The Principle of History of Effect (Wirkungsgeschichte)

Historical interest is directed not only toward the historical phenomenon and the traditionary work but also, secondarily, toward their effect in history (which also includes the history of research); the history of effect is generally regarded as a mere supplement to historical inquiry, from Hermann Grimm's Raffael to Gundolf and beyond—though it has occasioned many valuable insights. To this extent, history of effect is not new. But to require an inquiry into history of effect every time a work of art or an aspect of the tradition is led out of the twilight region between tradition and history so that it can be seen clearly and openly in terms of its own meaning—this is a new demand (addressed not to research, but to its methodological consciousness) that proceeds inevitably from thinking historical consciousness through.

It is not, of course, a hermeneutical requirement in the sense of the traditional conception of hermeneutics. I am not saying that historical inquiry should develop inquiry into the history of effect as a kind of inquiry separate from understanding the work itself. The requirement is of a more theoretical kind. Historical consciousness must become conscious that in the apparent immediacy with which it approaches a work of art or
a tradiotional text, there is also another kind of inquiry in play, albeit unrecognized and unregulated. If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, we are always already affected by history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there—in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon—when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth.

In our understanding, which we imagine is so innocent because its results seem so self-evident, the other presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other. In relying on its critical method, historical objectivism conceals the fact that historical consciousness is itself situated in the web of historical effects. By means of methodical critique it does away with the arbitrariness of “relevant” appropriations of the past, but it preserves its good conscience by failing to recognize the presuppositions—certainly not arbitrary, but still fundamental—that govern its own understanding, and hence falls short of reaching that truth which, despite the finite nature of our understanding, could be reached. In this respect, historical objectivism resembles statistics, which are such excellent means of propaganda because they let the “facts” speak and hence simulate an objectivity that in reality depends on the legitimacy of the questions asked.

We are not saying, then, that history of effect must be developed as a new independent discipline ancillary to the human sciences, but that we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work. When a naive faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge. We are familiar with this from the history of science, where it appears as the irrefutable proof of something that is obviously false. But on the whole the power of effective history does not depend on its being recognized. This, precisely, is the power of history over finite human consciousness, namely that it prevails even where faith in method leads one to deny one’s own historicity. Our need to become conscious of effective history is urgent because it is necessary for scientific consciousness. But this does not mean it can ever be absolutely fulfilled. That we should become completely aware of effective history is just as hybrid a statement as when Hegel speaks of absolute knowledge, in which history
would become completely transparent to itself and hence be raised to the level of a concept. Rather, historically effected consciousness (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewuβtsein) is an element in the act of understanding itself and, as we shall see, is already effectual in finding the right questions to ask.

Consciousness of being affected by history (wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewuβtsein) is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however, always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it.47 We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished. This is also true of the hermeneutic situation—i.e., the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand. The illumination of this situation—reflection on effective history—can never be completely achieved; yet the fact that it cannot be completed is due not to a deficiency in reflection but to the essence of the historical being that we are. To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete. All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call “substance,” because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity. This almost defines the aim of philosophical hermeneutics: its task is to retrace the path of Hegel's phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it.

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon.” The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth. Since Nietzsche and Husserl,49 the word has been used in philosophy to characterize the way in which thought is tied to its finite determinacy, and the way one’s range of vision is gradually expanded. A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence over-values what is nearest to him. On the other hand, “to have a horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon.
whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.

In the sphere of historical understanding, too, we speak of horizons, especially when referring to the claim of historical consciousness to see the past in its own terms, not in terms of our contemporary criteria and prejudices but within its own historical horizon. The task of historical understanding also involves acquiring an appropriate historical horizon, so that what we are trying to understand can be seen in its true dimensions. If we fail to transpose ourselves into the historical horizon from which the traditionary text speaks, we will misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us. To that extent this seems a legitimate hermeneutical requirement: we must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it. We may wonder, however, whether this phrase is adequate to describe the understanding that is required of us. The same is true of a conversation that we have with someone simply in order to get to know him—i.e., to discover where he is coming from and his horizon. This is not a true conversation—that is, we are not seeking agreement on some subject—because the specific contents of the conversation are only a means to get to know the horizon of the other person. Examples are oral examinations and certain kinds of conversation between doctor and patient. Historical consciousness is clearly doing something similar when it transposes itself into the situation of the past and thereby claims to have acquired the right historical horizon. In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person's standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also when someone thinks historically, he comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing himself in it.

In both cases, the person understanding has, as it were, stopped trying to reach an agreement. He himself cannot be reached. By factoring the other person's standpoint into what he is claiming to say, we are making our own standpoint safely unattainable. In considering the origin of historical thinking, we have seen that in fact it makes this ambiguous transition from means to ends—i.e., it makes an end of what is only a means. The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim to be saying something true. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint—i.e., transpose ourselves into the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon. In fact, however, we have
given up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves. Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth.

However, the question is whether this description really fits the hermeneutical phenomenon. Are there really two different horizons here—the horizon in which the person seeking to understand lives and the historical horizon within which he places himself? Is it a correct description of the art of historical understanding to say that we learn to transpose ourselves into alien horizons? Are there such things as closed horizons, in this sense? We recall Nietzsche's complaint against historicism that it destroyed the horizon bounded by myth in which alone a culture is able to live. Is the horizon of one's own present time ever closed in this way, and can a historical situation be imagined that has this kind of closed horizon?

Or is this a romantic refraction, a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream of historical enlightenment, the fiction of an unattainable island, as artificial as Crusoe himself—i.e., as the alleged primacy of the solus ipse? Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. The surrounding horizon is not set in motion by historical consciousness. But in it this motion becomes aware of itself.

When our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own; instead, they together constitute the one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness. Everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a single historical horizon. Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition.

Understanding tradition undoubtedly requires a historical horizon, then. But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by transposing ourselves into a historical situation. Rather, we must always already have a horizon
in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation. For what do we mean by “transposing ourselves”? Certainly not just disregarding ourselves. This is necessary, of course, insofar as we must imagine the other situation. But into this other situation we must bring, precisely, ourselves. Only this is the full meaning of “transposing ourselves.” If we put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, for example, then we will understand him—i.e., become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person—by putting ourselves in his position.

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of “horizon” suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand—not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. To speak, with Nietzsche, of the many changing horizons into which historical consciousness teaches us to place ourselves is not a correct description. If we disregard ourselves in this way, we have no historical horizon. Nietzsche’s view that historical study is deleterious to life is not, in fact, directed against historical consciousness as such, but against the self-alienation it undergoes when it regards the method of modern historical science as its own true nature. We have already pointed out that a truly historical consciousness always sees its own present in such a way that it sees itself, as well as the historically other, within the right relationships. It requires a special effort to acquire a historical horizon. We are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence. Thus it is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then can we listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard.

We have shown above that this is a process of foregrounding (abheben). Let us consider what this idea of foregrounding involves. It is always reciprocal. Whatever is being foregrounded must be foregrounded from something else, which, in turn, must be foregrounded from it. Thus all foregrounding also makes visible that from which something is foregrounded. We have described this above as the way prejudices are brought into play. We started by saying that a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the
horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see. But now it is important to avoid the error of thinking that the horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations, and that the otherness of the past can be foregrounded from it as from a fixed ground.

In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves. We are familiar with the power of this kind of fusion chiefly from earlier times and their naiveté about themselves and their heritage. In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.

If, however, there is no such thing as these distinct horizons, why do we speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply of the formation of the one horizon, whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition? To ask the question means that we are recognizing that understanding becomes a scholarly task only under special circumstances and that it is necessary to work out these circumstances as a hermeneutical situation. Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the text and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naive assimilation of the two but in consciously bringing it out. This is why it is part of the hermeneutic approach to project a historical horizon that is different from the horizon of the present. Historical consciousness is aware of its own otherness and hence foregrounds the horizon of the past from its own. On the other hand, it is itself, as we are trying to show, only something superimposed upon continuing tradition, and hence it immediately recombines with what it has foregrounded itself from in order to become one with itself again in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires.

Projecting a historical horizon, then, is only one phase in the process of understanding; it does not become solidified into the self-alienation of a past consciousness, but is overtaken by our own present horizon of
understanding. In the process of understanding, a real fusing of horizons occurs—which means that as the historical horizon is projected, it is simultaneously superseded. To bring about this fusion in a regulated way is the task of what we called historically effected consciousness. Although this task was obscured by aesthetic-historical positivism following on the heels of romantic hermeneutics, it is, in fact, the central problem of hermeneutics. It is the problem of application, which is to be found in all understanding.

2 THE RECOVERY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL HERMENEUTIC PROBLEM

(A) THE HERMENEUTIC PROBLEM OF APPLICATION

In the early tradition of hermeneutics, which was completely invisible to the historical self-consciousness of post-romantic scientific epistemology, this problem had its systematic place. Hermeneutics was subdivided as follows: there was a distinction between subtilitas intelligendi (understanding) and subtilitas explicandi (interpretation); and pietism added a third element, subtilitas applicandi (application), as in J. J. Rambach. The process of understanding was regarded as consisting of these three elements. It is notable that all three are called subtilitas—i.e., they are considered less as methods that we have at our disposal than as talents requiring particular finesse of mind. As we have seen, the hermeneutic problem acquired systematic importance because the romantics recognized the inner unity of intelligere and explicare. Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding. In accordance with this insight, interpretive language and concepts were recognized as belonging to the inner structure of understanding. This moves the whole problem of language from its peripheral and incidental position into the center of philosophy. We will return to this point.

The inner fusion of understanding and interpretation led to the third element in the hermeneutical problem, application, becoming wholly excluded from any connection with hermeneutics. The edifying application of Scripture in Christian preaching, for example, now seemed very different from the historical and theological understanding of it. In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding always
involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation. Thus we are forced to go one step beyond romantic hermeneutics, as it were, by regarding not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as comprising one unified process. This is not to return to the pietist tradition of the three separate "subtle-ties," for, on the contrary, we consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation.52

The current state of the hermeneutical discussion is what occasions my emphasizing the fundamental importance of this point. We can appeal first to the forgotten history of hermeneutics. Formerly it was considered obvious that the task of hermeneutics was to adapt the text's meaning to the concrete situation to which the text is speaking. The interpreter of the divine will who can interpret the oracle's language is the original model for this. But even today it is still the case that an interpreter's task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in the way that seems most appropriate to him, considering the real situation of the dialogue, which only he knows, since he alone knows both languages being used in the discussion.

Similarly, the history of hermeneutics teaches us that besides literary hermeneutics, there is also a theological and a legal hermeneutics, and together they make up the full concept of hermeneutics. As a result of the emergence of historical consciousness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philological hermeneutics and historical studies cut their ties with the other hermeneutical disciplines and established themselves as models of methodology for research in the human sciences.

The fact that philological, legal, and theological hermeneutics originally belonged closely together depended on recognizing application as an integral element of all understanding. In both legal and theological hermeneutics there is an essential tension between the fixed text—the law or the gospel—on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching. A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at
every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.

We began by showing that understanding, as it occurs in the human sciences, is essentially historical—i.e., that in them a text is understood only if it is understood in a different way as the occasion requires. Precisely this indicates the task of a historical hermeneutics: to consider the tension that exists between the identity of the common object and the changing situation in which it must be understood. We began by saying that the historical movement of understanding, which romantic hermeneutics pushed to the periphery, is the true center of hermeneutical inquiry appropriate to historical consciousness. Our consideration of the significance of tradition in historical consciousness started from Heidegger's analysis of the hermeneutics of facticity and sought to apply it to a hermeneutics of the human sciences. We showed that understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. Understanding proves to be an event, and the task of hermeneutics, seen philosophically, consists in asking what kind of understanding, what kind of science it is, that is itself advanced by historical change.

We are quite aware that we are asking something unusual of the self-understanding of modern science. All of our considerations thus far have been directed toward making this task easier by showing that it results from the convergence of a large number of problems. In fact, hermeneutical theory hitherto falls apart into distinctions that it cannot itself maintain. This is seen clearly in the attempt to construct a general theory of interpretation. When a distinction is made between cognitive, normative, and reproductive interpretation, as in Betti's General Theory of Interpretation,53 which is based on a remarkable knowledge and survey of the subject, difficulties arise in categorizing phenomena according to this division. This is especially true of scholarly interpretation. If we put theological interpretation together with legal interpretation and assign them a normative function, then we must remember Schleiermacher who, on the contrary, closely connected theological interpretation with general interpretation, which was for him the philological-historical one. In fact, the split between the cognitive and the normative function runs right through theological hermeneutics and can hardly be overcome by distinguishing scientific knowledge from the subsequent edifying application.
The split runs through legal interpretation also. In that discovering the meaning of a legal text and discovering how to apply it in a particular legal instance are not two separate actions, but one unitary process.

But even the kind of interpretation that seems furthest from the kinds we have been considering, namely performative interpretation, as in the cases of music and drama—and they acquire their real existence only in being played—is scarcely an independent mode of interpretation. In it too there is a split between the cognitive and the normative function. No one can stage a play, read a poem, or perform a piece of music without understanding the original meaning of the text and presenting it in his reproduction and interpretation. But, similarly, no one will be able to make a performative interpretation without taking account of that other normative element—the stylistic values of one's own day—which, whenever a text is brought to sensory appearance, sets limits to the demand for a stylistically correct reproduction. When we consider that translating texts in a foreign language, imitating them, or even reading texts aloud correctly, involves the same explanatory achievement as philological interpretation, so that the two things become as one, then we cannot avoid the conclusion that the suggested distinction between cognitive, normative, and reproductive interpretation has no fundamental validity, but all three constitute one unitary phenomenon.

If this is the case, then we have the task of redefining the hermeneutics of the human sciences in terms of legal and theological hermeneutics. For this we must remember the insight gained from our investigation into romantic hermeneutics, namely that both it and its culmination in psychological interpretation—i.e., deciphering and explaining the individuality of the other—treat the problem of understanding in a way that is far too one-sided. Our line of thought prevents us from dividing the hermeneutic problem in terms of the subjectivity of the interpreter and the objectivity of the meaning to be understood. This would be starting from a false antithesis that cannot be resolved even by recognizing the dialectic of subjective and objective. To distinguish between a normative function and a cognitive one is to separate what clearly belong together. The meaning of a law that emerges in its normative application is fundamentally no different from the meaning reached in understanding a text. It is quite mistaken to base the possibility of understanding a text on the postulate of a "con-geniality" that supposedly unites the creator and the interpreter of a work. If this were really the case, then the human sciences would be in a bad way. But the miracle of understanding consists in the fact that no
like-mindedness is necessary to recognize what is really significant and fundamentally meaningful in tradition. We have the ability to open ourselves to the superior claim the text makes and to respond to what it has to tell us. Hermeneutics in the sphere of philology and the historical sciences is not “knowledge as domination”\(^55\) — i.e., an appropriation as taking possession; rather, it consists in subordinating ourselves to the text’s claim to dominate our minds. Of this, however, legal and theological hermeneutics are the true model. To interpret the law’s will or the promises of God is clearly not a form of domination but of service. They are interpretations—which includes application—in the service of what is considered valid. Our thesis is that historical hermeneutics too has a task of application to perform, because it too serves applicable meaning, in that it explicitly and consciously bridges the temporal distance that separates the interpreter from the text and overcomes the alienation of meaning that the text has undergone.\(^56\)

(b) The Hermeneutic Relevance of Aristotle\(^57\)

At this point a problem arises that we have touched on several times. If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that one and the same tradition must time and again be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular. Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation. This makes Aristotle’s ethics especially important for us—we touched on it in the introductory remarks on the theory of the human sciences.\(^58\) It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension, but with the right estimation of the role that reason has to play in moral action. But what interests us here is precisely that he is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it. By circumscribing the intellectualism of Socrates and Plato in his inquiry into the good, Aristotle became the founder of ethics as a discipline independent of metaphysics. Criticizing the Platonic idea of the good as an empty generality, he asks instead the question of what is humanly good, what is good in terms of human action.\(^59\) His critique demonstrates that the equation of virtue and knowledge, arete and logos, which is the basis of Plato’s and Socrates’ theory of virtue, is an exaggeration. Aristotle restores the balance by showing that the basis of moral knowledge in man is orexis,
striving, and its development into a fixed demeanor (hexis). The very name “ethics” indicates that Aristotle bases arete on practice and “ethos.”

Human civilization differs essentially from nature in that it is not simply a place where capacities and powers work themselves out; man becomes what he is through what he does and how he behaves—i.e., he behaves in a certain way because of what he has become. Thus Aristotle sees ethos as differing from physis in being a sphere in which the laws of nature do not operate, yet not a sphere of lawlessness but of human institutions and human modes of behavior which are mutable, and like rules only to a limited degree.

The question is whether there can be any such thing as philosophical knowledge of the moral being of man and what role knowledge (i.e., logos) plays in the moral being of man. If man always encounters the good in the form of the particular practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to determine what the concrete situation asks of him—or, to put it another way, the person acting must view the concrete situation in light of what is asked of him in general. But—negatively put—this means that knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring what the situation calls for. This state of affairs, which represents the nature of moral reflection, not only makes philosophical ethics a methodologically difficult problem, but also gives the problem of method a moral relevance. In contrast to the theory of the good based on Plato’s doctrine of ideas, Aristotle emphasizes that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics. Indeed, to demand this kind of exactitude would be inappropriate. What needs to be done is simply to make an outline and by means of this sketch give some help to moral consciousness. But how such help can be possible is already a moral problem. For obviously it is characteristic of the moral phenomenon that the person acting must himself know and decide. He cannot let anything take this responsibility from him. Thus it is essential that philosophical ethics have the right approach, so that it does not usurp the place of moral consciousness and yet does not seek a purely theoretical and “historical” knowledge either but, by outlining phenomena, helps moral consciousness to attain clarity concerning itself. This asks a lot of the person who is to receive this help, namely the person listening to Aristotle’s lecture. He must be mature enough not to ask that his instruction provide anything other than it can and may give. To put it positively, through education and practice he must
himself already have developed a demeanor that he is constantly concerned to preserve in the concrete situations of his life and prove through right behavior.61

As we see, the problem of method is entirely determined by the object—a general Aristotelian principle—and the important thing for us is to examine more closely the curious relation between moral being and moral consciousness that Aristotle sets out in his Ethics. Aristotle remains Socratic in that he retains knowledge as an essential component of moral being, and it is precisely the balance between the heritage of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle's point concerning ethos that interests us. For the hermeneutical problem too is clearly distinct from "pure" knowledge detached from any particular kind of being. We spoke of the interpreter's belonging to the tradition he is interpreting, and we saw that understanding itself is a historical event. The alienation of the interpreter from the interpreted by the objectifying methods of modern science, characteristic of the hermeneutics and historiography of the nineteenth century, appeared as the consequence of a false objectification. My purpose in returning to the example of Aristotelian ethics is to help us realize and avoid this. For moral knowledge, as Aristotle describes it, is clearly not objective knowledge—i.e., the knower is not standing over against a situation that he merely observes; he is directly confronted with what he sees. It is something that he has to do.62

Obviously this is not what we mean by knowing in the realm of science. Thus the distinction that Aristotle makes between moral knowledge (phronesis) and theoretical knowledge (episteme) is a simple one, especially when we remember that science, for the Greeks, is represented by the model of mathematics, a knowledge of what is unchangeable, a knowledge that depends on proof and that can therefore be learned by anybody. A hermeneutics of the human sciences certainly has nothing to learn from mathematical as distinguished from moral knowledge. The human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to that kind of "theoretical" knowledge. They are "moral sciences." Their object is man and what he knows of himself. But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge of himself does not seek to establish what is. An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of his knowledge is to govern his action.

Here lies the real problem of moral knowledge that occupies Aristotle in his Ethics. For we find action governed by knowledge in an exemplary form
where the Greeks speak of techne. This is the skill, the knowledge of the
craftsman who knows how to make some specific thing. The question is
whether moral knowledge is knowledge of this kind. This would mean that
it was knowledge of how to make oneself. Does man learn to make himself
what he ought to be, in the same way that the craftsman learns to make
things according to his plan and will? Does man project himself on an eidos
of himself in the same way that the craftsman carries within himself an
eidos of what he is trying to make and embody in his material? We know
that Socrates and Plato did apply the concept of techne to the concept of
man's being, and it is undeniable that they did discover something true
here. In the political sphere, at any rate, the model of techne has an
eminently critical function, in that it reveals the untenability of what is
called the art of politics, in which everyone involved in politics—i.e., every
citizen—regards himself as an expert. Characteristically, the knowledge of
the craftsman is the only one that Socrates, in his famous account of his
experience of his fellow-countrymen, recognizes as real knowledge within
its own sphere. 63 But even the craftsmen disappoint him. Their knowledge
is not the true knowledge that constitutes a man and a citizen as such. But
it is real knowledge. It is a real art and skill, and not simply a high degree
of experience. In this respect it is clearly one with the true moral
knowledge that Socrates is seeking. Both are practical knowledge—i.e.,
their purpose is to determine and guide action. Consequently, they must
include the application of knowledge to the particular task.

This is the point at which we can relate Aristotle's analysis of moral
knowledge to the hermeneutical problem of the modern human sciences.
Admittedly, hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with techni-
cal nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include the
same task of application that we have recognized as the central problem of
hermeneutics. Certainly application does not mean the same thing in each
case. There is a curious tension between a techne that can be taught and
one acquired through experience. The prior knowledge that a person has
who has been taught a craft is not, in practice, necessarily superior to the
kind of knowledge that someone has who is untrained but has had
extensive experience. Although this is the case, the prior knowledge
involved in a techne cannot be called "theoretical," especially since
experience is automatically acquired in using this knowledge. For, as
knowledge, it is always related to practical application, and even if the
recalcitrant material does not always obey the person who has learned his
craft, Aristotle can still rightly quote the words of the poet: "Techne loves

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tyche (luck) and tyche loves techne.” This means that the person who has been taught his trade is will have the most luck. A genuine mastery of the matter is acquired practically in the techne, and just this provides a model for moral knowledge. For in moral knowledge too it is clear that experience can never be sufficient for making right moral decisions. Here too moral consciousness itself calls for prior direction to guide action; indeed, we cannot be content here with the uncertain relation between prior knowledge and success in the present case that obtains in the case of a techne. There is, no doubt, a real analogy between the fully developed moral consciousness and the capacity to make something—i.e., a techne—but they are certainly not the same.

On the contrary, the differences are patent. It is obvious that man is not at his own disposal in the same way that the craftsman’s material is at his disposal. Clearly he cannot make himself in the same way that he can make something else. Thus it will have to be another kind of knowledge that he has of himself in his moral being, a knowledge that is distinct from the knowledge that guides the making of something. Aristotle captures this difference in a bold and unique way when he calls this kind of knowledge self-knowledge—i.e., knowledge for oneself. This distinguishes the self-knowledge of moral consciousness from theoretical knowledge in a way that seems immediately evident. But it also distinguishes it from technical knowledge, and to make this double distinction Aristotle ventures the odd expression “self-knowledge.”

It is the distinction from technical knowledge that is the more difficult task if, with Aristotle, we define the “object” of this knowledge ontologically not as something general that always is as it is, but as something individual that can also be different. For at first sight the tasks seem wholly analogous. A person who knows how to make something knows something good, and he knows it “for himself,” so that, where there is the possibility of doing so, he is really able to make it. He takes the right material and chooses the right means to do the work. Thus he must know how to apply what has been learned in a general way to the concrete situation. Is the same not true of moral consciousness? A person who has to make moral decisions has always already learned something. He has been so formed by education and custom that he knows in general what is right. The task of making a moral decision is that of doing the right thing in a particular situation—i.e., seeing what is right within the situation and grasping it. He too has to act, choosing the right means, and his conduct
must be governed just as carefully as that of the craftsman. How then is it nevertheless a knowledge of a quite different kind?

From Aristotle's analysis of phronesis one can derive a variety of answers to this question, for Aristotle's ability to describe phenomena from every aspect constitutes his real genius. “The empirical, comprehended in its synthesis, is the speculative concept” (Hegel).65 Let us consider here a few points that are important for our discussion.

1. We learn a techne and can also forget it. But we do not learn moral knowledge, nor can we forget it. We do not stand over against it, as if it were something that we can acquire or not, as we can choose to acquire an objective skill, a techne. Rather, we are always already in the situation of having to act (disregarding the special position of children, for whom obedience to the person educating them replaces their own decision), and hence we must already possess and be able to apply moral knowledge. That is why the concept of application is highly problematical. For we can only apply something that we already have; but we do not possess moral knowledge in such a way that we already have it and then apply it to specific situations. The image that a man has of what he ought to be—i.e., his ideas of right and wrong, of decency, courage, dignity, loyalty, and so forth (all concepts that have their equivalents in Aristotle's catalogue of virtues)—are certainly in some sense images that he uses to guide his conduct. But there is still a basic difference between this and the guiding image the craftsman uses: the plan of the object he is going to make. What is right, for example, cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action from me, whereas the eidos of what a craftsman wants to make is fully determined by the use for which it is intended.

It is true that what is right seems equally determinate in an absolute sense. For what is right is formulated in laws and contained in general rules of conduct that, although uncodified, can be very exactly determined and are universally binding. Thus, administering justice is a special task that requires both knowledge and skill. Is it not a techne, then? Does it not also consist in applying laws and rules to the concrete case? Do we not speak of the “art” of the judge? Why is what Aristotle describes as the judge's form of phronesis (dikastike phronesis) not a techne?66

If we think about it, we shall see that applying laws involves a curious legal ambiguity. The situation of the craftsman is quite different. With the design of the object and the rules for executing it, the craftsman proceeds
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to carry it out. He may be forced to adapt himself to particular circumstances; he may have to resign himself to executing his design in a way other than he originally intended. But this resignation does not mean that his knowledge of what he wants is improved. Rather, he simply omits certain things in the execution. What we have here is the painful imperfection associated with applying one's knowledge.

By comparison, the situation of the person "applying" law is quite different. In a certain instance he will have to refrain from applying the full rigor of the law. But if he does, it is not because he has no alternative, but because to do otherwise would not be right. In restraining the law, he is not diminishing it but, on the contrary, finding the better law. Aristotle expresses this very clearly in his analysis of epikeia (equity): epikeia is the correction of the law. Aristotle shows that every law is in a necessary tension with concrete action, in that it is general and hence cannot contain practical reality in its full concreteness. We have already touched on this problem near the beginning of the present volume when we were considering the faculty of judgment. Clearly legal hermeneutics finds its proper place here. The law is always deficient, not because it is imperfect in itself but because human reality is necessarily imperfect in comparison to the ordered world of law, and hence allows of no simple application of the law.

From what we have said it is clear that Aristotle's position on the problem of natural law is highly subtle and certainly not to be equated with the later natural-law tradition. I will briefly outline the way the idea of natural law is related to the hermeneutical problem. It follows from our discussion so far that Aristotle does not simply dismiss the question of natural law. He does not regard a system of laws as true law in an absolute sense, but considers the concept of equity as a necessary supplement to law. Thus he opposes an extreme conventionalism or legal positivism by explicitly distinguishing between what is naturally right and what is legally right. The distinction he has in mind is not simply that between the unchangeability of natural law and the changeability of positive law. It is true that Aristotle has generally been understood as meaning this. But the true profundity of his insight has been missed. Certainly he accepts the idea of an absolutely unchangeable law, but he limits it explicitly to the gods and says that among men not only statutory law but also natural law is changeable. For Aristotle, this changeability is wholly compatible with the fact that it is "natural" law. The sense of this assertion seems to me to be the following: some laws are entirely a matter of mere agreement (e.g.,
traffic regulations), but there are also things that do not admit of regulation by mere human convention because the "nature of the thing" constantly asserts itself. Thus it is quite legitimate to call such things "natural law."73

In that the nature of the thing still allows some room for play, natural law is still changeable. This is clearly evidenced by the examples that Aristotle adduces from other spheres. The right hand is naturally the stronger one, but there is nothing to stop us from training the left one so that it becomes as strong as the right (Aristotle obviously uses this example because it was a favorite of Plato's). A second example is even more illuminating because it already belongs in the legal sphere: one and the same measure always proves smaller when we buy wine in it than when we sell wine in it. Aristotle is not saying that people in the wine trade are constantly trying to trick their customers, but rather that this behavior corresponds to the area of free play permitted within the set limits of what is right. And he quite clearly explains that the best state "is everywhere one and the same," but it is the same in a different way that "fire burns everywhere in the same way, whether in Greece or in Persia."

Despite this clear statement by Aristotle, later thinkers on natural law quoted this passage as if he were comparing the unchangeability of human law with the unchangeability of natural laws.74 The opposite is the case. In fact, as his very distinction shows, for Aristotle the idea of natural law has only a critical function. No dogmatic use can be made of it—i.e., we cannot invest particular laws with the dignity and inviolability of natural law. In view of the necessary imperfection of all human laws, the idea of natural law is indispensable for Aristotle; and it becomes particularly important in the question of what is equitable, which is what first really decides the law. But its function is a critical one in that the appeal to natural law is legitimate only where a discrepancy emerges between one law and another.

The special question of natural law, which Aristotle answers in extenso, does not as such interest us here, except by reason of its fundamental significance. For what Aristotle shows here is true of all man's ideas of what he ought to be, and not only of the problem of law. All these concepts are not just arbitrary ideals conditioned by convention, but despite all the variety of moral ideas in the most different times and peoples, in this sphere there is still something like the nature of the thing. This is not to say that the nature of the thing—e.g., the ideal of bravery—is a fixed standard that we could recognize and apply by ourselves. Rather, Aristotle affirms as true of the teacher of ethics precisely what is true, in his view, of all men:
that he too is always already involved in a moral and political context and acquires his image of the thing from that standpoint. He does not himself regard the guiding principles that he describes as knowledge that can be taught. They are valid only as schemata. They are concretized only in the concrete situation of the person acting. Thus they are not norms to be found in the stars, nor do they have an unchanging place in a natural moral universe, so that all that would be necessary would be to perceive them. Nor are they mere conventions, but really do correspond to the nature of the thing—except that the latter is always itself determined in each case by the use the moral consciousness makes of them.

2. Here we see a fundamental modification of the conceptual relation between means and end, one that distinguishes moral from technical knowledge. It is not only that moral knowledge has no merely particular end but pertains to right living in general, whereas all technical knowledge is particular and serves particular ends. Nor is it the case simply that moral knowledge must take over where technical knowledge would be desirable but is unavailable. Certainly if technical knowledge were available, it would always make it unnecessary to deliberate with oneself about the subject. Where there is a techne, we must learn it and then we are able to find the right means. We see that moral knowledge, however, always requires this kind of self-deliberation. Even if we conceive this knowledge in ideal perfection, it is perfect deliberation with oneself (euboulia) and not knowledge in the manner of a techne.

Thus we are dealing here with a fundamental relationship. It is not the case that extending technical knowledge would obviate the need for moral knowledge, this deliberating with oneself. Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught. The relation between means and ends here is not such that one can know the right means in advance, and that is because the right end is not a mere object of knowledge either. There can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole. Hence Aristotle's definitions of phronesis have a marked uncertainty about them, in that this knowledge is sometimes related more to the end, and sometimes more to the means to the end. In fact this means that the end toward which our life as a whole tends and its elaboration in the moral principles of action described in Aristotle's Ethics cannot be the object of a knowledge that can be taught. No more can ethics be used dogmatically than can natural law. Rather, Aristotle's theory of virtue describes typical forms of the true mean to be observed in human life and behavior; but the moral knowledge that is
oriented by these guiding images is the same knowledge that has to respond to the demands of the situation of the moment.

Hence also mere expediency cannot enter considerations about what might further moral ends; rather, the consideration of the means is itself a moral consideration and it is this that concretizes the moral rightness of the end. The self-knowledge of which Aristotle speaks is characterized by the fact that it includes perfect application and employs its knowledge in the immediacy of the given situation. Thus a knowledge of the particular situation (which is nevertheless not a perceptual seeing) is a necessary supplement to moral knowledge. For although it is necessary to see what a situation is asking of us, this seeing does not mean that we perceive in the situation what is visible as such, but that we learn to see it as the situation of action and hence in the light of what is right. Just as we "see" from the geometrical analysis of plane surfaces that the triangle is the simplest two-dimensional plane figure, so that we can go no further with our subdivisions, but must stop here, so also in moral deliberation, seeing what is immediately to be done is not a mere seeing but nous. This is also confirmed by what constitutes the opposite of this kind of seeing. The opposite of seeing what is right is not error or deception but blindness. A person who is overwhelmed by his passions suddenly no longer sees what is right to do in a given situation. He has lost his self-mastery and hence his own rightness—i.e., the right orientation within himself—so that, driven by the dialectic of passion, whatever his passion tells him is right seems so. Moral knowledge is really knowledge of a special kind. In a curious way it embraces both means and end, and hence differs from technical knowledge. That is why it is pointless to distinguish here between knowledge and experience, as can be done in the case of a techne. For moral knowledge contains a kind of experience in itself, and in fact we shall see that this is perhaps the fundamental form of experience (Erfahrung), compared with which all other experience represents an alienation, not to say a denaturing.

3. The self-knowledge of moral reflection has, in fact, a unique relation to itself. We can see this from the modifications that Aristotle presents in the context of his analysis of phronesis. Beside phronesis, the virtue of thoughtful reflection, stands "sympathetic understanding." "Being understanding" is introduced as a modification of the virtue of moral knowledge since in this case it is not I who must act. Accordingly synesis means simply the capacity for moral judgment. Someone's sympathetic understanding is praised, of course, when in order to judge he transposes
himself fully into the concrete situation of the person who has to act. The question here, then, is not about knowledge in general but its concretion at a particular moment. This knowledge also is not in any sense technical knowledge or the application of such. The man of the world, the man who knows all the tricks and dodges and is experienced in everything there is, does not really have sympathetic understanding for the person acting: he has it only if he satisfies one requirement, namely that he too is seeking what is right—i.e., that he is united with the other person in this commonality. The concrete example of this is the phenomenon of advice in “questions of conscience.” Both the person asking for advice and the person giving it assume that they are bound together in friendship. Only friends can advise each other or, to put it another way, only a piece of advice that is meant in a friendly way has meaning for the person advised. Once again we discover that the person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected.

This becomes fully clear when we consider other varieties of moral reflection listed by Aristotle, namely insight and fellow feeling. Insight here means a quality. We say that someone is insightful when they make a fair, correct judgment. An insightful person is prepared to consider the particular situation of the other person, and hence he is also most inclined to be forbearing or to forgive. Here again it is clear that this is not technical knowledge.

Finally, Aristotle makes the special nature of moral knowledge and the virtue of possessing it particularly clear by describing a naturally debased version of this moral knowledge. He says that the deinos is a man who has all the natural prerequisites and gifts for this moral knowledge, a man who is able, with remarkable skill, to get the most out of any situation, who is able to turn everything to his advantage and finds a way out of every situation. But this natural counterpart to phronesis is characterized by the fact that the deinos is “capable of anything”; he uses his skills to any purpose and is without inhibition. He is aneu aretes. And it is more than accidental that such a person is given a name that also means “terrible.” Nothing is so terrible, so uncanny, so appalling, as the exercise of brilliant talents for evil.

To summarize, if we relate Aristotle’s description of the ethical phenomenon and especially the virtue of moral knowledge to our own investigation, we find that his analysis in fact offers a kind of model of the problems
of hermeneutics. We too determined that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pregiven universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditionary text tries to apply it to himself. But this does not mean that the text is given for him as something universal, that he first understands it per se, and then afterward uses it for particular applications. Rather, the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text—i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all.

(c) THE EXEMPLARY SIGNIFICANCE OF LEGAL HERMENEUTICS

If this is the case, the gap between hermeneutics of the human sciences and legal hermeneutics cannot be as wide as is generally assumed. The dominant view is, of course, that only with the rise of historical consciousness was understanding raised to a method of objective science and that hermeneutics came into its own when it was elaborated into a general theory of the understanding and interpretation of texts. Legal hermeneutics does not belong in this context, for its purpose is not to understand given texts, but to be a practical measure filling a kind of gap in the system of legal dogmatics. It is thought, then, that it has nothing to do with the task of hermeneutics in the human sciences, which is the understanding of traditionary material.

But in that case theological hermeneutics cannot claim any independent systematic significance. Schleiermacher consciously placed it wholly within general hermeneutics and merely regarded it as a special application of it. Since then, scientific theology's claim to be a discipline on a par with the modern historical sciences seems to depend on the fact that no laws and rules are to be applied in interpreting Scripture other than those used in understanding any other traditionary material. Thus there could no longer be any such thing as a specifically theological hermeneutics.

It is a paradoxical position if we, nevertheless, try to revive the old truth and the old unity of hermeneutical discipline within modern science. It seems that methodology of the human sciences moves into modernity when it detaches itself from all dogmatic ties. Legal hermeneutics was
separated from theory of understanding as a whole because it has a
dogmatic purpose, just as, by giving up its dogmatic commitment, theo-
logical hermeneutics was united with philological-historical method.

In this situation we can take special interest in the divergence between
legal and historical hermeneutics and consider those cases in which legal
and historical hermeneutics are concerned with the same object—i.e.,
cases in which legal texts are interpreted legally, in court, and also
understood historically. So we will consider the approaches taken by the
legal historian and the jurist to the same legal text. We can turn here to the
excellent writings of E. Betti and pursue our own thinking from there.
Our question is whether or not there is an unequivocal distinction between
dogmatic and historical interest.

That there is a difference is clear. The jurist understands the meaning of
the law from the present case and for the sake of this present case. By
contrast, the legal historian has no case from which to start, but he seeks
to determine the meaning of the law by constructing the whole range of its
applications. It is only in all its applications that the law becomes concrete.
Thus the legal historian cannot be content to take the original application
of the law as determining its original meaning. As a historian he will,
rather, have to take account of the historical change that the law has
undergone. In understanding, he will have to mediate between the
original application and the present application of the law.

In my view it would not be enough to say that the task of the historian
was simply to “reconstruct the original meaning of the legal formula” and
that of the jurist to “harmonize that meaning with the present living
actuality.” This kind of division would mean that the definition of the jurist
is more comprehensive and includes the task of the legal historian.
Someone who is seeking to understand the correct meaning of a law must
first know the original one. Thus he must think in terms of legal
history—but here historical understanding serves merely as a means to an
end. On the other hand, the historian as such has no dogmatic task. As a
historian he approaches the historical object in order to determine its
historical value, whereas the jurist, in addition, applies what has been
learned in this way to the legal present. This is what Betti says.

We may ask, however, whether he has viewed and described the task of
the historian in a sufficiently comprehensive way. In our particular
example, where does the historical element come in? In regard to a law
still in force we naturally assume that its legal meaning is clear and that the
legal practice of the present simply follows the original meaning. If this
were always the case, the question about the meaning of a law would be both juridically and historically the same. For the jurist too the hermeneutical task would be just to establish the original meaning of the law and apply it as the right one. Hence as late as 1840, Savigny, in his *System des römischen Rechts*, regarded the task of legal hermeneutics as purely historical. Just as Schleiermacher saw no problem in the interpreter's having to identify himself with the original reader, so Savigny ignores the tension between the original and the present legal sense. 84

It has emerged clearly enough in the course of time that this is a legally untenable fiction. Ernst Forsthoff has shown in a valuable study that for purely legal reasons it was necessary for an awareness of historical change to develop, which involved distinguishing between the original meaning of a law and that applied in current legal practice. 85 It is true that the jurist is always concerned with the law itself, but he determines its normative content in regard to the given case to which it is to be applied. In order to determine this content exactly, it is necessary to have historical knowledge of the original meaning, and only for this reason does the judge concern himself with the historical value that the law has through the act of legislation. But he cannot let himself be bound by what, say, an account of the parliamentary proceedings tells him about the intentions of those who first passed the law. Rather, he has to take account of the change in circumstances and hence define afresh the normative function of the law.

It is quite different with the legal historian. He is apparently concerned only with the original meaning of the law, the way in which it was meant, and the validity it had when it was first promulgated. But how can he know this? Can he know it without being aware of the change in circumstances that separates his own present time from that past time? Must he not then do exactly the same thing as the judge does—i.e., distinguish between the original meaning of the text of the law and the legal meaning which he as someone who lives in the present automatically assumes? The hermeneutical situation of both the historian and the jurist seems to me to be the same in that, when faced with any text, we have an immediate expectation of meaning. There can be no such thing as a direct access to the historical object that would objectively reveal its historical value. The historian has to undertake the same reflection as the jurist.

Thus the actual content of what is understood in each of the two ways is the same. The above description of the historian's approach, then, is inadequate. Historical knowledge can be gained only by seeing the past in
its continuity with the present—which is exactly what the jurist does in his practical, normative work of “ensuring the unbroken continuance of law and preserving the tradition of the legal idea.”

We must consider, though, whether the case we have been discussing is really characteristic of the general problem of historical understanding. The model from which we started was the understanding of a law still in force. Here the historian and the dogmatist were concerned with the same object. But is this not a special case? A legal historian who turns to the legal cultures of the past, and certainly any other historian who is seeking to understand a past that no longer has any direct continuity with the present, would not recognize himself in the case we have been considering—namely a law still in force. He would say that legal hermeneutics has a special dogmatic task that is quite foreign to the context of historical hermeneutics.

In fact the situation seems to me just the opposite. Legal hermeneutics serves to remind us what the real procedure of the human sciences is. Here we have the model for the relationship between past and present that we are seeking. The judge who adapts the transmitted law to the needs of the present is undoubtedly seeking to perform a practical task, but his interpretation of the law is by no means merely for that reason an arbitrary revision. Here again, to understand and to interpret means to discover and recognize a valid meaning. The judge seeks to be in accord with the “legal idea” in mediating it with the present. This is, of course, a legal mediation. It is the legal significance of the law—and not the historical significance of the law’s promulgation or of particular cases of its application—that he is trying to understand. Thus his orientation is not that of a historian, but he has an orientation to his own history, which is his present. Thus he can always approach as a historian those questions that he has implicitly concluded as a judge.

On the other hand, the historian, who has no juridical task before him but is trying to discover the legal meaning of this law—like anything else that has been handed down in history—cannot disregard the fact that he is concerned with a legal creation that needs to be understood in a legal way. He must be able to think not only historically but also legally. It is true that it is a special case when a historian is examining a legal text that is still valid today. But this special case shows us what determines our relationship to any traditionary text. Trying to understand the law in terms of its historical origin, the historian cannot disregard its continuing effect: it presents him with the questions that he has to ask of historical tradition.
this not true of every text—i.e., that it must be understood in terms of what it says? Does this not mean that it always needs to be restated? And does not this restatement always take place through its being related to the present? Inasmuch as the actual object of historical understanding is not events but their “significance,” it is clearly an incorrect description of this understanding to speak of an object existing in itself and of the subject’s approach to it. The truth is that historical understanding always implies that the tradition reaching us speaks into the present and must be understood in this mediation—indeed, as this mediation. In reality then, legal hermeneutics is no special case but is, on the contrary, capable of restoring the hermeneutical problem to its full breadth and so re-establishing the former unity of hermeneutics, in which jurist and theologian meet the philologist.

We saw above that one of the conditions of understanding in the human sciences is belonging to tradition. Let us now try to verify this by seeing how this structural element of understanding obtains in the case of legal and theological hermeneutics. This condition is clearly not so much a limiting condition as one that makes understanding possible. The way the interpreter belongs to his text is like the way the point from which we are to view a picture belongs to its perspective. It is not a matter of looking for this viewpoint and adopting it as one’s standpoint. The interpreter similarly finds his point of view already given, and does not choose it arbitrarily. Thus it is an essential condition of the possibility of legal hermeneutics that the law is binding on all members of the community in the same way. Where this is not the case—for example in an absolutist state, where the will of the absolute ruler is above the law—hermeneutics cannot exist, “since an absolute ruler can explain his words in a sense that abrogates the general rules of interpretation.” For in this instance the law is not interpreted in such a way that the particular case is decided justly according to the right sense of the law. On the contrary, the will of a monarch who is not bound by the law can effect whatever seems just to him without regard for the law—that is, without the effort of interpretation. The need to understand and interpret arises only when something is enacted in such a way that it is, as enacted, irrevocable and binding.

The work of interpretation is to concretize the law in each specific case—that is, it is a work of application. The creative supplementing of the law that is involved is a task reserved to the judge, but he is subject to the law in the same way as is every other member of the community. It is part of the idea of a rule of law that the judge’s judgment does not proceed from
an arbitrary and unpredictable decision, but from the just weighing up of the whole. Anyone who has immersed himself in the particular situation is capable of undertaking this just weighing-up. This is why in a state governed by law, there is legal certainty—i.e., it is in principle possible to know what the exact situation is. Every lawyer and every counsel is able, in principle, to give correct advice—i.e., he can accurately predict the judge's decision on the basis of the existing laws. Applying the law is not simply a matter of knowing the law. If one has to give a legal judgment on a particular case, of course it is necessary to know the law and all the elements that have determined it. But the only belonging under the law necessary here is that the legal order is recognized as valid for everyone and that no one is exempt from it. Hence it is always possible to grasp the existing legal order as such—i.e., to assimilate dogmatically any past supplement to the law. Consequently there is an essential connection between legal hermeneutics and legal dogmatics, and in it hermeneutics has the more important place. For the idea of a perfect legal dogmatics, which would make every judgment a mere act of subsumption, is untenable.90

Let us now consider the case of theological hermeneutics, as developed by Protestant theology, as it applies to our question.91 Here there is a genuine parallel to legal hermeneutics, for here too dogmatics cannot claim any primacy. The proclamation is genuinely concretized in preaching, as is the legal order in judgment. But there is still a big difference between them. Unlike a legal verdict, preaching is not a creative supplement to the text it is interpreting. Hence the gospel acquires no new content in being preached that could be compared with the power of the judge's verdict to supplement the law. It is not the case that the gospel of salvation becomes more clearly determined only through the preacher's thoughts. As a preacher, he does not speak before the community with the same dogmatic authority that a judge does. Certainly preaching too is concerned with interpreting a valid truth, but this truth is proclamation; and whether it is successful or not is not decided by the ideas of the preacher, but by the power of the word itself, which can call men to repentance even though the sermon is a bad one. The proclamation cannot be detached from its fulfillment. The dogmatic establishment of pure doctrine is a secondary matter. Scripture is the word of God, and that means it has an absolute priority over the doctrine of those who interpret it.

Interpretation should never overlook this. Even as the scholarly interpretation of the theologian, it must never forget that Scripture is the divine
proclamation of salvation. Understanding it, therefore, cannot simply be a scientific or scholarly exploration of its meaning. Bultmann once wrote, "The interpretation of the biblical writings is subject to exactly the same conditions as any other literature." But the meaning of this statement is ambiguous, for the question is whether all literature is not subject to conditions of understanding other than those formal general ones that have to be fulfilled in regard to every text. Bultmann himself points out that all understanding presumes a living relationship between the interpreter and the text, his previous connection with the subject matter it deals with. He calls this hermeneutical requirement fore-understanding, because it is clearly not something to be attained through the process of understanding but is already presupposed. Thus Hofmann, whom Bultmann quotes with approval, writes that scriptural hermeneutics presupposes a relationship to the content of the Bible.

We may ask, however, what kind of "presupposition" this is. Is it something that is given with human life itself? Does there exist in every man a prior connection with the truth of divine revelation because man as such is concerned with the question of God? Or must we say that it is first from God—i.e., from faith—that human existence experiences itself as being affected by the question of God? But then the sense of the presupposition implied in the concept of fore-understanding becomes questionable. For then the presupposition would not be valid universally but only from the viewpoint of true faith.

In regard to the Old Testament this is a venerable hermeneutical problem. Which is the right interpretation of it, the Jewish one or the Christian one in light of the New Testament? Or are both legitimate interpretations—i.e., do they have something in common, and is this what is really being understood by the interpreter? The Jew who understands the text of the Old Testament in a different way than the Christian shares with him the presupposition that he too is concerned with the question of God. At the same time, he will hold that a Christian theologian misunderstands the Old Testament if he takes its truths as qualified by the New Testament. Hence the presupposition that one is moved by the question of God already involves a claim to knowledge concerning the true God and his revelation. Even unbelief is defined in terms of the faith that is demanded of one. The existential fore-understanding from which Bultmann starts can only be a Christian one.

We could perhaps try to escape this conclusion by saying that it is enough to know that religious texts are to be understood only as texts that
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answer the question of God. There need be no claim on the religious commitment of the interpreter himself. But what would a Marxist, who understands religious utterances only as the reflection of class interests, say? He will not accept the presupposition that human existence as such is moved by the question of God. This presupposition is obviously held only by someone who already recognizes the alternative of belief or unbelief in the true God. Thus the hermeneutical significance of fore-understanding in theology seems itself theological. After all, the history of hermeneutics shows how the examination of the texts is determined by a very precise fore-understanding. As a Protestant art of interpreting Scripture, modern hermeneutics is clearly related in a polemical way to the dogmatic tradition of the Catholic church. It has itself a dogmatic denominational significance. This does not mean that such theological hermeneutics is dogmatically predisposed, so that it reads out of the text what it has put into it. Rather, it really risks itself. But it assumes that the word of Scripture addresses us and that only the person who allows himself to be addressed—whether he believes or doubts—understands. Hence the primary thing is application.

We can, then, distinguish what is truly common to all forms of hermeneutics: the meaning to be understood is concretized and fully realized only in interpretation, but the interpretive activity considers itself wholly bound by the meaning of the text. Neither jurist nor theologian regards the work of application as making free with the text.

The task of concretizing something universal and applying it to oneself seems, however, to have a very different function in the historical sciences. If we ask what application means here and how it occurs in the kind of understanding undertaken in the human sciences, we can acknowledge that a certain class of traditionary material is applied in the same way the jurist does in regard to the law and the theologian the proclamation. Just as in the one case the judge seeks to dispense justice and in the other the preacher to proclaim salvation, and as, in both, the meaning of what is proclaimed finds its fullest realization in the proclamation of justice and the proclamation of the gospel, so in the case of a philosophical text or a work of literature we can see that these texts require a special activity of the reader and interpreter, and that we do not have the freedom to adopt a historical distance toward them. It will be seen that here understanding always involves applying the meaning understood.

But does application essentially and necessarily belong to understanding? From the point of view of modern science the answer will be that it does not, and it will be said that the kind of application that makes the
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interpreter the person to whom the text was originally addressed, as it were, is quite unscientific and is to be wholly excluded from the historical sciences. What makes modern scholarship scientific is precisely the fact that it objectifies tradition and methodically eliminates the influence of the interpreter and his time on understanding. It may often be difficult to attain this goal, and it will be difficult to preserve the distinction between historical and dogmatic interest in the case of texts that are addressed to no one in particular and claim to be valid for anyone who receives the tradition. A good example of this is the problem of scientific theology and its relation to the tradition of Scripture. It may seem in this case that the balance between historico-scientific and dogmatic interpretation is to be found in the private world of the person. It may be the same with the philosopher and also with our aesthetic consciousness when it finds itself addressed by a work of art. But according to this view, science claims to remain independent of all subjective applications by reason of its method.

This is the kind of argument that would have to be presented by proponents of the modern theory of science. Those cases in which the interpreter cannot immediately substitute for the original addressee will be considered exemplary—i.e., where a text has a quite specific addressee, such as the partner to an agreement, or the recipient of a bill or an order. Here, to understand the meaning of the text fully, we must, as it were, put ourselves in the place of the addressee, and insofar as this transposition serves to give the text its full concrete form, we can regard this also as an achievement of interpretation. But this transposing of ourselves into the position of the original reader (Schleiermacher) is something quite different from application. It actually skips the task of mediating between then and now, between the Thou and the I, which is what we mean by application and which legal hermeneutics also regards as its task.

Let us take the example of understanding an order. An order exists only where there is someone to obey it. Here, then, understanding belongs to a relationship between persons, one of whom has to give the order. To understand the order means to apply it to the specific situation to which it pertains. It is true that one makes the other repeat the order to make sure it has been understood, but that does not alter the fact that it is given its real meaning when it is carried out and concretized in accordance with its meaning. This is why there is such a thing as an explicit refusal to obey that is not simply disobedience but derives from the meaning of the order and its concretization. A person who refuses to obey an order has understood
it, and because he applies it to the situation and knows what obedience would mean in that situation, he refuses. The criterion of understanding is clearly not in the order’s actual words, nor in the mind of the person giving the order, but solely in the understanding of the situation and in the responsible behavior of the person who obeys. Even when an order is written down so one can be sure it will be correctly understood and executed, no one assumes that it makes everything explicit. The comic situation in which orders are carried out literally but not according to their meaning is well known. Thus there is no doubt that the recipient of an order must perform a definite creative act in understanding its meaning.

If we now imagine a historian who regards a traditioary text as such an order and seeks to understand it, he is, of course, in a situation quite different from that of the original addressee. He is not the person to whom the order is addressed and so cannot relate it to himself. But if he really wants to understand the order, then he must, idealiter, perform the same act as that performed by the intended recipient of the order. The latter too, who applies the order to himself, is well able to distinguish between understanding and obeying an order. It is possible for him not to obey even when—indeed, precisely when—he has understood it. It may be difficult for the historian to reconstruct the original situation in which the order arose. But he will understand it fully only when he has thus made the order concrete. This, then, is the clear hermeneutical demand: to understand a text in terms of the specific situation in which it was written.

According to the self-understanding of science, then, it can make no difference to the historian whether a text was addressed to a particular person or was intended “to belong to all ages.” The general requirement of hermeneutics is, rather, that every text must be understood according to the aim appropriate to it. But this means that historical scholarship first seeks to understand every text in its own terms and does not accept the content of what it says as true, but leaves it undecided. Understanding is certainly concretization, but one that involves keeping a hermeneutical distance. Understanding is possible only if one keeps oneself out of play. This is the demand of science.

According to this self-interpretation of the methodology of the human sciences, it is generally said that the interpreter imagines an addressee for every text, whether expressly addressed by the text or not. This addressee is in every case the original reader, and the interpreter knows that this is a different person from himself. This is obvious, when thus negatively expressed. A person trying to understand a text, whether literary critic or
historian, does not, at any rate, apply what it says to himself. He is simply trying to understand what the author is saying, and if he is simply trying to understand, he is not interested in the objective truth of what is said as such, not even if the text itself claims to teach truth. On this the philologist and the historian are in agreement. Hermeneutics and historical study, however, are clearly not the same thing. By examining the methodological differences between the two, we will discover that what they really have in common is not what they are generally thought to have. The historian has a different orientation to the texts of the past, in that he is trying to discover something about the past through them. He therefore uses other traditionary material to supplement and verify what the texts say. He considers it as more or less of a weakness when the philologist regards his text as a work of art. A work of art is a whole, self-sufficient world. But the interest of the historian knows no such self-sufficiency. Against Schleiermacher, Dilthey once said, "Philology would like to see self-contained existence everywhere." If a work of literature from the past makes an impression on a historian, this will have no hermeneutical significance for him. It is fundamentally impossible for him to regard himself as the addressee of the text and accept its claim on him. Rather, he examines the text to find something it is not, of itself, attempting to provide. This is true even of traditionary material which itself purports to be historical representation. Even the writer of history is subject to historical critique.

Thus the historian goes beyond hermeneutics, and the idea of interpretation acquires a new and more defined meaning. It no longer refers only to the explicit act of understanding a given text, as for the philologist. The concept of historical interpretation corresponds more to the idea of the expression, which is not understood by historical hermeneutics in its classical and traditional sense—i.e., as a rhetorical term that refers to the relation of language to thought. What the expression expresses is not merely what is supposed to be expressed in it—what is meant by it—but primarily what is also expressed by the words without its being intended—i.e., what the expression, as it were, "betrays." In this wider sense the word "expression" refers to far more than linguistic expression; rather, it includes everything that we have to get behind, and that at the same time enables us to get behind it. Interpretation here, then, does not refer to the sense intended, but to the sense that is hidden and has to be disclosed. In this sense every text not only presents an intelligible meaning but, in many respects, needs to be interpreted. The text is primarily a
phenomenon of expression. It is understandable that the historian is interested in this aspect. For the documentary value of, say, a report depends in part on what the text, as a phenomenon of expression, displays. From this, one can discover what the writer intended without saying, what party he belonged to, with what views he approached things, or even what degree of lack of principle or dishonesty is to be expected of him. These subjective elements affecting the credibility of the witness must be taken into consideration. But, above all, the content of the traditionary material must itself be interpreted, even if its subjective reliability is established—i.e., the text is understood as a document whose true meaning can be discovered only behind its literal meaning, by comparing it with other data that allow us to estimate its historical value.

Thus for the historian it is a basic principle that tradition is to be interpreted in a sense different than the texts, of themselves, call for. He will always go back behind them and the meaning they express to inquire into the reality they express involuntarily. Texts must be treated in the same way as other available historical material—i.e., as the so-called relics of the past. Like everything else, they need explication—i.e., to be understood in terms of not only what they say but what they exemplify.

The concept of interpretation reaches its culmination here. Interpretation is necessary where the meaning of a text cannot be immediately understood. It is necessary wherever one is not prepared to trust what a phenomenon immediately presents to us. The psychologist interprets in this way by not accepting the expressions of life in their intended sense but delving back into what was taking place in the unconscious. Similarly, the historian interprets the data of tradition in order to discover the true meaning that is expressed and, at the same time, hidden in them.

Thus there is a natural tension between the historian and the philologist who seeks to understand a text for the sake of its beauty and its truth. The historian's interpretation is concerned with something that is not expressed in the text itself and need have nothing to do with the intended meaning of the text. There is a fundamental conflict here between the historical and the literary consciousness, although this tension scarcely exists now that historical consciousness has also altered the orientation of the critic. He has given up the claim that his texts have a normative validity for him. He no longer regards them as models of the best that has been thought and said, but looks at them in a way that they themselves did not intend to be looked at; he looks at them as a historian. This has made philology and criticism subsidiary disciplines of historical studies. This
could be glimpsed already in classical philology when it began to call itself the science of antiquity (Wilamowitz). It is a department of historical research concerned primarily with language and literature. The philologist is a historian, in that he discovers a historical dimension in his literary sources. Understanding, then, is for him a matter of placing a given text in the context of the history of language, literary form, style, and so on, and thus ultimately mediating it with the whole context of historical life. Only occasionally does his own original nature come through. Thus, in judging the ancient historians, he tends to give these great writers more credence than the historian finds justified. This ideological credulity, which makes the philologist overestimate the value of his texts as evidence, is the last vestige of his old claim to be the friend of “eloquence” and the mediator of classical literature.

Let us now inquire whether this description of the procedure of the human sciences, in which the historian and the critic of today are one, is accurate and whether the claim of historical consciousness to be universal is justified. In regard to philology it seems questionable. The critic is ultimately mistaking his own nature, as a friend of eloquence, if he bows to the standard of historical studies. If his texts possess an exemplary character for him, this may be primarily in regard to form. The older humanism fervently believed that everything in classical literature was said in an exemplary way; but what is said in such a way is actually more than an exemplar of form. Eloquence (schöne Reden) is not called such simply because what is said is said beautifully, but also because something beautiful is said. It seeks to be more than mere rhetoric. It is particularly true of the national poetic traditions that we admire not only their poetic power, the imagination and art of their expression, but above all the great truth that speaks in them.

If in the work of the critic, then, there is still something of only acknowledging models, he is not in fact relating his texts merely to a reconstructed address but also to himself (though he is unwilling to accept this). But in accepting models there is always an understanding that does not leave their exemplarity undecided, but rather has already chosen and considers itself obligated to them. That is why relating oneself to an exemplar is always like following in someone’s footsteps. And just as this is more than mere imitation, so this understanding is a continually new form of encounter and has itself the character of an event precisely because it does not simply leave things up in the air but involves application. The
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literary critic, as it were, weaves a little further on the great tapestry of tradition that supports us.

If we acknowledge this, then criticism and philology can attain their true dignity and proper knowledge of themselves only by being liberated from history. Yet this seems to me to be only half the truth. Rather, we should ask whether the picture of the historical approach, as set out here, is not itself distorted. Perhaps not only the approach of the critic and philologist but also that of the historian should be oriented not so much to the methodological ideal of the natural sciences as to the model offered us by legal and theological hermeneutics. It may be that the historical approach to texts differs specifically from the original bond of the critic to his texts. It may be that the historian tries to get behind the texts in order to force them to yield information that they do not intend, and are unable of themselves to give. With regard to the individual text, this would seem to be the case. The historian approaches his texts the way an investigating magistrate approaches his witnesses. But simply establishing facts, elicited from possibly prejudiced witnesses, does not make the historian. What makes the historian is understanding the significance of what he finds. Thus the testimony of history is like that given before a court. It is no accident that in German the same word is used for both, Zeugnis (testimony; witness). In both cases testimony aids in establishing the facts. But the facts are not the real objects of inquiry: they are simply material for the real tasks of the judge and of the historian—that is, respectively, to reach a just decision and to establish the historical significance of an event within the totality of his historical self-consciousness.

Thus the whole difference is possibly only a question of the criteria. One should not choose too nicely if one would reach the essentials. We have already shown that traditional hermeneutics artificially limited the dimensions of the phenomenon, and perhaps the same is true of the historical approach. Is it not the case here too that the really important things precede any application of historical methods? A historical hermeneutics that does not make the nature of the historical question the central thing, and does not inquire into a historian's motives in examining historical material, lacks its most important element.

If we accept this, then the relation between literary criticism and historical studies suddenly appears quite different. Although we spoke of the humanities as being under the alien control of historical studies, this is not the last word on the matter. Rather, it seems to me that the problem of application, of which we had to remind the critic, also characterizes the more
complicated situation of historical understanding. All appearances seem to be against this, it is true, for historical understanding seems to fall entirely short of the traditionary text's claim to applicability. We have seen that history does not regard a text in terms of the text's intention but in terms of its own characteristic and different intention—i.e., as a historical source—using it to understand what the text did not at all intend to say but we nevertheless find expressed in it.

On closer examination, however, the question arises whether the historian's understanding is really different in structure from the critic's. It is true that he considers the texts from another point of view, but this difference of intention applies only to the individual text as such. For the historian, however, the individual text makes up, together with other sources and testimonies, the unity of the whole tradition. The whole unified tradition is his true hermeneutical object. It is this that he must understand in the same sense in which the literary critic understands his text in the unity of its meaning. Thus the historian too must perform a task of application. This is the important point: historical understanding proves to be a kind of literary criticism writ large.

But this does not mean that we share the hermeneutical approach of the historical school, the problems of which we outlined above. We spoke of the dominance of the philological schema in historical self-understanding and used Dilthey's foundation of the human sciences to show that the historical school's aim of seeing history as reality and not simply as unfolding complexes of ideas could not be achieved. We, for our part, are not maintaining, with Dilthey, that every event is as perfectly meaningful as a text. When I called history criticism writ large, this did not mean that historical studies are to be understood as part of intellectual history (Geistesgeschichte).

I am saying just the opposite. We have seen, I think more correctly, what is involved in reading a text. Of course the reader before whose eyes the great book of world history simply lies open does not exist. But neither does the reader exist who, when he has his text before him, simply reads what is there. Rather, all reading involves application, so that a person reading a text is himself part of the meaning he apprehends. He belongs to the text that he is reading. The line of meaning that the text manifests to him as he reads it always and necessarily breaks off in an open indeterminacy. He can, indeed he must, accept the fact that future generations will understand differently what he has read in the text. And what is true of every reader is also true of the historian. The historian is concerned with
the whole of historical tradition, which he has to mediate with his own present existence if he wants to understand it and which in this way he keeps open for the future.

Thus we too acknowledge that there is an inner unity between philology and literary criticism on the one hand and historical studies on the other, but we do not see it in the universality of the historical method, nor in the objectifying replacement of the interpreter by the original reader, nor in historical critique of tradition as such but, on the contrary, in the fact that both perform an act of application that is different only in degree. If the philologist or critic understands the given text—i.e., understands himself in the text in the way we have said—the historian too understands the great text of world history he has himself discovered, in which every text handed down to us is but a fragment of meaning, one letter, as it were, and he understands himself in this great text. Both the critic and the historian thus emerge from the self-forgetfulness to which they had been banished by a thinking for which the only criterion was the methodology of modern science. Both find their true ground in historically effected consciousness.

This shows that the model of legal hermeneutics was, in fact, a useful one. When a judge regards himself as entitled to supplement the original meaning of the text of a law, he is doing exactly what takes place in all other understanding. The old unity of the hermeneutical disciplines comes into its own again if we recognize that historically effected consciousness is at work in all hermeneutical activity, that of philologist as well as of the historian.

The meaning of the application involved in all forms of understanding is now clear. Application does not mean first understanding a given universal in itself and then afterward applying it to a concrete case. It is the very understanding of the universal—the text—itself. Understanding proves to be a kind of effect and knows itself as such.

3 ANALYSIS OF HISTORICALLY EFFECTED CONSCIOUSNESS

(A) THE LIMITATIONS OF REFLECTIVE PHILOSOPHY

We must now ask how knowledge and effect belong together. I have already pointed out above that historically effected consciousness is something other than inquiry into the history of a particular work's effect—as it were, the trace a work leaves behind. It is, rather, a consciousness of the work itself, and hence itself has an effect. The purpose
of the whole account of the formation and fusion of horizons was to show how historically effected consciousness operates. But what sort of consciousness is this? That is the decisive problem. However much we emphasize that historically effected consciousness itself belongs to the effect, what is essential to it as consciousness is that it can rise above that of which it is conscious. The structure of reflexivity is fundamentally given with all consciousness. Thus this must also be the case for historically effected consciousness.

We might also express it thus: when we speak of historically effected consciousness, are we not confined within the immanent laws of reflection, which destroy any immediate effect? Are we not forced to admit that Hegel was right and regard the basis of hermeneutics as the absolute mediation of history and truth?

We cannot underestimate this point if we think of the historical worldview and its development from Schleiermacher to Dilthey. It was the same everywhere. Everywhere the claim of hermeneutics seems capable of being met only in the infinity of knowledge, in the thoughtful fusion of the whole of tradition with the present. We see it based on the ideal of perfect enlightenment, on the complete limitlessness of our historical horizon, on the abolition of our finiteness in the infinity of knowledge, in short, on the omnipresence of the historically knowing spirit. It is clearly of no fundamental significance that nineteenth-century historicism never expressly acknowledged this consequence. Ultimately it finds its justification in Hegel, even if the historians, filled with enthusiasm for experience, preferred to quote Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt. But neither Schleiermacher nor Humboldt really thought through their positions fully. However much they emphasize the individuality, the barrier of alienness, that our understanding has to overcome, understanding ultimately finds its fulfillment only in an infinite consciousness, just as the idea of individuality finds its ground there as well. The fact that all individuality is pantheistically embraced within the absolute is what makes possible the miracle of understanding. Thus here too being and knowledge interpenetrate each other in the absolute. Neither Schleiermacher’s nor Humboldt’s Kantianism, then, affirms an independent system distinct from the consummation of speculative idealism in the absolute dialectic of Hegel. The critique of reflective philosophy that applies to Hegel applies to them also.

We must ask whether our own attempt at a historical hermeneutics is not subject to the same critique. Have we succeeded in keeping ourselves
free from the metaphysical claims of reflective philosophy? Have we
legitimated the hermeneutical experience by agreeing with the critique
that the young Hegelians leveled at Hegel, a critique that proved histori-
ically so important?

To do so we must acknowledge that absolute reflection is powerfully
compelling and admit that Hegel’s critics never really succeeded in
breaking its magic spell. We can detach the problem of a historical
hermeneutics from the hybrid consequences of speculative idealism only if
we refuse to be satisfied with the irrationalistic reduction of it, but preserve
the truth of Hegel’s thought. We are concerned with understanding
historically effected consciousness in such a way that the immediacy and
superiority of the work does not dissolve into a mere reflective reality in
the consciousness of the effect—i.e., we are concerned to conceive a reality
that limits and exceeds the omnipotence of reflection. This was precisely
the point against which the critique of Hegel was directed and where the
principle of reflective philosophy actually proved itself superior to all its
critics.

This can be exemplified by Hegel’s polemic against Kant’s “thing-
in-itself.” Kant’s critical delimitation of reason had limited the application
of the categories to the objects of possible experience and declared that the
thing-in-itself behind appearances was unknowable. Hegel’s dialectical
argument objected that by making this distinction, and separating the
appearance from the thing-in-itself, reason was proving this distinction to
be its own. In doing so it by no means comes up against its own limits;
rather, reason has itself set this limit, and that means it has already gone
beyond that limit. What makes a limit a limit always also includes
knowledge of what is on both sides of it. It is the dialectic of the limit to
exist only by being superseded. Thus the quality of being-in-itself that
distinguishes the thing-in-itself from its appearance is in-itself only for us.
What appears in logical generality in the dialectic of the limit becomes
specified in consciousness by the experience that the being-in-itself
distinguished from consciousness is the other of itself, and is known in its
truth when it is known as self—i.e., when it knows itself in full and
absolute self-consciousness. We will consider the legitimacy and limita-
tions of this argument below.

The varied critique of this philosophy of absolute reason by Hegel’s
critics cannot withstand the logical consequences of total dialectical self-
mediation that Hegel has described, especially in his Phenomenology, the
science of phenomenal knowledge. That the other must be experienced
not as the other of myself grasped by pure self-consciousness, but as a Thou—this prototype of all objections to the infiniteness of Hegel's dialectic—does not seriously challenge him. The dialectical process of the Phenomenology of Mind is perhaps determined by nothing so much as by the problem of the recognition of the Thou. To mention only a few stages of this history: our own self-consciousness, for Hegel, attains to the truth of its self-consciousness only by fighting to be recognized by the other person. The immediate relationship between man and woman is the natural knowledge of mutual recognition (p. 325). Beyond this, conscience represents the spiritual side of being recognized, and the mutual self-recognition in which the spirit is absolute can be attained only via confession and forgiveness. It cannot be denied that Feuerbach and Kierkegaard's objections are already anticipated when Hegel describes these forms of spirit.

Polemics against an absolute thinker has itself no starting point. The Archimedean point from which Hegel's philosophy could be toppled can never be found through reflection. The formal superiority of reflective philosophy is precisely that every possible position is drawn into the reflective movement of consciousness coming to itself. The appeal to immediacy—whether of bodily nature, or the Thou making claims on us, or the impenetrable factualness of historical accident, or the reality of the relations of production—has always been self-refuting, in that it is not itself an immediate relation, but a reflective activity. The left-Hegelian critique of merely intellectual reconciliation that fails to take account of the real transformation of the world, the whole doctrine of the transformation of philosophy into politics, is inevitably the self-abolition of philosophy.

Thus the question arises how far the dialectical superiority of reflective philosophy corresponds to a substantive truth and how far it merely creates a formal appearance. For the arguments of reflective philosophy cannot ultimately obscure the fact that there is some truth in the critique of speculative thought based on the standpoint of finite human consciousness. This emerges, in particular, in the epigones of idealism—e.g., the neo-Kantian critics of life philosophy and existentialism. Heinrich Rickert, who attempted in 1920 to destroy life philosophy through argument, was unable to come anywhere near the influence of Nietzsche and Dilthey, which was beginning to grow at that time. However clearly one demonstrates the inner contradictions of all relativist views, it is as Heidegger has said: all these victorious arguments have something of the attempt to bowl
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one over. However cogent they may seem, they still miss the main point. In making use of them one is proved right, and yet they do not express any superior insight of value. That the thesis of skepticism or relativism refutes itself to the extent that it claims to be true is an irrefutable argument. But what does it achieve? The reflective argument that proves successful here rebounds against the arguer, for it renders the truth value of reflection suspect. It is not the reality of skepticism or of truth-dissolving relativism but the truth claim of all formal argument that is affected.

Thus the formalism of such reflective argument is of specious philosophical legitimacy. In fact it tells us nothing. We are familiar with this kind of thing from the Greek Sophists, whose inner hollowness Plato demonstrated. It was also he who saw clearly that there is no argumentatively adequate criterion by which to distinguish between truly philosophical and sophistic discourse. In particular, he shows in his Seventh Letter that the formal refutability of a proposition does not necessarily exclude its being true.

The model of all empty argument is the sophistic question how one can inquire into anything that one does not already know. This sophistical objection, which Plato formulates in the Meno, is not, characteristically enough, overcome there through superior argument, but by appealing to the myth of the pre-existence of the soul. This is a very ironic appeal, since the myth of pre-existence and anamnesis, which is supposed to solve the mystery of questioning and seeking, does not present a religious certainty but depends on the certainty of the knowledge-seeking soul, which prevails against the emptiness of formal arguments. Nevertheless, it is characteristic of the weakness that Plato recognizes in the logos that he bases his critique of the Sophists’ argument not on logic but myth. Just as true opinion is a divine favor and gift, so the search for and recognition of the true logos is not the free self-possession of the human mind. We will see below that Plato’s mythical justification of Socratic dialectic is of fundamental importance. Were not the Sophists refuted—and this cannot be done through argument—their argument would lead to resignation. It is the argument of “lazy reason” and has a truly symbolic importance, since all empty reflection, despite its appearance of victory, leads to the discrediting of all reflective thought.

But however convincing it seems, Plato’s mythical refutation of dialectical sophism does not satisfy the modern mind. There is no mythical foundation of philosophy in Hegel: for him myth is part of pedagogy.
Ultimately, reason is its own foundation. By working through the dialectic of reflection as the total self-mediation of reason, Hegel is fundamentally beyond the argumentative formalism that we, like Plato, call “sophistical.” Hence his dialectic is no less polemical toward the empty arguments of logic, which he calls “external reflection,” than are the arguments of Plato’s Socrates. That is why it is of central importance that the hermeneutical problem come to grips with Hegel. For Hegel’s whole philosophy of mind claims to achieve the total fusion of history with the present. It is concerned not with a reflective formalism but with the same thing as we are. Hegel has thought through the historical dimension in which the problem of hermeneutics is rooted.

For this reason we will have to define the structure of historically effected consciousness with an eye to Hegel, setting it against his own approach. Hegel’s spiritualistic interpretation of Christianity, which he uses to define the nature of mind, is not affected by the objection that it leaves no room for the experience of the other and the alterity of history. The life of the mind consists precisely in recognizing oneself in other being. The mind directed toward self-knowledge regards itself as alienated from the “positive” and must learn to reconcile itself with it, seeing it as its own, as its home. By dissolving the hard edge of positivity, it becomes reconciled with itself. In that this kind of reconciliation is the historical work of the mind, the historical activity of the mind is neither self-reflection nor the merely formal dialectical supersession of the self-alienation that it has undergone, but an experience that experiences reality and is itself real.

(B) THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE (ERFAHRUNG) AND THE ESSENCE OF THE HERMENEUTIC EXPERIENCE

This is precisely what we have to keep in mind in analyzing historically effected consciousness: it has the structure of experience (Erfahrung). However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have. Because it plays an important role in the natural sciences in the logic of induction, it has been subjected to an epistemological schematization that, for me, truncates its original meaning. We may remember that Dilthey accused British empiricism of a lack of historical culture. Considering his unresolved hesitation between life philosophy and philosophy of science, we can regard this as a very half-hearted criticism. In fact, the main deficiency in theory of experience hitherto—and this includes Dilthey himself—is that it is entirely oriented
toward science and hence takes no account of the inner historicity of experience. The aim of science is so to objectify experience that it no longer contains any historical element. Scientific experiment does this by its methodical procedure. The historico-critical method, moreover, does something similar in the human sciences. Through the objectivity of their approach, both methods are concerned to guarantee that these basic experiences can be repeated by anyone. Just as in the natural sciences experiments must be verifiable, so also must the whole process be capable of being checked in the human sciences also. Hence there can be no place for the historicity of experience in science.

In its methodology modern science thus simply proceeds further toward a goal that experience has always striven after. Experience is valid only if it is confirmed; hence its dignity depends on its being in principle repeatable. But this means that by its very nature, experience abolishes its history and thus itself. This is true even of everyday experience, and much more so of any scientific version of it. Theory of experience is related exclusively teleologically to the truth that is derived from it, and this is not just an accidental one-sidedness in modern scientific theory but has a foundation in fact.

In recent times Edmund Husserl, in particular, has directed his attention to this problem. In a series of many investigations he attempted to throw light on the one-sidedness of the scientific idealization of experience. To this end he gives a genealogy of the experience which, as experience of the living world, precedes its being idealized by science. To me, however, he still seems dominated by the one-sidedness that he criticizes, for he projects the idealized world of exact scientific experience into the original experience of the world, in that he makes perception, as something directed toward merely external physical appearances, the basis of all other experience. To quote him: "Although, because of this sensible presence it also attracts our practical or affective interest, presenting itself to us at once as something useful, attractive, or repulsive, all this is based on the fact that there is a substratum with qualities that can be apprehended simply by the senses, to which there always leads a path of possible explication." [It is easy to see how much the ontological fore-conception of "presence" dominates him.] Husserl's attempt to go back genetically to the origin of experience, and to overcome its idealization by science, obviously has to struggle especially with the difficulty that the pure transcendental subjectivity of the ego is not really given as such but always given in the idealization of language; moreover, language is already present in any
acquisition of experience, and in it the individual ego comes to belong to a particular linguistic community.

In fact, when we go back to the beginnings of modern scientific theory and logic, we find this same problem: the extent to which there can be such a thing as the pure use of our reason, proceeding according to methodological principles, superior to all prejudices and predispositions, especially "verbalistic" ones. The particular achievement of Bacon in this field is that he was not satisfied with the immanent logical task of elaborating the theory of experience as the theory of true induction; instead, he discussed the whole moral difficulty and anthropological questionableness of this kind of experiential product. His method of induction seeks to rise above the irregular and accidental way daily experience occurs and certainly above its dialectical use. In this connection he undermined the theory of induction based on enumeratio simplex, still held by humanist scholasticism, an achievement that foreshadowed the new age of scientific method. The concept of induction makes use of the idea that we generalize on the basis of chance observation and, if we encounter no contrary instance, we pronounce it valid. Against anticipatio, this overhasty generalization of everyday experience, Bacon opposes what he calls interpretatio naturae—i.e., the expert interpretation of the true being of nature. Methodically conducted experiments permit us to progress step by step toward the true and tenable universals, the simple forms of nature. This true method is characterized by the fact that the mind is not left to its own devices; it cannot soar as it would like. Rather, it has to climb gradatim (step by step) from the particular to the universal in order to achieve an ordered experience that avoids all hasty conclusions.

Bacon himself describes the method he calls for as experimental. But it must be remembered that by experiment Bacon does not always mean just the scientist's technical procedure of artificially inducing processes under conditions that isolate them and render them capable of being measured. An experiment is also, and primarily, the careful directing of our mind, preventing it from indulging in overhasty generalizations, consciously confronting it with the most remote and apparently most diverse instances, so that gradually and continuously it can learn to work, via the process of exclusion, toward the axioms.

On the whole, we have to agree with the usual criticism of Bacon and admit that his methodological suggestions are disappointing. As we can see today, they are too vague and general and have produced little, especially
when applied to the study of nature. It is true that this opponent of empty dialectical casuistry himself remained profoundly involved in the metaphysical tradition and in the dialectical forms of argument that he attacked. His goal of conquering nature through obedience—the new approach of attacking and forcing nature’s secrets from it which makes him the predecessor of modern science—is only the programmatic side of his work, and his contribution has hardly been enduring. His real achievement is, rather, that he undertakes a comprehensive examination of the prejudices that hold the human mind captive and lead it away from the true knowledge of things. He thus carries out a methodical self-purification of the mind that is more a discipline than a method. Bacon’s famous doctrine of the “prejudices” first and foremost makes the methodical use of reason possible. This is precisely why he interests us, for he expresses, albeit with a critical and exclusionary intention, elements in experience that are not teleologically related to the goal of science. For example, among the idola tribus, Bacon speaks of the tendency of the human mind always to remember what is positive and forget all instantiae negativae. A case in point is the belief in oracles, which is based on this remarkable forgetfulness, which remembers only the true prophecies and forgets the false ones. Similarly, in Bacon’s eyes the relation of the human mind to the conventions of language is a case of knowledge being distracted by empty conventional forms. It is one of the idola fori.

These two examples are enough to indicate that the teleological aspect, which dominates this question for Bacon, is not the only one possible. Whether the positive should always have priority in the memory, or whether the tendency of life to forget the negative is to be criticized in all respects, is a question that needs asking. Ever since the Prometheus of Aeschylus, hope has been such a clear mark of human experience that, in view of its human importance, we must regard as one-sided the principle that experience should be evaluated only teleologically, by the degree to which it ends in knowledge. We will probably come to a similar conclusion with regard to language, which precedes experience, and although illusory verbalistic problems can derive from the dominance of linguistic conventions, it is equally certain that language is at the same time a positive condition of, and guide to, experience itself. Even Husserl, like Bacon, noted more the negative than the positive side of language.

In analyzing the concept of experience we will not let ourselves be guided by these models, since we cannot confine ourselves to the
teleological perspective, which until now has largely governed consideration of the problem. This is not to say that this perspective has not correctly grasped a true element in the structure of experience. The fact that experience is valid so long as it is not contradicted by new experience (ubi non reperitur instantia contradictoria) is clearly characteristic of the general nature of experience, whether we are dealing with scientific procedure in the modern sense or with the experience of daily life that men have always had.

Thus this characterization of experience is entirely in agreement with Aristotle's analysis of the concept of induction in the appendix to his *Posterior Analytics.* There (as in Chapter 1 of his *Metaphysics*) he describes how various perceptions unite to form the unity of experience when many individual perceptions are retained. What sort of unity is this? Clearly it is the unity of a universal. But the universality of experience is not yet the universality of science. Rather, according to Aristotle, it occupies a remarkably indeterminate intermediate position between the many individual perceptions and the true universality of the concept. Science and technology start from the universality of the concept. But what is the universality of experience, and how does it evolve into the new universality of the logos? If experience shows us that a particular remedy has a particular effect, this means that something common has been noticed in a number of observations, and it is clear that the actual medical question, the scientific question—i.e., the question about the logos—is possible only on the basis of this kind of observation. Science knows why, for what reason, this remedy has a healing effect. Experience is not science itself, but it is a necessary condition of it. There must already be certainty—i.e., the individual observations must show the same regularity. Only when the universality found in experience has been attained can we look for the reason and hence begin a scientific inquiry. We ask again: what kind of universality is this? It is obviously concerned with the undifferentiated commonality of many single observations. It is because we retain these that we can make certain predictions.

However, the relation among experience, retention, and the resulting unity of experience remains conspicuously vague. Aristotle is obviously basing what he says here on an argument that by his time already had a certain classic stamp. We find it first in Anaxagoras who, according to Plutarch, distinguished man from the beasts through his powers of empeiria, mneme, sophia and techne. We find a similar point in Aeschylus' emphasis on mneme in the *Prometheus,* and although we do
not find the corresponding emphasis on mneme in Plato's myth in the
Protagoras, both Plato\textsuperscript{14} and Aristotle indicate that it was already an
established theory. The persistence of important perceptions (mone) is
clearly the linking motif through which the knowledge of the universal
can emerge from the experience of the individual. All animals that possess
mneme in this sense—i.e., a sense of the past, of time—approximate the
human in this respect. A separate investigation into this early theory of
experience, whose traces we have outlined, would be necessary to discover
how influential was the connection between memory (mneme) and
language. It is clear that universal concepts are acquired by learning names
and speech generally, and Themistius exemplified Aristotle's analysis of
induction simply by reference to learning to speak and form words. At any
rate, the universality of experience of which Aristotle speaks is not that of
the concept or of science. (The problematic which we approach with this
theory is undoubtedly that of the Sophists' educational thought, for we
find in all the available documents a connection between that distinctiveness
of the human that concerns us here and the general arrangement of
nature. But this motif—the contrast of men and beasts—was the natural
basis for the Sophists' educational ideal.) Experience is always actually
present only in the individual observation. It is not known in a previous
universality. Here lies the fundamental openness of experience to new
experience, not only in the general sense that errors are corrected, but that
experience is essentially dependent on constant confirmation and necessarily
becomes a different kind of experience where there is no confirmation
(ubi reperitur instantia contradictoria).

Aristotle has a very fine image for the logic of this procedure. He
compares the many observations someone makes to a fleeing army. They
too hurry away—i.e., they do not stand fast. But if in this general flight an
observation is confirmed by its being experienced repeatedly, then it does
stand fast. At this point the general flight begins to stop. If others join it,
then finally the whole fleeing host stops and again obeys a single
command. The whole army under unified control is an image of science.
The image is intended to show how science—i.e., universal truth—is
possible, considering that it must not depend on the contingency of
observations, but be valid in a really universal way. How is that possible on
the basis of such contingent observations?

The image is important for us because it illustrates the crucial element in
the nature of experience. Like all images, it is not entirely perfect; however, the imperfection of a symbol is not a shortcoming but the other
side of the work of abstraction that it performs. Aristotle’s image of the fleeing army is imperfect because it starts from the wrong assumption, namely that before fleeing the army was standing fast. Of course this is not true of the tenor, namely the way knowledge is born. But this very lack shows clearly the only thing that the image is intended to illustrate: the birth of experience as an event over which no one has control and which is not even determined by the particular weight of this or that observation, but in which everything is co-ordinated in a way that is ultimately incomprehensible. The image captures the curious openness in which experience is acquired, suddenly, through this or that feature, unpredictably, and yet not without preparation, and it is valid from then on until there is a new experience—i.e., it holds not only for this or that instance but everything of the kind. According to Aristotle, it is through this universality of experience that the true universality of the concept and the possibility of science comes about. Thus the image illustrates the way the unprincipled universality of experience (its accretion) eventually leads to the unity of the arche (which means both “command” and “principle”).

But if, like Aristotle, we think of the essence of experience only in regard to “science” [which in any case is not “modern” science but “knowledge”], then we are simplifying the process by which it comes about. His image describes this process, but it describes it under oversimplified conditions. As if one could automatically give a straightforward account of experience that contained no contradictions! Aristotle here presupposes that what persists in the flight of observations and emerges as a universal is, in fact, something common to them: for him the universality of the concept is ontologically prior. What concerns Aristotle about experience is merely how it contributes to the formation of concepts.

If we thus regard experience in terms of its result, we have ignored the fact that experience is a process. In fact, this process is essentially negative. It cannot be described simply as the unbroken generation of typical universals. Rather, this generation takes place as false generalizations are continually refuted by experience and what was regarded as typical is shown not to be so. Language shows this when we use the word “experience” in two different senses: the experiences that conform to our expectation and confirm it and the new experiences that occur to us. This latter—“experience” in the genuine sense—is always negative. If a new experience of an object occurs to us, this means that hitherto we have not seen the thing correctly and now know it better. Thus the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply that we see
through a deception and hence make a correction, but we acquire a comprehensive knowledge. We cannot, therefore, have a new experience of any object at random, but it must be of such a nature that we gain better knowledge through it, not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before—i.e., of a universal. The negation by means of which it achieves this is a determinate negation. We call this kind of experience dialectical.

It is not Aristotle but, most important, Hegel who testifies to the dialectical element in experience. With him the element of historicity comes into its own. He conceives experience as skepticism in action. We saw that one's experience changes one's whole knowledge. Strictly speaking, we cannot have the same experience twice. It is true, of course, that part of the nature of experience is to be continually confirmed; it is, as it were, acquired only by being repeated. But it is no longer a new experience when it is repeated and confirmed. When we have had an experience, this means that we possess it. We can now predict what was previously unexpected. The same thing cannot again become a new experience for us; only something different and unexpected can provide someone who has experience with a new one. Thus the experiencing consciousness has reversed its direction—i.e., it has turned back on itself. The experienter has become aware of his experience; he is "experienced." He has acquired a new horizon within which something can become an experience for him.

This is the point at which Hegel becomes an important witness for us. In his Phenomenology of Mind he shows how the consciousness that would be certain of itself has new experiences. For consciousness its object is the in-itself, but what is in-itself can be known only as it presents itself to the experiencing consciousness. Thus the experiencing consciousness has precisely this experience: that the in-itselfness of the object is in-itself "for us." Hegel here analyzes the concept of experience—an analysis that has drawn the special attention of Heidegger, who was both attracted and repulsed by it. Hegel says, "The dialectical movement that consciousness carries out in regard to itself, both in regard to its knowledge and to its object inasmuch as its new, true object emerges from this, is actually what is called experience." Remembering what we have said above, let us ask what Hegel means, since he is here clearly trying to say something about the general nature of experience. Heidegger has pointed out, rightly in my opinion, that here Hegel is not interpreting experience dialectically but
rather conceiving what is dialectical in terms of the nature of experience. According to Hegel, experience has the structure of a reversal of consciousness and hence it is a dialectical movement. Hegel behaves, of course, as if what is generally meant by experience were something else, in that in general we "experience the falsehood of this first concept through another object" (and not in such a way that the object itself changes). But it is only apparently different. Actually, the philosophical mind realizes what the experiencing mind is really doing when it proceeds from one to the other: it is reversing itself. Thus Hegel declares that the true nature of experience is to reverse itself in this way.

In fact, as we saw, experience is initially always experience of negation: something is not what we supposed it to be. In view of the experience that we have of another object, both things change—our knowledge and its object. We know better now, and that means that the object itself "does not pass the test." The new object contains the truth about the old one.

What Hegel thus describes as experience is the experience that consciousness has of itself. "The principle of experience contains the infinitely important element that in order to accept a content as true, the man himself must be present or, more precisely, he must find such content in unity and combined with the certainty of himself," writes Hegel in the Encyclopedia. The concept of experience means precisely this, that this kind of unity with oneself is first established. This is the reversal that consciousness undergoes when it recognizes itself in what is alien and different. Whether experience moves by expanding into the manifoldness of the contents or as the continual emergence of new forms of mind, the necessity of which is understood by philosophical science, in any case it is a reversal of consciousness. Hegel's dialectical description of experience has some truth.

For Hegel, it is necessary, of course, that conscious experience should lead to a self-knowledge that no longer has anything other than or alien to itself. For him the consummation of experience is "science," the certainty of itself in knowledge. Hence his criterion of experience is self-knowledge. That is why the dialectic of experience must end in that overcoming of all experience which is attained in absolute knowledge—i.e., in the complete identity of consciousness and object. We can now understand why applying Hegel's dialectic to history, insofar as he regarded it as part of the absolute self-consciousness of philosophy, does not do justice to hermeneutical consciousness. The nature of experience is conceived in terms of something that surpasses it; for experience itself can never be science.
Experience stands in an ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge. The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. That is why a person who is called experienced has become so not only through experiences but is also open to new experiences. The consummation of his experience, the perfection that we call "being experienced," does not consist in the fact that someone already knows everything and knows better than anyone else. Rather, the experienced person proves to be, on the contrary, someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he has had and the knowledge he has drawn from them, is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.

But then this gives the concept of experience that we are concerned with here a qualitatively new element. It refers not only to experience in the sense of information about this or that. It refers to experience in general. This experience is always to be acquired, and from it no one can be exempt. Experience in this sense belongs to the historical nature of man. Although in bringing up children, for example, parents may try to spare them certain experiences, experience as a whole is not something anyone can be spared. Rather, experience in this sense inevitably involves many disappointments of one’s expectations and only thus is experience acquired. That experience refers chiefly to painful and disagreeable experiences does not mean that we are being especially pessimistic, but can be seen directly from its nature. Only through negative instances do we acquire new experiences, as Bacon saw. Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation. Thus the historical nature of man essentially implies a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight.

Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. It too is ultimately part of the vocation of man—i.e., to be discerning and insightful.

If we want to quote another witness for this third element in the nature of experience, the best is Aeschylus. He found the formula—or, rather,
recognized its metaphysical significance as expressing the inner historicality of experience—of “learning though suffering” (pathēi mathos). This phrase does not mean only that we become wise through suffering and that our knowledge of things must first be corrected through deception and undeception. Understood in this way, the formula is probably as old as human experience itself. But Aeschylus means more than this. He refers to the reason why this is so. What a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine. It is ultimately a religious insight—the kind of insight that gave birth to Greek tragedy.

Thus experience is experience of human finitude. The truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart, who knows that he is master neither of time nor the future. The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. In him is realized 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 being perfectly experienced. It does not mean that experience has ceased and a higher form of knowledge is reached (Hegel), but that for the first time experience fully and truly is. In it all dogmatism, which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier. Experience teaches us to acknowledge the real. The genuine result of experience, then—as of all desire to know—is to know what is. But “what is,” here, is not this or that thing, but “what cannot be destroyed” (Ranke).

Real experience is that whereby man becomes aware of his finiteness. In it are discovered the limits of the power and the self-knowledge of his planning reason. The idea that everything can be reversed, that there is always time for everything and that everything somehow returns, proves to be an illusion. Rather, the person who is situated and acts in history continually experiences the fact that nothing returns. To acknowledge what is does not just mean to recognize what is at this moment, but to have insight into the limited degree to which the future is still open to expectation and planning or, even more fundamentally, to have the insight that all the expectation and planning of finite beings is finite and limited. Genuine experience is experience of one's own historicity. Our discussion of the concept of experience thus arrives at a conclusion that is of considerable importance to our inquiry into the nature of historically effected consciousness. As a genuine form of experience it must reflect the
general structure of experience. Thus we will have to seek out in hermeneutical experience those elements that we have found in our analysis of experience in general.

Hermeneutical experience is concerned with tradition. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is language—i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. It would be wrong to think that this means that what is experienced in tradition is to be taken as the opinion of another person, a Thou. Rather, I maintain that the understanding of tradition does not take the traditionary text as an expression of another person's life, but as meaning that is detached from the person who means it, from an I or a Thou. Still, the relationship to the Thou and the meaning of experience implicit in that relation must be capable of teaching us something about hermeneutical experience. For tradition is a genuine partner in dialogue, and we belong to it, as does the I with a Thou.

It is clear that the experience of the Thou must be special because the Thou is not an object but is in relationship with us. For this reason the elements we have emphasized in the structure of experience will undergo a change. Since here the object of experience is a person, this kind of experience is a moral phenomenon—as is the knowledge acquired through experience, the understanding of the other person. Let us therefore consider the change that occurs in the structure of experience when it is experience of the Thou and when it is hermeneutical experience.

There is a kind of experience of the Thou that tries to discover typical behavior in one's fellowmen and can make predictions about others on the basis of experience. We call this a knowledge of human nature. We understand the other person in the same way that we understand any other typical event in our experiential field—i.e., he is predictable. His behavior is as much a means to our end as any other means. From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding and contradicts the moral definition of man. As we know, in interpreting the categorical imperative Kant said, inter alia, that the other should never be used as a means but always as an end in himself.

If we relate this form of the I-Thou relation—the kind of understanding of the Thou that constitutes knowledge of human nature—to the hermeneutical problem, the equivalent is naive faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it. Someone who understands tradition in this way makes it an object—i.e., he confronts it in a free and
uninvolved way—and by methodically excluding everything subjective, he discovers what it contains. We saw that he thereby detaches himself from the continuing effect of the tradition in which he himself has his historical reality. It is the method of the social sciences, following the methodological ideas of the eighteenth century and their programatic formulation by Hume, ideas that are a clichéd version of scientific method. But this covers only part of the actual procedure of the human sciences, and even that is schematically reduced, since it recognizes only what is typical and regular in behavior. It flattens out the nature of hermeneutical experience in precisely the same way as we have seen in the teleological interpretation of the concept of induction since Aristotle.

A second way in which the Thou is experienced and understood is that the Thou is acknowledged as a person, but despite this acknowledgment the understanding of the Thou is still a form of self-relatedness. Such self-regard derives from the dialectical appearance that the dialectic of the I-Thou relation brings with it. This relation is not immediate but reflective. To every claim there is a counterclaim. This is why it is possible for each of the partners in the relationship reflectively to outdo the other. One claims to know the other’s claim from his point of view and even to understand the other better than the other understands himself. In this way the Thou loses the immediacy with which it makes its claim. It is understood, but this means it is co-opted and pre-empted reflectively from the standpoint of the other person. Because it is a mutual relationship, it helps to constitute the reality of the I-Thou relationship itself. The inner historicity of all the relations in the lives of men consists in the fact that there is a constant struggle for mutual recognition. This can have very varied degrees of tension, to the point of the complete domination of one person by the other. But even the most extreme forms of mastery and slavery are a genuine dialectical relationship of the kind that Hegel has elaborated.

The experience of the Thou attained here is more adequate than what we have called the knowledge of human nature, which merely seeks to calculate how the other person will behave. It is an illusion to see another person as a tool that can be absolutely known and used. Even a slave still has a will to power that turns against his master, as Nietzsche rightly said. But the dialectic of reciprocity that governs all I-Thou relationships is inevitably hidden from the consciousness of the individual. The servant who tyrannizes his master by serving him does not believe that he is serving his own aims by doing so. In fact, his own self-consciousness consists precisely in withdrawing from the dialectic of this reciprocity, in
reflecting himself out of his relation to the other and so becoming unreachable by him. By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy. In particular, the dialectic of charitable or welfare work operates in this way, penetrating all relationships between men as a reflective form of the effort to dominate. The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance. We are familiar with this from the teacher-pupil relationship, an authoritative form of welfare work. In these reflective forms the dialectic of the I-Thou relation becomes more clearly defined.

In the hermeneutical sphere the parallel to this experience of the Thou is what we generally call historical consciousness. Historical consciousness knows about the otherness of the other, about the past in its otherness, just as the understanding of the Thou knows the Thou as a person. In the otherness of the past it seeks not the instantiation of a general law but something historically unique. By claiming to transcend its own conditionedness completely in knowing the other, it is involved in a false dialectical appearance, since it is actually seeking to master the past, as it were. This need not be accompanied by the speculative claim of a philosophy of world history; as an ideal of perfect enlightenment, it sheds light on the process of experience in the historical sciences, as we find, for example, in Dilthey. In my analysis of hermeneutical consciousness I have shown that the dialectical illusion which historical consciousness creates, and which corresponds to the dialectical illusion of experience perfected and replaced by knowledge, is the unattainable ideal of the Enlightenment. A person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a vis a tergo. A person who does not admit that he is dominated by prejudices will fail to see what manifests itself by their light. It is like the relation between I and Thou. A person who reflects himself out of the mutuality of such a relation changes this relationship and destroys its moral bond. A person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way. In seeking to understand tradition historical consciousness must not rely on the critical method with which it approaches its sources, as if this preserved it from mixing in its own judgments and prejudices. It must, in fact, think within its own historicity. To be situated within a tradition does not limit the freedom of knowledge but makes it possible.
Knowing and recognizing this constitutes the third, and highest, type of hermeneutical experience: the openness to tradition characteristic of historically effected consciousness. It too has a real analogue in the I’s experience of the Thou. In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. When two people understand each other, this does not mean that one person “understands” the other. Similarly, “to hear and obey someone” (auf jemanden hören) does not mean simply that we do blindly what the other desires. We call such a person slavish (hörig). Openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.

This is the parallel to the hermeneutical experience. I must allow tradition’s claim to validity, not in the sense of simply acknowledging the past in its otherness, but in such a way that it has something to say to me. This too calls for a fundamental sort of openness. Someone who is open to tradition in this way sees that historical consciousness is not really open at all, but rather, when it reads its texts “historically,” it has always thoroughly smoothed them out beforehand, so that the criteria of the historian’s own knowledge can never be called into question by tradition. Recall the naive mode of comparison that the historical approach generally engages in. The 25th “Lyceum Fragment” by Friedrich Schlegel reads: “The two basic principles of so-called historical criticism are the postulate of the commonplace and the axiom of familiarity. The postulate of the commonplace is that everything that is really great, good, and beautiful is improbable, for it is extraordinary or at least suspicious. The axiom of familiarity is that things must always have been just as they are for us, for things are naturally like this.” By contrast, historically effected consciousness rises above such naive comparisons and assimilations by letting itself experience tradition and by keeping itself open to the truth claim encountered in it. The hermeneutical consciousness culminates not in methodological sureness of itself, but in the same readiness for experience that distinguishes the experienced man from the man captivated by dogma. As we can now say more exactly in terms of the concept of experience, this readiness is what distinguishes historically effected consciousness.
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(c) THE HERMENEUTIC PRIORITY OF THE QUESTION

(i) The Model of Platonic Dialectic

This indicates the direction our inquiry must take. We will now examine the logical structure of openness that characterizes hermeneutical consciousness, recalling the importance of the concept of the question to our analysis of the hermeneutical situation. It is clear that the structure of the question is implicit in all experience. We cannot have experiences without asking questions. Recognizing that an object is different, and not as we first thought, obviously presupposes the question whether it was this or that. From a logical point of view, the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that. It has the structure of a question. And just as the dialectical negativity of experience culminates in the idea of being perfectly experienced—i.e., being aware of our finitude and limitedness—so also the logical form of the question and the negativity that is part of it culminate in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing. This is the famous Socratic docta ignorantia which, amid the most extreme negativity of doubt, opens up the way to the true superiority of questioning. We will have to consider the essence of the question in greater depth if we are to clarify the particular nature of hermeneutical experience.

The essence of the question is to have sense. Now sense involves a sense of direction. Hence the sense of the question is the only direction from which the answer can be given if it is to make sense. A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective. When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the object, as it were. Hence the logos that explicates this opened-up being is an answer. Its sense lies in the sense of the question.

Among the greatest insights that Plato's account of Socrates affords us is that, contrary to the general opinion, it is more difficult to ask questions than to answer them. When the partners in the Socratic dialogue are unable to answer Socrates' awkward questions and try to turn the tables by assuming what they suppose is the preferable role of the questioner, they come to grief.124 Behind this comic motif in the Platonic dialogues there is the critical distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. To someone who engages in dialogue only to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. There is no risk that he will be unable to answer a question. In fact, however, the continual failure of the interlocutor shows that people who
think they know better cannot even ask the right questions. In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know. In the comic confusion between question and answer, knowledge and ignorance that Plato describes, there is a profound recognition of the priority of the question in all knowledge and discourse that really reveals something of an object. Discourse that is intended to reveal something requires that that thing be broken open by the question.

For this reason, dialectic proceeds by way of question and answer or, rather, the path of all knowledge leads through the question. To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled. It must still be undetermined, awaiting a decisive answer. The significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned. It has to be brought into this state of indeterminacy, so that there is an equilibrium between pro and contra. The sense of every question is realized in passing through this state of indeterminacy, in which it becomes an open question. Every true question requires this openness. Without it, it is basically no more than an apparent question. We are familiar with this from the example of the pedagogical question, whose paradoxical difficulty consists in the fact that it is a question without a questioner. Or from the rhetorical question, which not only has no questioner but no object.

The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. A question that lacks this horizon is, so to speak, floating. It becomes a question only when its fluid indeterminacy is concretized in a specific “this or that.” In other words, the question has to be posed. Posing a question implies openness but also limitation. It implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which can be seen what still remains open. Hence a question can be asked rightly or wrongly, according as it reaches into the sphere of the truly open or fails to do so. We say that a question has been put wrongly when it does not reach the state of openness but precludes reaching it by retaining false presuppositions. It pretends to an openness and susceptibility to decision that it does not have. But if what is in question is not foregrounded, or not correctly foregrounded, from those presuppositions that are really held, then it is not brought into the open and nothing can be decided.

This is shown clearly in the case of the slanted question that we are so familiar with in everyday life. There can be no answer to a slanted question because it leads us only apparently, and not really, through the open state of indeterminacy in which a decision is made. We call it slanted rather than
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wrongly put because there is a question behind it—i.e., there is an openness intended, but it does not lie in the direction in which the slanted question is pointing. The word "slanted" refers to something that has deviated from the right direction. The slant of a question consists in the fact that it does not give any real direction, and hence no answer to it is possible. Similarly, we say that statements which are not exactly wrong but also not right are "slanted." This too is determined by their sense—i.e., by their relation to the question. We cannot call them wrong, since we detect something true about them, but neither can we properly call them right because they do not correspond to any meaningful question and hence have no correct meaning unless they are themselves corrected. Sense is always sense of direction for a possible question. Correct sense must accord with the direction in which a question points.

Insofar as a question remains open, it always includes both negative and positive judgments. This is the basis of the essential relation between question and knowledge. For it is the essence of knowledge not only to judge something correctly but, at the same time and for the same reason, to exclude what is wrong. Deciding the question is the path to knowledge. What decides a question is the preponderance of reasons for the one and against the other possibility. But this is still not full knowledge. The thing itself is known only when the counterinstances are dissolved, only when the counterarguments are seen to be incorrect.

We are familiar with this especially from medieval dialectic, which lists not only the pro and contra and then its own decision, but finally sets out all the arguments. This form of medieval dialectic is not simply the consequence of an educational system emphasizing disputation, but on the contrary, it depends on the inner connection between knowledge and dialectic—i.e., between answer and question. There is a famous passage in Aristotle's Metaphysics\(^\text{125}\) that has attracted a great deal of attention and can be explained in terms of what we have been saying. Aristotle says that dialectic is the power to investigate contraries independently of the object, and to see whether one and the same science can be concerned with contraries. Here it seems that a general account of dialectic (which corresponds exactly to what we find, for example, in Plato's Parmenides) is linked to a highly specialized "logical" problem which is familiar to us from the Topics.\(^\text{126}\) It does indeed seem a very curious question whether the same science can be concerned with contraries. Hence the attempt has been made to dismiss this as a gloss.\(^\text{127}\) The connection between the two questions becomes clear, however, as soon as we accept the priority of the
question over the answer, which is the basis of the concept of knowledge. Knowledge always means, precisely, considering opposites. Its superiority over preconceived opinion consists in the fact that it is able to conceive of possibilities as possibilities. Knowledge is dialectical from the ground up. Only a person who has questions can have knowledge, but questions include the antithesis of yes and no, of being like this and being like that. Only because knowledge is dialectical in this comprehensive sense can there be a "dialectic" that explicitly makes its object the antithesis of yes and no. Thus the apparently over-specialized question of whether or not it is possible to have one and the same science of contraries contains, in fact, the ground of the very possibility of dialectic.

Even Aristotle's views on proof and argument—which, in fact, make dialectic a subordinate element in knowledge—accord the same priority to the question, as has been demonstrated by Ernst Kapp's brilliant work on the origin of Aristotle's syllogistic. The priority of the question in knowledge shows how fundamentally the idea of method is limited for knowledge, which has been the starting point for our argument as a whole. There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable. On the contrary, the example of Socrates teaches that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know. Hence the Socratic dialectic—which leads, through its art of confusing the interlocutor, to this knowledge—creates the conditions for the question. All questioning and desire to know presuppose a knowledge that one does not know; so much so, indeed, that a particular lack of knowledge leads to a particular question.

Plato shows in an unforgettable way where the difficulty lies in knowing what one does not know. It is the power of opinion against which it is so hard to obtain an admission of ignorance. It is opinion that suppresses questions. Opinion has a curious tendency to propagate itself. It would always like to be the general opinion, just as the word that the Greeks have for opinion, doxa, also means the decision made by the majority in the council assembly. How, then, can ignorance be admitted and questions arise?

Let us say first of all that it can occur only in the way any idea occurs to us. It is true that we do speak of ideas occurring to us less in regard to questions than to answers—e.g., the solution of problems; and by this we mean to say that there is no methodical way to arrive at the solution. But we also know that such ideas do not occur to us entirely unexpectedly. They always presuppose an orientation toward an area of openness from
which the idea can occur—i.e., they presuppose questions. The real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less that a solution occurs to us like an answer to a riddle than that a question occurs to us that breaks through into the open and thereby makes an answer possible. Every sudden idea has the structure of a question. But the sudden occurrence of the question is already a breach in the smooth front of popular opinion. Hence we say that a question too “occurs” to us, that it “arises” or “presents itself” more than that we raise it or present it.

We have already seen that, logically considered, the negativity of experience implies a question. In fact we have experiences when we are shocked by things that do not accord with our expectations. Thus questioning too is more a passion than an action. A question presses itself on us; we can no longer avoid it and persist in our accustomed opinion.

It seems to conflict with these conclusions, however, that the Socratic-Platonic dialectic raises the art of questioning to a conscious art; but there is something peculiar about this art. We have seen that it is reserved to the person who wants to know—i.e., who already has questions. The art of questioning is not the art of resisting the pressure of opinion; it already presupposes this freedom. It is not an art in the sense that the Greeks speak of techne, not a craft that can be taught or by means of which we could master the discovery of truth. The so-called epistemological digression of the Seventh Letter is directed, rather, to distinguishing the unique art of dialectic from everything that can be taught and learned. The art of dialectic is not the art of being able to win every argument. On the contrary, it is possible that someone practicing the art of dialectic—i.e., the art of questioning and of seeking truth—comes off worse in the argument in the eyes of those listening to it. As the art of asking questions, dialectic proves its value because only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further—i.e., the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting a real dialogue.

To conduct a dialogue requires first of all that the partners do not talk at cross purposes. Hence it necessarily has the structure of question and answer. The first condition of the art of conversation is ensuring that the other person is with us. We know this only too well from the reiterated ‘yes’ of the interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues. The positive side of this monotony is the inner logic with which the subject matter is developed in the conversation. To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be
conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other’s opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. A person skilled in the “art” of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything in favor of an opinion. Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter).

The unique and continuing relevance of the Platonic dialogues is due to this art of strengthening, for in this process what is said is continually transformed into the uttermost possibilities of its rightness and truth, and overcomes all opposition that tries to limit its validity. Here again it is not simply a matter of leaving the subject undecided. Someone who wants to know something cannot just leave it a matter of mere opinion, which is to say that he cannot hold himself aloof from the opinions that are in question. The speaker (der Redende) is put to the question (zur Rede gestellt) until the truth of what is under discussion (wovon der Rede ist) finally emerges. The maieutic productivity of the Socratic dialogue, the art of using words as a midwife, is certainly directed toward the people who are the partners in the dialogue, but it is concerned merely with the opinions they express, the immanent logic of the subject matter that is unfolded in the dialogue. What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors’ subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know. As the art of conducting a conversation, dialectic is also the art of seeing things in the unity of an aspect (sunoran eis hen eidos)—i.e., it is the art of forming concepts through working out the common meaning. What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point—performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. Hence it is more than a
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metaphor; it is a memory of what originally was the case, to describe the task of hermeneutics as entering into dialogue with the text. That this interpretation is performed by spoken language does not mean that it is transposed into a foreign medium; rather, being transformed into spoken language represents the restoration of the original communication of meaning. When it is interpreted, written tradition is brought back out of the alienation in which it finds itself and into the living present of conversation, which is always fundamentally realized in question and answer.

Thus we can appeal to Plato if we want to foreground the place of the question in hermeneutics. We can do this all the more readily since Plato himself manifests the hermeneutical phenomenon in a specific way. It would be worth investigating his critique of the written word as evidence that the poetic and philosophical tradition was becoming a literature in Athens. In Plato’s dialogues we see how the kind of textual “interpretation” cultivated by the sophists, especially the interpretation of poetry for didactic ends, elicited Plato’s opposition. We can see, further, how Plato tries to overcome the weakness of the logoi, especially the written logoi, through his own dialogues. The literary form of the dialogue places language and concept back within the original movement of the conversation. This protects words from all dogmatic abuse.

The primacy of conversation can also be seen in derivative forms in which the relation between question and answer is obscured. Letters, for example, are an interesting intermediate phenomenon: a kind of written conversation that, as it were, stretches out the movement of talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point. The art of writing letters consists in not letting what one says become a treatise on the subject but in making it acceptable to the correspondent. But on the other hand it also consists in preserving and fulfilling the standard of finality that everything stated in writing has. The time lapse between sending a letter and receiving an answer is not just an external factor, but gives this form of communication its special nature as a particular form of writing. So we note that speeding up the post has not improved this form of communication but, on the contrary, has led to a decline in the art of letter writing.

The primacy of dialogue, the relation of question and answer, can be seen in even so extreme a case as that of Hegel’s dialectic as a philosophical method. To elaborate the totality of the determinations of thought, which was the aim of Hegel’s logic, is as it were the attempt to comprehend within the great monologue of modern “method” the continuum of
meaning that is realized in every particular instance of dialogue. When Hegel sets himself the task of making the abstract determinations of thought fluid and subtle, this means dissolving and remolding logic into concrete language, and transforming the concept into the meaningful power of the word that questions and answers—a magnificent reminder, even if unsuccessful, of what dialectic really was and is. Hegel's dialectic is a monologue of thinking that tries to carry out in advance what matures little by little in every genuine dialogue.

(ii) The Logic of Question and Answer

Thus we return to the conclusion that the hermeneutic phenomenon too implies the primacy of dialogue and the structure of question and answer. That a historical text is made the object of interpretation means that it puts a question to the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question. But this takes place, as we showed, by our attaining the hermeneutical horizon. We now recognize this as the horizon of the question within which the sense of the text is determined.

Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question—a horizon that, as such, necessarily includes other possible answers. Thus the meaning of a sentence is relative to the question to which it is a reply, but that implies that its meaning necessarily exceeds what is said in it. As these considerations show, then, the logic of the human sciences is a logic of the question.

Despite Plato we are not very ready for such a logic. Almost the only person I find a link with here is R. G. Collingwood. In a brilliant and telling critique of the Oxford "realist" school, he developed the idea of a logic of question and answer, but unfortunately never elaborated it systematically. He clearly saw what was missing in naive hermeneutics founded on the prevailing philosophical critique. In particular the practice that Collingwood found in English universities of discussing "statements," though perhaps good practice for sharpening one's intelligence, obviously failed to take account of the historicity that is part of all understanding. Collingwood argues thus: We can understand a text only when we have understood the question to which it is an answer. But since this question
can be derived solely from the text and accordingly the appropriateness of the reply is the methodological presupposition for the reconstruction of the question, any criticism of this reply from some other quarter is pure shadow boxing. It is like understanding works of art. A work of art can be understood only if we assume its adequacy as an expression of the artistic idea. Here too we have to discover the question which it answers, if we are to understand it as an answer. This is, in fact, an axiom of all hermeneutics: we described it above as the "fore-conception of completeness."\footnote{132}

For Collingwood, this is the nerve of all historical knowledge. The historical method requires that the logic of question and answer be applied to historical tradition. We will understand historical events only if we reconstruct the question to which the historical actions of the persons involved were the answer. As an example Collingwood cites the Battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's plan on which it was based. The example is intended to show that the course of the battle helps us to understand Nelson's real plan, because it was successfully carried out. Because his opponent's plan failed, however, it cannot be reconstructed from the events. Thus, understanding the course of the battle and understanding the plan that Nelson carried out in it are one and the same process.\footnote{133}

But yet one cannot conceal the fact that the logic of question and answer has to reconstruct two different questions that have two different answers: the question of the meaning of a great event and the question of whether this event went according to plan. Clearly, the two questions coincide only when the plan coincides with the course of events. But we cannot suppose such coincidence as a methodological principle when we are concerned with a historical tradition which deals with men, like ourselves, in history. Tolstoy's celebrated description of the council of war before the battle—in which all the strategic possibilities are calculated and all the plans considered, thoroughly and perceptively, while the general sits there and sleeps, but in the night before the battle goes round all the sentry posts—is obviously a more accurate account of what we call history. Kutusov gets nearer to the reality and the forces that determine it than the strategists of the war council. The conclusion to be drawn from this example is that the interpreter of history always runs the risk of hypostasizing the connectedness of events when he regards their significance as that intended by the actual actors and planners.\footnote{134}

This is a legitimate undertaking only if Hegel's conditions hold good—i.e., the philosophy of history is made party to the plans of the world spirit and on the basis of this esoteric knowledge is able to mark out
certain individuals as having world-historical importance, since there is a real correlation between their particular ideas and the world-historical meaning of events. But it is impossible to derive a hermeneutical principle for the knowledge of history from such conjunctions of the subjective and objective in history. In regard to historical tradition Hegel’s theory clearly has only a limited truth. The infinite web of motivations that constitutes history only occasionally and briefly acquires the clarity of what a single individual has planned. Thus what Hegel describes as an exception proves the rule that there is a disproportion between an individual’s subjective thoughts and the meaning of the whole course of history. As a rule we experience the course of events as something that continually changes our plans and expectations. Someone who tries to stick to his plans discovers precisely how powerless his reason is. There are rare occasions when everything happens, as it were, of its own accord—i.e., events seem to be automatically in accord with our plans and wishes. On these occasions we can say that everything is going according to plan. But to apply this experience to the whole of history is to make a great extrapolation that completely contradicts our experience.

Collingwood’s use of the logic of question and answer in hermeneutical theory is made ambiguous by this extrapolation. Our understanding of written tradition per se is not such that we can simply presuppose that the meaning we discover in it agrees with what its author intended. Just as the events of history do not in general manifest any agreement with the subjective ideas of the person who stands and acts within history, so the sense of a text in general reaches far beyond what its author originally intended.

The task of understanding is concerned above all with the meaning of the text itself.

This is clearly what Collingwood had in mind when he denied that there is any difference between the historical question and the philosophical question to which the text is supposed to be an answer. Nevertheless, we must remember that the question we are concerned to reconstruct has to do not with the mental experiences of the author but simply with the meaning of the text itself. Thus if we have understood the meaning of a sentence—i.e., have reconstructed the question to which it really is the answer—it must be possible to inquire also about the questioner and his intended question, to which the text is perhaps only an imagined answer. Collingwood is wrong when he finds it methodologically unsound to differentiate between the question which the text is intended to answer and the question to which it really is an answer. He is right only insofar as
understanding a text does not generally involve such a distinction, if we are concerned with the subject matter of which the text speaks. Reconstructing the author's ideas is quite a different task.

We will have to ask what conditions apply to this different task. For it is undoubtedly true that, compared with the genuine hermeneutical experience that understands the meaning of the text, reconstructing what the author really had in mind is a limited undertaking. Historicism tempts us to regard such reduction as a scientific virtue and to regard understanding as a kind of reconstruction which in effect repeats the process whereby the text came into being. Hence it follows the cognitive ideal familiar to us from the knowledge of nature, where we understand a process only when we are able to reproduce it artificially.

I have shown above how questionable is Vico's statement that this ideal finds its purest culmination in history because there man encounters his own human-historical reality. I have asserted, on the contrary, that every historian and philologist must reckon with the fundamental non-definitiveness of the horizon in which his understanding moves. Historical tradition can be understood only as something always in the process of being defined by the course of events. Similarly, the philologist dealing with poetic or philosophical texts knows that they are inexhaustible. In both cases it is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. By being re-actualized in understanding, texts are drawn into a genuine course of events in exactly the same way as are events themselves. This is what we described as the history of effect as an element in hermeneutical experience. Every actualization in understanding can be regarded as a historical potential of what is understood. It is part of the historical finitude of our being that we are aware that others after us will understand in a different way. And yet it is equally indubitable that it remains the same work whose fullness of meaning is realized in the changing process of understanding, just as it is the same history whose meaning is constantly in the process of being defined. The hermeneutical reduction to the author's meaning is just as inappropriate as the reduction of historical events to the intentions of their protagonists.

However, we cannot take the reconstruction of the question to which a given text is an answer simply as an achievement of historical method. The most important thing is the question that the text puts to us, our being perplexed by the traditionary word, so that understanding it must already include the task of the historical self-mediation between the present and tradition. Thus the relation of question and answer is, in fact, reversed. The
voice that speaks to us from the past—whether text, work, trace—itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness. In order to answer the question put to us, we the interrogated must ourselves begin to ask questions. We must attempt to reconstruct the question to which the traditionary text is the answer. But we will be unable to do so without going beyond the historical horizon it presents us. Reconstructing the question to which the text is presumed to be the answer itself takes place within a process of questioning through which we try to answer the question that the text asks us. A reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that circumscribed the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one. It is, rather, included within the horizon that embraces us as the questioners who have been encountered by the traditionary word.

Hence it is a hermeneutical necessity always to go beyond mere reconstruction. We cannot avoid thinking about what the author accepted unquestioningly and hence did not consider, and bringing it into the openness of the question. This is not to open the door to arbitrariness in interpretation but to reveal what always takes place. Understanding the word of tradition always requires that the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness—i.e., that it merge with the question that tradition is for us. If the “historical” question emerges by itself, this means that it no longer arises as a question. It results from the cessation of understanding—a detour in which we get stuck.\footnote{137} Part of real understanding, however, is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them. Above I called this “the fusion of horizons.”\footnote{138} With Collingwood, we can say that we understand only when we understand the question to which something is the answer, but the intention of what is understood in this way does not remain foregrounded against our own intention. Rather, reconstructing the question to which the meaning of a text is understood as an answer merges with our own questioning. For the text must be understood as an answer to a real question.

The close relation between questioning and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension. However much a person trying to understand may leave open the truth of what is said, however much he may dismiss the immediate meaning of the object and consider its deeper significance instead, and take the latter not as true but merely as meaningful, so that the possibility of its truth remains unsettled, this is the real and fundamental nature of a question: namely to make things
indeterminate. Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing. That is why we cannot understand the questionableness of something without asking real questions, though we can understand a meaning without meaning it. To understand the questionableness of something is already to be questioning. There can be no tentative or potential attitude to questioning, for questioning is not the positing but the testing of possibilities. Here the nature of questioning indicates what is demonstrated by the actual operation of the Platonic dialogue. A person who thinks must ask himself questions. Even when a person says that such and such a question might arise, this is already a real questioning that simply masks itself, out of either caution or politeness.

This is the reason why understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject. Only in an inauthentic sense can we talk about understanding questions that one does not pose oneself—e.g., questions that are outdated or empty. We understand how certain questions came to be asked in particular historical circumstances. Understanding such questions means, then, understanding the particular presuppositions whose demise makes such questions "dead.” An example is perpetual motion. The horizon of meaning of such questions is only apparently still open. They are no longer understood as questions. For what we understand, in such cases, is precisely that there is no question.

To understand a question means to ask it. To understand meaning is to understand it as the answer to a question.

The logic of question and answer that Collingwood elaborated puts an end to talk about permanent problems, as in the way the "Oxford realists” approach to the classics of philosophy, and hence also an end to the concept of history of problems developed by neo-Kantianism. History of problems would truly be history only if it acknowledged that the identity of the problem is an empty abstraction and permitted itself to be transformed into questioning. There is no such thing, in fact, as a point outside history from which the identity of a problem can be conceived within the vicissitudes of the history of attempts to solve it. The fact is that understanding philosophical texts always requires re-cognizing what is cognized in them. Without this we would understand nothing at all. But this in no way means that we step outside the historical conditions in which we are situated and in which we understand. The problem that we re-cognize is not in fact simply the same if it is to be understood in a genuine act of
questioning. We can regard it as the same only because of our historical short-sightedness. The standpoint that is beyond any standpoint, a standpoint from which we could conceive its true identity, is a pure illusion.

We can understand the reason for this now. The concept of the problem is clearly an abstraction, namely the detachment of the content of the question from the question that in fact first reveals it. It refers to the abstract schema to which real and really motivated questions can be reduced and under which they can be subsumed. Such a "problem" has fallen out of the motivated context of questioning, from which it receives the clarity of its sense. Hence it is insoluble, like every question that has no clear, unambiguous sense, because it is not really motivated and asked.

This also confirms the origin of the concept of the problem. It does not belong in the sphere of those "honestly motivated refutations" in which the truth of the subject matter is advanced, but in the sphere of dialectic as a weapon to amaze or make a fool of one's opponent. In Aristotle, the word "problema" refers to those questions that present themselves as open alternatives because there is evidence for both views and we think that they cannot be decided by reasons, since the questions involved are too great. Problems are not real questions that arise of themselves and hence acquire the pattern of their answer from the genesis of their meaning, but are alternatives that can only be accepted as themselves and thus can be treated only in a dialectical way. This dialectical sense of the "problem" has its proper place in rhetoric, not in philosophy. Part of the concept of the problem is that there can be no clear decision on the basis of reasons. That is why Kant sees the rise of the concept of the problem as limited to the dialectic of pure reason. Problems are "tasks that emerge entirely from its own womb"—i.e., products of reason itself, the complete solution of which it cannot hope to achieve. It is interesting that in the nineteenth century, with the collapse of the unbroken tradition of philosophical questioning and the rise of historicism, the concept of the problem acquires a universal validity—a sign of the fact that an immediate relation to the questions of philosophy no longer exists. It is typical of the embarrassment of philosophical consciousness when faced with historicism that it took flight into an abstraction, the concept of the "problem," and saw no problem about the manner in which problems actually "exist." Neo-Kantian history of problems is a bastard of historicism. Critiquing the concept of the problem by appealing to a logic of question and answer must destroy the illusion that problems exist like stars in the sky.
Reflection on the hermeneutical experience transforms problems back to questions that arise and that derive their sense from their motivation.

The dialectic of question and answer disclosed in the structure of hermeneutical experience now permits us to state more exactly what kind of consciousness historically effected consciousness is. For the dialectic of question and answer that we demonstrated makes understanding appear to be a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation. It is true that a text does not speak to us in the same way as does a Thou. We who are attempting to understand must ourselves make it speak. But we found that this kind of understanding, "making the text speak," is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but that, as a question, it is related to the answer that is expected in the text. Anticipating an answer itself presupposes that the questioner is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it. This is the truth of historically effected consciousness. It is the historically experienced consciousness that, by renouncing the chimera of perfect enlightenment, is open to the experience of history. We described its realization as the fusion of the horizons of understanding, which is what mediates between the text and its interpreter.

The guiding idea of the following discussion is that the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language. Admittedly, what language is belongs among the most mysterious questions that man ponders. Language is so uncannily near our thinking, and when it functions it is so little an object, that it seems to conceal its own being from us. In our analysis of the thinking of the human sciences, however, we came so close to this universal mystery of language that is prior to everything else, that we can entrust ourselves to what we are investigating to guide us safely in the quest. In other words we are endeavoring to approach the mystery of language from the conversation that we ourselves are.

When we try to examine the hermeneutical phenomenon through the model of conversation between two persons, the chief thing that these apparently so different situations—understanding a text and reaching an understanding in a conversation—have in common is that both are concerned with a subject matter that is placed before them. Just as each interlocutor is trying to reach agreement on some subject with his partner, so also the interpreter is trying to understand what the text is saying. This understanding of the subject matter must take the form of language. It is not that the understanding is subsequently put into words; rather, the way...
understanding occurs—whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person who raises an issue with us—is the coming-into-language of the thing itself. Thus we will first consider the structure of dialogue proper, in order to specify the character of that other form of dialogue that is the understanding of texts. Whereas up to now we have framed the constitutive significance of the question for the hermeneutical phenomenon in terms of conversation, we must now demonstrate the linguisticality of dialogue, which is the basis of the question, as an element of hermeneutics.

Our first point is that the language in which something comes to speak is not a possession at the disposal of one or the other of the interlocutors. Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language. Something is placed in the center, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another. Hence reaching an understanding on the subject matter of a conversation necessarily means that a common language must first be worked out in the conversation. This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but, rather, in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.¹⁴⁴
Notes

1 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 312ff.

2 Cf. Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutik*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle in *Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie*, (1959), 2nd Abhandlung, which is explicitly committed to the old ideal of an art formulated in rules (p. 127, n.: “I . . . hate it when theory does not go beyond nature and the bases of art, whose object it is”). [See above pp. 178ff.]

3 Cf. Emil Staiger's description, which accords with that of Heidegger, in *Die Kunst der Interpretation*, pp. 11ff. I do not, however, agree that the work of a literary critic begins only “when we are in the situation of a contemporary reader.” This is something we never are, and yet we are capable of understanding, although we can never achieve a definite “personal or temporal identity” with the author. Cf. also Appendix IV below. [See also my “Vom Zirkel des Verstehens,” *Kleine Schriften*, IV, 54–61 (*GW*, II, 57–65) and the criticism of W. Stegmüller, *Der sogenannte Zirkel des Verstehens* (Darmstadt, 1974). The objection raised from a logical point of view against talk of the “hermeneutic circle” fails to recognize that this concept makes no claim to scientific proof, but presents a logical metaphor, known to rhetoric ever since Schleiermacher. Rightly opposed to this misunderstanding is Karl-Otto Apel, *Transformationen der Philosophie* (2 vols.: Frankfurt, 1973), II, 83, 89, 216 and passim.]

4 *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 312ff.

5 Cf. Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas*, p.163: “The word ‘prejudice’ is the most suitable expression for the great aim of the Enlightenment, the desire for free, untrammelled verification; the Vorurteil is the unambiguous polemical correlate of the very ambiguous word ‘freedom.’”

6 Praejudicium auctoritatis et precipitantium, which we find as early as Christian
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7 At the beginning of his essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784).

8 The enlightenment of the classical world, the fruit of which was Greek philosophy and its culmination in sophism, was quite different in nature and hence permitted a thinker like Plato to use philosophical myths to convey the religious tradition and the dialectical method of philosophizing. Cf. Erich Frank, *Philosophische Erkenntnis und religiöse Wahrheit*, pp. 31ff., and my review of it in the *Theologische Rundschau*, (1950), pp. 260–66. And see especially Gerhard Krüger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* (2nd ed., 1951).

9 A good example of this is the length of time it has taken for the authority of the historical writing of antiquity to be destroyed in historical studies and how slowly the study of archives and the research into sources have established themselves (cf. R. G. Collingwood, *Autobiography* [Oxford, 1939], ch. 11, where he more or less draws a parallel between turning to the study of sources and the Baconian revolution in the study of nature).

10 Cf. what we said about Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, pp. 180ff. above.

11 As we find, for example, in G. F. Meier's *Beiträge zu der Lehre von den Vorurteilen des menschlichen Geschlechts* (1766).

12 I have analyzed an example of this process in a little study on Immermann's "Chiliastische Sonette," *Kleine Schriften*, II. 136–47 (GW, IX).

13 [See my "Mythos und Vernunft," *Kleine Schriften*, IV. 48–53 (GW, VIII) and "Mythos und Wissenschaft," *GW*, VIII.]

14 Horkheimer and Adorno seem to me right in their analysis of the "dialectic of the Enlightenment" (although I must regard the application of sociological concepts such as "bourgeois" to Odysseus as a failure of historical reflection, if not, indeed, a confusion of Homer with Johann Heinrich Voss [author of the standard German translation of Homer], who had already been criticized by Goethe.


16 Cf. the reflections on this important question by G. von Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness*, tr. Rodney Livingstone (1923; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).

17 Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*.


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22 (It seems to me that the tendency to acknowledge authority, as for instance in Karl Jaspers, Von der Wahrheit, pp. 766ff., and Gerhard Krüger, Freiheit und Weltpolitik, pp. 231ff., lacks an intelligible basis so long as this proposition is not acknowledged.) The notorious statement, “The party (or the Leader) is always right” is not wrong because it claims that a certain leadership is superior, but because it serves to shield the leadership, by a dictatorial decree, from any criticism that might be true. True authority does not have to be authoritarian. [This issue has meanwhile been much debated, particularly in my exchange with Jürgen Habermas. See Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik, ed. Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt, 1977) and my lecture at Solothurn, “Über den Zusammenhang von Autorität und kritischer Freiheit.” Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie, Neurochirurgie und Psychiatrie, 133 (1983), 11–16. Arnold Gehlen especially has worked out the role of institutions.]


24 I don’t agree with Scheler that the preconscious pressure of tradition decreases as historical study proceeds (Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos, p. 37). The independence of historical study implied in this view seems to me a liberal fiction of a sort that Scheler is generally able to see through. (Cf. similarly in his Nachlass, I, 228ff., where he affirms his faith in enlightenment through historical study or sociology of knowledge.)

25 [The question appears much more complicated since Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, 1963) and The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change (Chicago, 1977).]

26 [That K.-G. Faber in his thorough discussion in Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft (2nd ed., Munich, 1972), p. 25, cannot quote this statement without placing an ironic exclamation mark after “constituted” obliges me to ask how else one defines a “historical fact”?]

27 [Now, in the light of the past three decades of work in the philosophy of science, I willingly acknowledge that even this formulation is too undifferentiated.]

28 [See my “Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik: Versuch einer Selbstkritik,” GW, II.]

29 [On the concept of “style,” see Part One, n. 67, and Appendix I below.]

30 The congress at Naumburg on the classical (1930), which was completely dominated by Werner Jaeger, is as much an example of this as the founding of the periodical Die Antike. Cf. Das Problem des Klassischen und die Antike (1931).

31 Cf. the legitimate criticism that A. Körte made of the Naumburg lecture by J. Stroux, in the Berichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 86 (1934), and my note in Gnomon, 11 (1935), 612f. [repr. in GW, V, 350–53].

32 Thus Tacitus’ Dialogue on the Orators rightly received special attention in the Naumburg discussions on the classical. The reasons for the decline of rhetoric
include the recognition of its former greatness, i.e., a normative awareness. Bruno Snell is correct when he points out that the historical stylistic concepts of "baroque," "archaic," etc. all presuppose a relation to the normative concept of the classical and have only gradually lost their pejorative sense ("Wesen und Wirklichkeit des Menschen," Festschrift für H. Plessner, pp. 33ff.).

33 Hegel, Asthetik, II, 3.

34 Friedrich Schlegel, Fragmente, ed. Minor, no. 20, draws the hermeneutical consequence: "A classical work of literature is one that can never be completely understood. But it must also be one from which those who are educated and educating themselves must always desire to learn more."

35 [Here especially, see my "Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik: Versuch einer Selbstkritik," GW, II, 3ff.]


37 [See G. Ripanti. Agostino teoretico del’interpretazione (Brescia, 1980).]

38 [See M. Flacius, Clavis Scripturae sacrae seu de Sermonem sacrarum literarum, book II (1676).]

39 In a lecture on aesthetic judgment at a conference in Venice in 1958 I tried to show that it too, like historical judgment, is secondary in character and confirms the "anticipation of completeness." ("On the Problematic Character of Aesthetic Consciousness," tr. E. Kelly, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal (New School for Social Research), 9 (1982), 31–40.)

40 There is one exception to this anticipation of completeness, namely the case of writing that is presenting something in disguise, e.g., a roman à clef. This presents one of the most difficult hermeneutical problems (cf. the interesting remarks by Leo Strauss in Persecution and the Art of Writing). This exceptional hermeneutical case is of special significance, in that it goes beyond interpretation of meaning in the same way as when historical source criticism goes back behind the tradition. Although the task here is not a historical, but a hermeneutical one, it can be performed only by using understanding of the subject matter as a key to discover what is behind the disguise—just as in conversation we understand irony to the extent to which we are in agreement with the other person on the subject matter. Thus the apparent exception confirms that understanding involves agreement. [I doubt that Strauss is right in the way he carries out his theory, for instance in his discussion of Spinoza. Dissembling meaning implies a high degree of consciousness. Accommodation, conforming, and so on do not have to occur consciously. In my view, Strauss did not sufficiently see this. See op. cit., pp. 223ff. and my "Hermeneutics and Historicism," Supplement I below. These problems have meanwhile been much disputed, in my view, on too narrowly semantic a basis. See Donald Davidson, Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation (Oxford, 1984).]

41 Cf. p.182 above.

42 Cf. p.182 above.
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43 Nicomachean Ethics, I, 7.

44 [I have here softened the original text ("It is only temporal distance that can solve . . . ”): it is distance, not only temporal distance, that makes this hermeneutic problem solvable. See also GW, II, 64.]

45 Pp. 289 and 293 above.

46 [Here constantly arises the danger of “appropriating” the other person in one’s own understanding and thereby failing to recognize his or her otherness.]

47 The structure of the concept of situation has been illuminated chiefly by Karl Jaspers, Die geistige Situation der Zeit, and Erich Rothacker. [See my “Was ist Wahrheit.” Kleine Schriften, I, 46–58, esp. pp. 55ff. (GW, II, 44ff.).]

48 [H. Kuhn already referred to this in “The Phenomenological Concept of ‘Horizon,” in Philosophical Essays in Memory of Husserl, ed. Martin Farber (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 106–23. See my observations on “horizon” above, pp. 236ff.]

49 [I already discussed the moral aspect of this topic in my 1943 essay “Das Problem der Geschichte in der neueren deutschen Philosophie,” Kleine Schriften, I, 1–10 (GW, II, 27–36). It will also be more emphatically stressed in what follows.]

50 Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations, II, at the beginning.

51 Rambach’s Institutiones hermeneuticae sacrae (1723) are known to me in the compilation by Morus. There we read: Solemus autem intelligendi explicandique subtilitatem (soliditatem vulgo).

52 [Unfortunately, this plain statement is often overlooked by both sides in debates over hermeneutics.]


54 Cf. the analysis of the ontology of the work of art in Part One, pp. 102ff. above.


56 [In many respects, the discussion here is much too restricted to the special situation of the historical human sciences and “being that is oriented to a text.” Only in Part Three have I succeeded in broadening the issue to language and dialogue, though in fact I have had it constantly in view; and consequently, only there have I grasped in a fundamental way the notions of distance and otherness. See also pp. 296f.]


58 Cf. pp. 13ff. and 28 above.

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60 Cf. Nicomachean Ethics, I, 7 and II, 2.

61 The final chapter of the Nicomachean Ethics gives the fullest expression to this requirement and thus forms the transition to the Politics.

62 Here we shall be following Nicomachean Ethics, VI, unless otherwise noted. [An analysis of this book written in 1930 was first published under the title "Praktisches Wissen" in GW, V, 230–48.]

63 Plato, Apology, 22cd.

64 Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 8, 1141 b 33, 1142 a 30; Eudemean Ethics, VIII, 2, 1246 b 36. [In my view, one misses the essential methodological unity of ethics and politics in Aristotle if one does not include here politike phronesis (as Gauthier fails to do in the new introduction to the 2nd ed. of his commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics [Louvain, 1970]). See my review, reprinted in GW, VI, 304–06.]

65 Werke (1832), XIV, 341.

66 Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 8.

67 Nicomachean Ethics, V, 14.

68 Lex superior preferenda est inferiori, writes Melanchthon in his explanation of the ratio of epikeieia (in the earliest version of Melanchthon's Ethics, ed. H. Helneck [Berlin, 1893], p.29).

69 Above, pp. 34ff.

70 Ideo adhibenda est ad omnes leges interpretatio quae flectat eas ad humaniorem ac leniorem sententiam (Melanchthon, 29): "Therefore an interpretation should be applied to every law that would bend it to more humane and lenient decisions."

71 Cf. the excellent critique by H. Kuhn of Leo Strauss' Naturrecht und Geschichte (1953), in the Zeitschrift für Politik, 3, no. 4 (1956).

72 Nicomachean Ethics, V, 10. The distinction itself originates, of course, with the Sophists, but it loses its destructive meaning through Plato's restriction of the logos, and its positive meaning in law becomes clear only in Plato's Statesman, 294ff., and in Aristotle.

73 The train of thought in the parallel place in the Magna Moralia, I, 33, 1194 b 30–95 a 7, cannot be understood unless one does this: "Do not suppose that if things change owing to our use, there is not therefore a natural justice; because there is" (tr. Ross).

74 Cf. Melanchthon, op. cit., p.28.

75 Aristotle says in general that phronesis is concerned with the means (ta pros to telos) and not with the telos itself. It is probably the contrast with the Platonic doctrine of the idea of the good that makes him emphasize that. However, phronesis is not simply the capacity to make the right choice of means, but is
itself a moral hexis that also sees the telos toward which the person acting is aiming with his moral being. This emerges clearly from its place within the system of Aristotle's ethics. Cf. in particular Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 10, 1142 b 33, 1140 b 13, 1141 b 15. I was glad to see that H. Kuhn in his essay "Die Gegenwart der Griechen," Festschrift for H.-G. Gadamer (1960), pp. 134ff., now does full justice to this situation, although he tries to demonstrate that there is an ultimate "preferential choice" that makes Aristotle lag behind Plato. [The Latin translation of phronesis as prudentia abetted the failure to see the real state of affairs, a failure which still haunts contemporary "deontic" logic. In my review of recent work in ethics, Philosophische Rundschau, 32 (1985), 1-26, the noteworthy exception was T. Engberg-Pederson. Aristotle's Theory of Moral Insight (Oxford, 1983).]

76 Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 9, 1142 a 25ff.
77 Cf. pp. 30ff. below.
78 sunesis ("fellow-feeling, forbearance, forgiveness"), Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 11.
79 [I have slightly revised the text here. The phrase allou legoutos (1145 a 15) surely means only that it is not a case in which I must act. I can listen with understanding when another relates something even if I am not going to offer advice.]
80 gnome, syn gnome.
81 Nicomachean Ethics, VI, 13, 1144 a 23ff.
82 He is a panourgos, i.e., he is capable of anything.
83 In addition to the works cited in nn. 172 and 53 above are many shorter articles. [Cf. also Supplement I below, "Hermeneutics and Historicism," and my essay "Emilio Betti und das idealistische Erbe," in Quaderni Fiorentini, 7 (1978), 5-11.]
84 Is it just an accident that Schleiermacher's lecture on hermeneutics first appeared in a posthumous edition two years before Savigny's book? It would be worth making a special study of hermeneutical theory in Savigny, an area that Forsthoef left out in his study. On Savigny, see Franz Wieacker's note in Gründer und Bewahrer, p.110.
86 Betti, op. cit., n. 62 a.
87 Above, p.251 and passim.
88 Walch, p.158. [Enlightened despotism gives the appearance that the "ruler" interprets his command in such a way that the law is not superseded, but reinterpreted, so that it corresponds with his will without needing to observe any rule of explanation.]
The importance of this concretizing of the law is so central to jurisprudence that there is a vast literature on the subject. Cf. Karl Engisch, *Die Idee der Konkretisierung, Abhandlungen der Heidelberger Akademie* (1953). [See also his more recent works, *Methoden der Rechtswissenschaft* (Munich, 1972), pp. 39–80, and *Recht und Sittlichkeit: Hauptthemen der Rechtsphilosophie* (Munich, 1971).]

Cf. F. Wieacker, who has investigated the problem of an extralegal order of law from the point of view of the art of giving legal judgment and of the elements that determine it: *Gesetz und Richterkunst* (1957).

Over and above the aspect discussed here, the overcoming of the hermeneutics of historicism, which is the general purpose of the present investigation, has positive consequences for theology, which seem to approach the views of the theologians Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling (Fuchs, *Hermeneutik* [2nd ed., 1960]; Ebeling, “Hermeneutik,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed.). [See also my “On the Problem of Self-Understanding,” in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, tr. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 44–58.]

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Cf. p.298 above.


[The expression “reflective philosophy” was coined by Hegel against Jacobi, Kant, and Fichte. It is used already in “Glauben und Wissen,” but as a “reflective philosophy of subjectivity.” Hegel himself counterposes it to the reflection of reason.]

Cf. p.298 above.


[I have given a detailed interpretation of the dialectic of recognition (*Phenomenology of Mind*, IV, A: “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”) in *Hegel’s Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, tr. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), ch. 3.]

This is evident in Marxist literature even today. Cf. the energetic elaboration of this point in Jürgen Habermas’ “Zur philosophischen Diskussion um Marx und den Marxismus,” *Philosophische Rundschau*, 5, nos. 3/4 (1957), 183ff.


This is the meaning of the difficult passage 343cd, for the authorship of which those who deny the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* have to assume a second, nameless Plato. [See my detailed study, “Dialectic and Sophism in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*,” in *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, tr. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 93–123.]
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102 Meno, 80d ff.
103 Cf. his account in Erfahrung und Urteil, p.42, and in his great work, Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie, pp. 48ff., 130ff. [What is said here is based on a quite different concept of “founding.” Phenomenologically considered, “pure” perception seems to me a mere construction, which corresponds to the derivative concept of “presence-at-hand”—and consequently appears as a position left over from the latter’s idealization in the theory of science.]
104 Husserliana, VI, loc. cit. See above pp. 237f.
105 Francis Bacon, Novum Organum, I, 26ff.
111 Posterior Analytics, II, 19, 99ff.
112 Plutarch, De fortuna, III, 98 F = Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Anaxagoras B 21 b.
113 Aeschylus, Prometheus, 461.
114 Phaedo, 96.
115 [This parallels Karl Popper’s paired concepts of “trial and error”—with the restriction that those concepts all too often proceed from the deliberate, and all too rarely from the suffering side of human experience of life. Or at least that is so, insofar as one looks only to the “logic of scientific discovery,” but not if one thinks of the logic actually effective in human experience of life.]
119 Hegel, Encyclopedia, §7.
120 In his informative study, “Leid und Erfahrung,” Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, no. 5 (1956), H. Dörrie investigated the origin of the rhyme pathos mathos in proverbial modes of expression. He considers that the original meaning of the proverb was that only the foolish man has to suffer in order to become wise, whereas the wise man is more prudent. The religious element that Aeschylus gives to the phrase is a later development. This is not very convincing in view of the fact that the myth that Aeschylus takes up speaks of the shortsightedness of the human race, and not just of individual fools. Moreover, the limits of human prediction are such an early and human experience and so closely connected with the universal human experience of suffering that we can hardly believe that this insight remained hidden in a simple little proverb until Aeschylus discovered it. [On this
Aschylean motif, see more recently Heinz Neitzel, *Gymnasium*, 87 (1980), 283ff. According to him, what is meant is punishment for *hybris*, as in: "Who refuses to listen, must be made to feel."

121 Cf. our remarks on this in the “Introduction” above.

122 Cf. the outstanding analysis of this reflective dialectic of I and Thou in Karl Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen* (1928) and my review of it in *Logos*, 18 (1929), 436–40 [GW, IV].

123 *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, II, "Of self-overcoming."

124 Cf. our remarks on this in the "Introduction" above.


126 105 b 23.


128 Cf. chiefly his article “Syllogistik” in Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie für Altertumswissenschaft*.

129 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1004 b 25: *esti de he dialektike peirastike*. Here we can already discern the idiom of being led, which is the real sense of dialectic, in that the testing of an opinion gives it the chance to conquer and hence puts one’s own previous opinion at risk.

130 See above pp. 291f., 331f.

131 Cf. Collingwood’s *Autobiography*, which at my suggestion was published in German translation as *Denken*, pp. 30ff., as well as Joachim Finkeldei, *Grund und Wesen des Fragens* (unpub. diss., Heidelberg, 1954). A similar position is adopted by Croce (who influenced Collingwood) in his *Logic as Science of the Pure Concept*, tr. Ainsley (London, 1917), German tr., pp. 135ff., where he understands every definition as an answer to a question and hence historical.


135 See pp. 182, 294 above and passim.

136 Pp. 216f. and 277f. above.

137 See the account of this wrong turning of the historical in my analysis above, pp. 180ff., of Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

138 Cf. pp. 304ff. above.

139 Pp. 355ff. above.


141 Aristotle, *Topics*, 1. 11.
142 Critique of Pure Reason, A 321ff.

143 Nicolai Hartmann, in his essay “Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte.” Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (1936), no. 5 (repr. in Hartmann, Kleine Schriften, II, 1-47), rightly pointed out that the important thing is to realize once more in our own minds what the great thinkers realized. But when, in order to hold something fixed against the inroads of historicism, he distinguished between the constancy of what the “real problems are concerned with” and the changing nature of the way in which they have to be both asked and answered, he failed to see that neither “change,” nor “constancy,” the antithesis of “problem” and “system,” nor the criterion of “achievements” is consonant with the character of philosophy as knowledge. When he wrote that “only when the individual avails himself of the enormous intellectual experience of the centuries, and his own experience is based on what he has recognized and what has been well tried . . . . can that knowledge be sure of its own further progress” (p. 18), he interpreted the “systematic acquaintance with the problems” according to the model of an experimental science and a progress of knowledge that falls far short of the complicated interpenetration of tradition and history that we have seen in hermeneutical consciousness.