

2006

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### Recommended Citation

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**RICOEUR'S CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS  
AND THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC MODEL  
OF CRITICAL THEORY**

*After Ricoeur: An Interdisciplinary Conference*  
*Oklahoma City University*  
*October 20-21, 2006*

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*Word count (excluding endnotes and headings: 2,921)*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to extend Ricoeur's acclaimed mediation of the Gadamer-Habermas debate. Freud's psychoanalytic practice was an important touchstone for the debate, and Ricoeur's reading of Freud provides a key to his critical intervention in the debate. The emerging postmodern account of psychotherapeutic practice provides a model of the critical hermeneutics that Ricoeur championed. Bringing Ricoeur's insights to bear on this model, we can advance the questioning spurred by the Gadamer-Habermas debate without pretending to bring closure to the unending conversation of thinking.

# **RICOEUR'S CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS AND THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC MODEL OF CRITICAL THEORY**

**Francis J. Mootz III**

## ***Introduction***

One of Paul Ricoeur's enduring legacies is his sophisticated mediation of the famous debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas regarding the potential for, and scope of, social critique.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I first recount the Gadamer-Habermas debate, focusing on their competing accounts of the theoretical significance of Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>2</sup> Next, I sketch Ricoeur's mediation of the debate in concert with his distinctive reading of Freud. Finally, I extend his approach by looking to psychotherapeutic model of critique. I describe the broad contours of an emerging postmodern account of psychotherapeutic practice that serves as a model of the critical hermeneutics championed by Ricoeur.

### ***I. The Gadamer-Habermas Debate: Competing Interpretations of Psychoanalysis.***

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argued that our truthful relation to the world subtends, but is not exhausted by, scientific methodologism. Against the ascendancy of technical-empirical rationality premised on the Enlightenment fantasy of a monadic, prejudice-free subject decoding the world of objects, Gadamer advocated a "philosophical hermeneutics." Gadamer's analysis of the give-and-take of conversation provides the most vivid and succinct model of hermeneutical understanding. Beginning with the observation that "the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner," he argued

that the understanding emerging from a conversation is “like an event that happens to us.”<sup>3</sup> Gadamer is making an ontological claim, asserting that human understanding is founded on a decentering “fusion of horizons.” This experience is placed in sharp relief when two conversationalists find the path of their dialogue taking on a life of its own, and is masked when a scientist radically demarcates the scope of inquiry and seeks understanding only through methodological testing.

In the late 1960s, Habermas defended the Enlightenment faith that reason is sufficiently powerful to outline the path of social progress against Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, notwithstanding Habermas’s post-metaphysical acknowledgment that the Enlightenment conception of reason was mistakenly limited to empirical and logical modes of thinking. In *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, he acknowledged Gadamer’s powerful description of the fluidity of linguistic horizons that enable understanding through translation and accommodation to practical demands, but Habermas concluded that hermeneutic self-reflection devolves into irrationalism “when it posits hermeneutic experience as an absolute and fails to acknowledge the transcending force of reflection that is also at work in it.”<sup>4</sup> Guided by Freudian psychoanalysis, he insisted that cultural tradition as developed in hermeneutical reflection must be subject to theoretical insight guided by rational reconstruction.<sup>5</sup>

Habermas refined this critique by developing a philosophical anthropology of knowledge-constitutive interests. In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, he agreed that two

distinct interests subtend technical-empirical inquiry and historical-hermeneutical inquiry. Rejecting Gadamer's attempt to embed the former within the latter, he argued that the very recognition that human interest subtends empirical and hermeneutical knowledge reveals that reason is subject to a third interest: the interest in reason itself.<sup>6</sup> Distinguished from the technical manipulation of the natural world and the effort to reach a shared understanding with others, self-reflection arises from an independent yet co-primordial human interest in emancipatory reflection. Freud's psychoanalytic theory represents a decisive moment in our intellectual tradition precisely because it directly takes into account this "new dimension" of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Habermas properly rejected Freud's scientific self-understanding, but he offered Freud's psychoanalytic practice as a compelling model for social critique.<sup>8</sup> The practicing analyst is not just attempting to interpret ambiguous statements or actions, nor is she seeking a technical mastery of human physiology and neurology. Instead, the analyst guides the patient through a process of self-reflection that has an emancipatory effect by correcting internal disturbances below the level of every day hermeneutical understanding, disturbances that amount to a "defective organization of speech itself" and that result in "systematically distorted communication."<sup>9</sup>

The critical social theorist plays a similar role in her efforts to promote the autonomy of a community by guiding it to self-understanding. The social critic must, no less than an analyst, employ a different kind of persuasion and reasoning in therapeutic critique, since she

is not seeking mutual understanding as she would in ordinary dialogue but rather is assisting the “patient” to reconstruct his mistaken self-understanding as part of a process of emancipation. In place of Freud’s mistaken meta-psychological explanations, Habermas anchors his theory in language. Language is not just the medium of psychoanalytic dialogue, it is the source of critical standards that guide emancipatory self-reflection.<sup>10</sup>

Gadamer immediately and repeatedly challenged Habermas’s quasi-transcendental grounding of critique, arguing that Habermas erred by attempting to articulate a tradition-independent standard of rationality, and also by underestimating the critical element within every hermeneutical appropriation. Habermas’s psychoanalytic model of social criticism brings into sharp focus his misguided hopes for a critical inquiry that can transcend the critic’s hermeneutical situation. Because the social critic is embedded in a traditionary horizon of understanding no less than any other person, Gadamer insisted that the task of unmasking a prejudice always takes place against the background of an entire network of “prejudices.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, in “the realm of practical reason there is simply no analogy to the knowing analyst who guides the productive reflective processes of the analysand.”<sup>12</sup> Gadamer pressed further by insisting that psychoanalysis itself always operates within, and is parasitic upon, the primordial and inescapable hermeneutical situation that girds understanding.<sup>13</sup>

Gadamer’s reply to Habermas’s review of *Truth and Method* contains his most pointed defense of the critical element in hermeneutical understanding while still criticizing

Habermas's invocation of psychoanalysis as a model of an extra-traditional measure of validity:

Tradition itself is no proof of validity, at any rate not in instances where reflection demands proof. But that is the point: Where does reflection demand proof? Everywhere? The finiteness of human existence and the intrinsic particularity of reflection seem to me to make that impossible.

.....

In light of such considerations . . . Habermas's analogy between psychoanalytical and sociological theory becomes problematic. For where is the latter to find its limit? Where in Habermas's scheme of things does the patient stop and the social partnership step in in its unprofessional right? . . . The inevitable consequence seems to be that the emancipatory consciousness cannot stop short of the dissolution of every obligation to restraint—and thus that its guiding light must be the vision of an anarchistic utopia. This, of course, seems to me a hermeneutically false consciousness.<sup>14</sup>

Gadamer did not argue against the claimed accomplishments of psychoanalytic practice any more than he denied the powerful transformations wrought by natural science. He insisted only that Habermas erred by not recognizing that all methodological attitudes, even when directed toward emancipation from natural, cultural or psychological constraints, are subordinated to the hermeneutical dimension of all human understanding.

## ***II. Ricoeur's Critical Hermeneutics: Meditations on Freud.***

Ricoeur famously addressed the Gadamer-Habermas debate with the goal of dissolving false dichotomies without reducing the exchange to a superficial and univocal resolution.<sup>15</sup> Rejecting a stark choice between the humility of the hermeneutical consciousness of belonging and the defiance of the critical consciousness of distancing, Ricoeur asks whether it is “possible to formulate a hermeneutics that would render justice



to the critique of ideology, that would show the necessity of the latter at the very heart of its own concerns?”<sup>16</sup> He emphasizes that critical hermeneutics is not only possible, but necessary: “Hermeneutics without a project of liberation is blind, but a project of emancipation without historical experience is empty,”<sup>17</sup> and so the “moment these two interests become radically separate, hermeneutics and critique will themselves be no more than . . . ideologies!”<sup>18</sup>

Ricoeur argues that Habermas’s critical theory can succeed only “if it incorporates a certain regeneration of the past” in the form of a hermeneutical “reinterpretation of tradition.”<sup>19</sup> The distortions of ideology, like the distortions of psychopathology, are disruptions in a society’s communicative capacity to regenerate itself, and so a critique of distortions can never be divorced from practical communicative experience. In short, Ricoeur insists that “a depth hermeneutics is still a hermeneutics, even if it is called metahermeneutical,”<sup>20</sup> and cautions that an emancipatory critique can be nothing other than a “pious vow” if it is not engaged “in the reawakening of communicative action itself.”<sup>21</sup> Habermas’s own philosophical efforts prove Ricoeur’s point, because Habermas’s critical theory represents a particular reinterpretation of a long tradition of critical inquiry that is intended to meet the challenges posed by the emerging post-metaphysical, bureaucratic and technocratic global village.<sup>22</sup>

In similar fashion, Ricoeur argues that Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy must expand attention to the critical moment encompassed in every interpretation. Although

Gadamer acknowledges the critical element of interpretation in his ontological characterization of interpretation as “play” and in his analysis of the productive effects of temporal distance, Ricoeur extends and deepens these insights. Gadamer famously describes the decentering experience of being brought up short in an interpretative encounter, but Ricoeur stresses the productive role of methodological critique when engaged in an extended exegesis of a work. “Distanciation from oneself demands that the appropriation of the proposed worlds offered by the text passes through the disappropriation of the self. The critique of *false consciousness* can thus become an integral part of hermeneutics, conferring upon the critique of ideology that meta-hermeneutical dimension that Habermas assigns to it.”<sup>23</sup> Explanation and understanding are not distinct activities; rather, they interpenetrate the hermeneutic experience. The practice of approaching literature by combining a structural account of the work with an interpretive appropriation reveals that explanation is fused with understanding in ordinary interpretation, and is not just a feature of the emancipatory critique embodied in psychoanalysis.<sup>24</sup>

Ricoeur undoubtedly is closer to Gadamer’s position,<sup>25</sup> but he provides a helpful corrective to Gadamer’s focused critique of the excesses of methodologism. It pays to recall that *Truth and Method* was written slowly during the 1950s, was not published until 1960, and did not become locked in public debate with Habermas until 1970. Gadamer recognized that his book came ‘too late’ in some respects, but in the Foreword to the Second German Edition in 1965 he suggested that the admitted “one-sidedness of hermeneutic universalism

has the truth of a corrective” even with respect to the emerging challenges issued by the critics of ideology.<sup>26</sup> Ricoeur exemplifies hermeneutic charity, taking up Gadamer’s argument with the goal of extending it beyond Gadamer’s polemic against methodologism and the later polemic against radical critique.<sup>27</sup> Ricoeur shows himself to be a sensitive reader intent on drawing the best out of his interlocutors while gaining perspective on their time-bound commitments to a certain line of inquiry. He engages in critical hermeneutics as much as he offers a theory of critical hermeneutics.

Because psychoanalytic theory was the touchstone of the debate, Ricoeur’s intervention can be understood fully only by considering his reading of Freud. In *Freud and Philosophy*, he addressed the psychoanalytic challenge to religious faith with a detailed and nuanced exegesis that offered a deceptively simple theme: we must be suspicious of our beliefs, and yet we must believe. In some of his most frequently quoted passages, Ricoeur elegantly describes the “double possibility” that is the quandary of modernity: we must simultaneously be ready to interrogate idols but also to listen to symbols.<sup>28</sup> The questions guiding his exegesis of Freud are: “Is the showing-hiding of double-meaning always a dissimulation of what desire means, or can it sometimes be a manifestation, a revelation, of the sacred? And is this alternative itself real or illusory, provisional or definitive?” There can be no easy answers, but he champions “the faith of one who has engaged in hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism, postcritical faith.”<sup>29</sup>

Faith can be fostered by critical hermeneutics only through an internal dynamic; faith

can never be directed from outside one's faith. After an extensive exegesis of Freud with the goal of bringing together the archeological impulses of critique and the teleological impulses of one's faith issuing from a finite perspective, Ricoeur returns to Freud's analysis of the myth of the primal murder. Ricoeur emphasizes that Freud fails to explain the pivotal episode of the drama,

the forming of the covenant among the brothers whereby they agreed not to repeat among themselves the murder of the father. This covenant is highly significant, for it puts an end to a repetition of the act of parricide; by prohibiting fratricide, the covenant engenders a history. But Freud is much more preoccupied with the symbolic repetition of the murder in the totem meal than with the conciliation among the brothers, which makes possible the reconciliation with the father image henceforward engraved in the hearts of men. Why not link the destiny of faith with this fraternal conciliation, rather than with the perpetual repetition of the parricide?<sup>30</sup>

This is the role of critical hermeneutics: to listen to the masters of suspicion without becoming entangled in their myopic attention to one feature of the interpretive process.

### ***III. Critical Hermeneutics and Postmodern Psychotherapeutic Practice.***

The Gadamer-Habermas debate was distorted from the beginning because it was conducted in Freud's canonical shadow. Habermas attempted to sidestep Freud's metapsychology, while Gadamer rejected its relevance for social critique outright; both, however, remained in the grip of Freud's legacy. Since the debate, Freudian psychoanalysis has been the target of blistering criticism, and "independent studies have begun to converge toward a verdict . . . that there is literally nothing to be said, scientifically or therapeutically, to the advantage of the entire Freudian system or any of its component dogmas."<sup>31</sup> As the

Freudian theoretical corpus crumbles, it is illuminating to return to Ricoeur's distinctive reading of Freud and to extend his mediation of the Gadamer-Habermas debate by connecting his critical hermeneutics to subsequent developments in psychotherapeutic practice.

An emerging "postmodern" account of psychotherapeutic practice returns to the primacy of Freud's "talking cure" by reconceptualizing psychotherapy as hermeneutics, rhetoric and narrative.<sup>32</sup> Postmodern psychotherapists engage clients in a dialogue for the purpose of augmenting the client's capacity for successful interaction; therapeutic dialogue is not a tool or method, it *is* the therapy. Therapy is not empowering because the "expert" analyst decodes the client's situation according to a theoretical template. Instead, therapy is an actively shared participation in revising the client's lived social narratives, beginning with the hermeneutical activity of discernment and extending through the rhetorical activity of elaborating the client's situation. Postmodern psychotherapy exemplifies critical hermeneutics because it is a process of broadening the client's lived narratives rather than simply a site for communicating expert knowledge to the client. The therapist can't persuade the client to revise a life-narrative at will, because there simply is no "self" standing outside the narrative to do the editing. Consequently, psychotherapy is a process of broadening the client's successful participation in socially structured narratives that are beyond the client's direction,<sup>33</sup> principally by disrupting the mistaken sense of necessity by collaboratively revising the narratives of the session.<sup>34</sup> Ken Gergen has emphasized that the goal of revising

client narratives is not to approximate an ideal narrative; rather, the goal is to permit the client to experience the malleability of narrative reality so as to enable the client “to participate in the continuous process of creating and transforming meaning.”<sup>35</sup>

Harlene Anderson’s “philosophical stance” of “not-knowing” exemplifies this perspective by focusing on the need for a genuine conversation, in which the therapist accepts her role as a co-expert who facilitates a collaborative dialogue rather than an expert who provides an answer.<sup>36</sup> Anderson’s stance of “not-knowing” is not quiescence in the face of ideology; rather, the therapist exercises expertise by “suspending” her urge to diagnose, by *not* “establishing understanding, explanation, and interpretations based on prior experiences, formed truths, and knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> In short, the therapist is an expert only in the *process* of facilitating dialogic and reflective conversation, rather than in the *content* of her client’s narrative.

The postmodern approach to psychotherapeutic dialogue acknowledges that critique is hermeneutical, but it also recognizes the validity and necessity of a structured dialogic inquiry that draws upon methodologies and empirically-based studies.<sup>38</sup> In this way, postmodern psychotherapy converges with Ricoeur’s description of critical hermeneutics and his critique of Freudian psychoanalysis. Ricoeur responds to Habermas’s hubris and Gadamer’s conservative insistence on the limits of finitude by embracing the critical potential within a dialogue that does not purport to differentiate between symbols and idols in advance. Within the therapeutic context, critical hermeneutics is an effort to disrupt rigid narrative

constructions that have become problematic for the client, and also an effort to discover the unhelpful extension of certain localized realities (e.g., anger) to more generalized ways of being (e.g., depression). A critical hermeneutics founded on this practice begins by recognizing that the critic has access only to ordinary hermeneutical and rhetorical competencies, but also recognizes that she may engage these competencies in a disciplined manner guided by the posture of not-knowing. Empirical quantification, sociological description, ethnographic study, historical understanding and economic assessment all play a role in the critic's project, even if such methods and techniques are helpful only to the extent that they broaden discourse by revealing the unproductive prejudices of idols or the resources of symbols. Insistence on the superiority of one methodology would betray a rigidity of theoretical understanding that runs counter to the pluralism of critical engagement embodied in the position of not-knowing. Dogmatism substitutes a theoretical idol for the living symbol, dialectical demonstration for hermeneutical-rhetorical engagement, and abstraction for engagement.

### ***Conclusion***

There are myriad paths of productive thinking "after Ricoeur;" undoubtedly, some are not yet apparent to us. One promising avenue is the rejuvenation and extension of Ricoeur's critique of Freud and his related intervention in the Gadamer-Habermas debate. The philosophical stance of "not-knowing," as deployed in a disciplined effort to facilitate a therapeutic conversation, is a theoretically-informed practical engagement that provides a

model of social critique. Bringing Ricoeur's insights to bear on this model, we can advance the questioning spurred by the Gadamer-Habermas debate without pretending to bring closure to the unending conversation of thinking.



## Endnotes

1. As a law professor, I am interested in exploring these themes within the venues of legal practice and legal theory. I note this particular interest by way of explanation rather than apology. I agree with Gadamer's assessment that legal practice has "exemplary significance" for hermeneutical philosophy, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Joel Weinsheimer & Donald Marshall rev. trans.) (Crossroad: New York, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. 1989), 324-341 ("The exemplary significance of legal hermeneutics"), even while recognizing that the self-understanding of lawyers can be improved by attending to hermeneutical philosophy. I plan to articulate a critical legal theory modeled on postmodern psychotherapy as an example of what Ricoeur termed a "critical hermeneutics," in which understanding and explanation are incommensably fused, which is to say that they are joined as a tensive unity. This paper is a propaedeutic for that book project.

2. The "debate" unfolded in a series of publications by Gadamer and Habermas, but it obviously has an effective-history that extends beyond the debate proper, comprised of extensive scholarly commentary in a variety of disciplines. The core texts that comprise the exchange between Gadamer and Habermas are: Gadamer, *Truth and Method*; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (David E. Linge trans. and ed.) (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1970); Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Shierry Weber Nicholson and Jerry A. Stark trans.) (The MIT Press: Cambridge, MA., 1988), 143-86; Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," *Continuum* 8: 77-95 (G.B. Hess and R.E. Palmer trans., 1970); Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Jeremy J. Shapiro trans.) (Beacon Press: Boston, 1971); Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," in Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (Josef Bleicher trans.) (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1980) 181-211.

3. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, at 383.

4. Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, at 172.

5. *Id.* at 180-87.

6. Habermas writes: "We can say that [reason] obeys an emancipatory cognitive interest, which aims at the pursuit of reflection," since "we can methodologically ascertain the knowledge-constitutive interests of the natural and social sciences only once we have entered the dimensions of self-reflection. *It is in accomplishing self-reflection that reason grasps itself as interested.*" Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, at 198, 212.

7. *Id.* at 215.

8. Habermas argued that Freud's clumsy theoretical explanations add nothing to Freud's explication of the techniques utilized in psychoanalytic dialogue. In fact, Freud's reductionist epistemological framework concealed his important insights:

*The language of the theory is narrower than the language in which the technique was described. . . . [W]hat does not appear among ego functions on the metapsychological level is the movement of reflection, which transforms one state into another—which transforms the pathological state of compulsion and self-deception into the state of superseded conflict and reconciliation with excommunicated language. Strangely enough, the structural model denies the origins of its own categories in a process of enlightenment.*

*Id.* at 245. Habermas argues that Freud, misled by the overpowering ideology of positivism, legitimated his psychoanalytic practice with biological/empirical terms that obscured the distinct cognitive interest served by radical self-reflection.

9. Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality," at 191.

**10. Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, at 314:**

It is no accident that the standards of self-reflection are exempted from the singular state of suspension in which those of all other cognitive processes require critical evaluation. They possess theoretical certainty. The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility constitute the only Idea that we possess a priori in the sense of the philosophical tradition.

Habermas solves the problem of identifying a baseline against which a community norms may be judged by locating this touchstone in the very nature of communicative action.

**11. Gadamer explains that he wishes to recapture a pre-Enlightenment sense of “prejudices” as our rooted opening to the world of experience. He explains:**

Heidegger worked out this primacy [of our orientation to the future for recalling the past] in his doctrine of the productivity of the hermeneutical circle. I have given the following formulation to this insight: It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation, for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and the English Enlightenment. It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us.

Gadamer, *The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem*,” at 9.

**12. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Reflections on My Philosophical Journey (Richard E. Palmer, trans.), in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Lewis Edwin Hahn ed.) (Open Court: Chicago, 1997), 3, 32.**

**13. The critique of ideology, Gadamer explained,**

belongs itself, then, to the social process that it criticizes. That is the ineluctable pretension. This is ultimately no less true for psychoanalysis. However often technical-scientific skill may intervene in psychoanalytic therapy, there is always a moment of authentic practice present as well. Nothing is “made” here or produced by construction, not even the life story of the patient. The constructive hypotheses of the therapist have to be accepted by the personal reflection of the patient. This goes far beyond any technical procedure inasmuch as it puts the patient in his entire social and mental constitution to free, spontaneous work on his own healing.

Hans-Georg Gadamer, “What is Practice? The Conditions of Social Reason,” in *Reason in the Age of Science* (Frederick G. Lawrence trans.) (MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 69, 79.

**14. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology” (Jerry Dibble trans.), in *The Hermeneutics Reader* (Kurt Mueller-Vollmer ed.) (Continuum: New York, 1989), 286, 291.**

**15. Ricoeur emphasizes that he has “no plan of annexation, no syncretism” guiding his review of the debate, and he reassures us that his “aim is not to fuse the hermeneutics of tradition and the critique of ideology in a super-system that would encompass both.” Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” (John B. Thompson trans.), in *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II* (Northwestern U. Press: Evanston, 1991), 270-307, at 271, 294. Rather, his**

interrogation proceeds from this observation. Would it not be appropriate to shift the initial locus of the hermeneutical question, to reformulate the question in such

a way that a certain dialectic between the experience of belonging and alienating distanciation becomes the mainspring, the key to the inner life, of hermeneutics?

Id. at 297.

Ricoeur's effort to reformulate the Gadamer-Habermas debate without leveling it with a facile synthesis is a defining feature of his critical hermeneutics. As David Kaplan succinctly describes:

He tends to think in terms of opposites, pairs, and contrasts juxtaposed in such a way that highlights and preserves differences, while resisting the temptation to synthesize a new unity. Instead he claims only to draw a "hermeneutic arc" between opposites, a metaphor that suggests a chastened, mitigated mediation. . . . He respects the plurality of voices and questions of others while honoring the original philosophical impulse to find unity, reason, and clarity in history.

David M. Kaplan, *Ricoeur's Critical Theory* (State U. Press of New York: Albany, 2003), 1.

16. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," at 270.

17. Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (George H. Taylor ed.) (Columbia U. Press: New York, 1986), 237.

18. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," at 307.

19. Paul Ricoeur, "Ethics and Culture: Habermas and Gadamer in Dialogue," (David Pellauer trans.) in *Political and Social Essays* (David Stewart and Joseph Bien eds.) (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1974), 243-70, 257.

20. Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," at 304.

21. Id. at 306.

22. Id.

23. Id. at 301.

24. For an extension of this element of Ricoeur's philosophy to legal theory, see George H. Taylor, "Critical Hermeneutics: The Intertwining of Explanation and Understanding as Exemplified in Legal Analysis," 76 *Chi-Kent L. Rev.* 1101 (2000).

25. In an exchange with Ricoeur on the problem of developing critical standards for interpretation, Gadamer makes clear that the critical attitude of "going behind, unmasking, showing forth hidden desires that are longing for their fulfillment as revealed by the inner tension in our souls" moves beyond intersubjective dialogue, but that the conflict of interpretations is best resolved not by traditional philosophical critique, but rather in a dialogue oriented to finding a common language. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, "The Conflict of Interpretations," in *Phenomenology: Dialogues and Bridges* (Ronald Bruzina & Bruce Wilshire eds. and trans.) (State University of New York Press: Albany, 1982), 299, 303. Gadamer seeks the critical insight championed by Habermas, but he refuses to regard it as a distinct epistemological achievement. The "critique of ideologies, psychoanalysis, and every radical form of critique should be and needs to be reintegrated into this basic process of social life—a way which I call (in a manner I find satisfactory) hermeneutical." Id. at 304. Ricoeur essentially endorsed Gadamer's position. Id. at 311.

26. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* at xxxvii. Gadamer explains the importance of humility fostered by his hermeneutics of belonging:

The hermeneutic consciousness, which must be awakened and kept awake, recognizes that in the age of science philosophy's claim of superiority has something chimerical and unreal about it. But though the will of man is more than ever intensifying its utopian or eschatological consciousness, the hermeneutic consciousness seeks to confront that will with something of the truth of remembrance; with what is still and ever again real.

Id. at xxxviii.

27. Ricoeur agrees with Gadamer that the Gadamer-Habermas debate is difficult because the two contestants are speaking from different places, but he strives to show that each theory implicates the other without abolishing the privileged place of each theory in working out “different regional preferences.” Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology,” at 271, 306. Ricoeur notes that Gadamer falls victim, to a lesser degree, to the problem that beset Heidegger’s attempt to revive hermeneutics: in his effort to deconstruct metaphysics with unrelenting radicality he was never able to return to the forward-looking impulse of philosophy. *Id.* at 295-97. As Robert Piercey summarizes:

Despite his debts to Gadamer, Ricoeur does not simply side with Gadamerian hermeneutics and against the Habermasian critique of ideology. Instead, he argues that Habermas’s concerns can be addressed within a hermeneutic framework, and that philosophical hermeneutics can incorporate within itself a Habermasian impulse towards critique.

Robert Piercey, “Ricoeur’s Account of Tradition and the Gadamer-Habermas Debate,” *Human Studies* 27:259-280, 262 (2004).

28. Ricoeur’s (translated) prose deserves quotation at length.

According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, or as is sometimes said, a kerygma; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion. Psychoanalysis, at least on a first reading, aligns itself with the second understanding of hermeneutics.

From the beginning we must consider this double possibility: this tension, this extreme polarity, is the truest expression of our “modernity.” The situation in which language today finds itself comprises this double possibility, this double solicitation and urgency: on the one hand, purify discourse of its excrescences, liquidate the idols, go from drunkenness to sobriety, realize our state of poverty once and for all; on the other hand, use the most “nihilistic,” destructive, iconoclastic movement so as to *let speak* what once, what each time, was *said*, when meaning appeared anew, when meaning was at its fullest. Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience. In our time we have not yet finished doing away with *idols* and we have barely begun to listen to *symbols*. It may be that this situation, in its apparent distress, is instructive: it may be that extreme iconoclasm belongs to the restoration of meaning.

Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Denis Savage, trans.) (Yale U. Press: New Haven, 1970), 27.

29. *Id.* at 28.

30. *Id.* at 535.

31. Frederick Crews, “The Verdict on Freud,” *Psychological Science* 7: 63, 63 (1996). Examples of recent critiques of Freudian theory include: Frank Cioffi, *Freud and the Question of Pseudoscience* (Open Court: Chicago, 1998); Todd Dufresne, *Killing Freud: Twentieth Century Culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis* (Continuum: London, 2003); Edward Erwin, *Philosophy and Psychotherapy* (Sage Publications: London, 1996); Adolf Grunbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1984); Adolf Grunbaum, *Validation in the Clinical Theory of Psychoanalysis: A Study in the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (International University Press: Madison, Conn., 1993); Malcolm Macmillan, *Freud Evaluated: The Completed Arc* (North-Holland: Amsterdam, 1991); *The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute* (Frederick Crews ed.) (New York Review of Books: New York, 1995); Thomas S. Szasz, *Anti-Freud: Karl Kraus's Criticism of Psychoanalysis* (Syracuse University Press: Syracuse, rev. ed. 1990); *Unauthorized Freud: Doubters Confront a Legend* (Frederick C. Crews ed.) (Viking Press: New York, 1998); Richard Webster, *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science and Psychoanalysis* (Basic Books: New York, 1995); R. Tallis, *Burying Freud*, *Lancet* 347:669 (1996).

32. Francis J. Mootz III, "Psychotherapeutic Practice as a Model for Postmodern Legal Theory," 12 Yale J. of Law & the Human. 299, 349-72 (2000).

33. Alan Parry and Robert E. Doan, *Story Re-Visions: Narrative Therapy in the Postmodern World* (1994), 43: "No one ever fully becomes the author of his/her own story; any such assumptions can only lead back into the illusions of control, individual autonomy, isolated selfhood, and single truth. The person goes forth instead to join with others in the universal human action of multiple authorship."

34. Two scholars contend that the reconstruction of client narratives is a collaborative effort to construct a plausible account of how the patient's narrow version of reality developed through a series of accidental events, misunderstandings, and frozen emotions. . . . The therapist thus tries to get the patient to see that what he takes to be unchangeable reality is really simply his particular and quirky story, and that this understanding has a high price. This "genealogy" will tend to undermine the patient's conviction that his way of seeing things is the way things are and have to be.

Hubert L. Dreyfus & Jerome Wakefield, "From Depth Psychology to Breadth Psychology: A Phenomenological Approach to Psychopathology," in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory* (Stanley B. Messer et. al. eds.) (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1988), 272, 281-82. See also Carlo Stenger, *Between Hermeneutics and Science: An Essay on the Epistemology of Psychoanalysis* (International Universities Press: Madison, Conn., 1991), 87.

35. Kenneth J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Sounding in Social Construction* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1994), 245. See also Kenneth J. Gergen, "If Persons are Texts," in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory: Interpretative Perspectives on Personality, Psychotherapy, and Psychopathology* (Stanley B. Messer et. al. eds.) (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1988) at 28, 43-44.

36. Anderson describes the evolution of her approach to psychotherapy as moving from an effort to "diagnose" the client's "problems" and to intervene with "answers," to an effort to listen closely to her client and engage in a dialogue. She writes:

The more attention I paid to what clients were saying, the more I understand that they knew more than I did or ever would about their lives, and the more I realized how my *knowing* interfered with the telling of their stories and the accessing of their resources. As a consequence, I have elevated the client's voice to center stage; again—much like flipping the usual roles of therapists (knowers) and clients (not-knowers)—therapists learn and clients teach.

A cornerstone of the conversation and the relationship is the concept of *not-knowing*. . . . Not-Knowing is the key feature that distinguishes my collaborative approach from other therapies and that makes a pivotal difference in a therapist's intent, direction and style.

. . . .  
What begins as a therapist's learning about a client begins to arouse the client's curiosity as well, inviting the client to join the therapist in a shared inquiry into the issues at hand. As a therapist begins to learn about and understand a client's story—his or her view, experience, desires—this therapist learning mode, initially an asking-telling-listening sequence, shades into a conversational process characterized by shared inquiry. As shared inquiry develops, fixed, frozen, or monological constructions begin to change.

Harlene Anderson, *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy* (Basic Books, New York, 1997), 133, 113. Anderson concludes that a "therapeutic conversation is no more than a slowly evolving and detailed, concrete, individual life story stimulated by the therapist's position of not-knowing and the therapist's curiosity to learn" what only the client is in a position to tell her. Harlene Anderson & Harold Goolishian, "The Client is the Expert: A Not-Knowing Approach to Therapy," in *Therapy as Social Construction* (Sheila McNamee & Kenneth J. Gergen eds.) (Sage Publications: London, 1992), 25, 38.

37. Anderson at 137.

**38.** For example, two therapists suggest that it is possible to develop methodologies for effective therapy by drawing on understandings of how one fosters dialogue. Alan Parry & Robert E. Doan, *Story Re-Visions* (1994). As Anderson emphasizes, techniques such as asking a certain kind of question cannot be planned in advance because the point of all techniques is to continue the dialogue at hand with a particular client, rather than to rehash a “standard” therapeutic story. In this regard, one of the principal means of creating a dialogical encounter is by asking “conversational questions.” She explains:

A therapist’s task is always to find the question, the tool, through which to learn more about the immediate recounting of experience. This means that what we have just been told, the composition of narrative, is the answer to which a therapist must find the next question; it gives the therapist the next question. That is, questions result from the immediate dialogical event, the developing narrative informs the next question, and the narrative is constituted differently by the questions directed at it. In this local and continuing process of question and answer, of recounting and redescribing, possibilities for understanding, meaning, and change are open and infinite.

Anderson, *Conversation, Language and Possibilities*, at 146.