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HOW THE PAST BECOMES TRADITION: GADAMER AND FOUCAULT ON THE HERMENEUTICS OF HISTORY

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Abstract: Our contemporary situation of intense and multi-dimensional crises motivates us to problematize how the past becomes a tradition. Two thinkers are particularly helpful in grappling with this predicament, namely Gadamer and Foucault. The argument of the present study is that it is possible to establish a fruitful encounter between the works of Gadamer and Foucault on the question of how the past becomes tradition and how best to understand our relationship to the figures of the past in the present. What becomes visible in this encounter between two visions of our relatedness to the past is that tradition is always already contested in the present and that a method of investigation that presupposes the 'fusion of horizons' understates the fundamental nature of such contestation.

Keywords: Gadamer, Foucault, Hermeneutics, Tradition, History

GEÇMİŞ NASIL GELENEK OLUR: GADAMER VE FOUCAULT'DA TARİH YORUMBİLİMİ

Öz: Günümüzde yaşadığımız yoğun ve çok boyutlu krizler, bizleri geçmişin geleneğe dönüşümünü sorunsallaştırmaya teşvik etmektedir. Bu sorunun zorluklarını düşünmemizde faydalı iki düşünür Gadamer ve Foucault'dur. Bu makalenin argümanı, Gadamer ve Foucault'nun çalışmaları arasında etkili bir karşılaşma olduğu ve bu karşılaşmanın geçmişin şimdiki zamandaki figürleri ile ilişkimizi anlamamızda faydalı olduğudur. Bu karşılaşmanın görünür kıldığı şey, geleneğin şimdiki zamanda zaten ve hep çatışmalı olduğu ve 'ufukların birleşimini' varsayan bir araştırma yönteminin bu çatışmanın varlığıyla yeterince yüzleşemediğidir.

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1. Introduction

From wars between countries to rampant polarization within countries, the contemporary global situation is rife with events that motivate us to question how identities are forged and our political belongings are tested. This situation, in turn, motivates us to problematize the ways in which the past becomes tradition and shapes the present as appeals to the past are more frequently made in such crisis situations, both to legitimate and to delegitimate the concerns of the present. The argument of the present study is that it is possible to establish a fruitful encounter between the works of Gadamer and Foucault on the question of how the past becomes tradition and how best to understand our relationship to the figures of the past in the present. This encounter is significant as much for the similarities it reveals as the differences it shows. The discussion is divided into three parts. First, I will offer an account of the relevant salient features of Gadamer's views on the hermeneutics of history and, in particular, our relationship to tradition. Second, I will refer to a particular period in Foucault's work, namely genealogy, to delineate a contrasting picture of the same set of issues to articulate the contention between his account and the one provided in the first part. Finally, I will claim that, despite Gadamer's attempt to de-subjectivize hermeneutics, his views remain within the parameters of what Foucault calls the 'analytic of finitude'.[2] What becomes visible in this encounter between two visions of our relatedness to the past is that tradition is always already contested in the present and that a method of investigation that presupposes the 'fusion of horizons' understates the fundamental nature of such contestation. In other words, two visions of 'effective history' emerge from a critical encounter between Gadamer and Foucault. The former is dialectical, predicated on a complex vision of the merging of the past and the present, and an unfinished project. Even though this conception has the advantage of foregrounding our situatedness in a cultural world as a condition of possibility of historical existence and communication—and not as a deficiency—it is not sufficiently critical of the authority of tradition presupposed in its conception. The latter vision of effective history offers a corrective to this feature by explicitly theorizing about the present and the past in terms of power relations, while acknowledging the interpretive nature of historical experience.

2.1. The fusion of horizons and the continuity of tradition.

For Gadamer, "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" (Gadamer, 2013, p. 290). He attempts to show the intimate connection that exists between language, understanding, interpretation, conversation,

[2] In what follows, to keep the focus of the argument on the two respective views on the hermeneutics of history in these two authors, I will mainly draw on Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and Foucault's "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", and refer to other works only to the extent that they are relevant for my purposes here.

and tradition. In fact, these elements are so intimately related that what we have here is not so much a connection between self-subsisting phenomena as the explication of the basic phenomenon of understanding. He claims that "all understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and yet is at the same time the interpreter's own language" (389). According to Gadamer, this process is akin to conversation to the extent that "conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" (385). Since, for Gadamer, the essence of tradition is to exist linguistically, he is able to argue that "like conversation, interpretation is a … genuine historical life comportment achieved through the medium of language, and we can call it a conversation with respect to the interpretation of texts as well" (389).

Gadamer de-subjectivizes 'conversation' in order to establish its independence of a subject's will or representations: "we fall into conversation, … we become involved in it"; "… the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led" (383). Thus Gadamer claims that "conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it—i.e. that it allows something to 'emerge' which henceforth exists" (383).

For Gadamer, coming to an understanding in conversation is not a matter of 'living' the interlocutor's own subjectivity or animating his/her intentions within ourselves—which he seems to take to be paradigmatic of theories of 'lived experience' (383)—but, rather, it is the experience (*erfahrung*) of meaning that is to be understood as application. He characterizes this as a process that involves the application of the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation (308). Hence interpretation (of texts, of a partner in dialogue) involves the essential tension between the fixed text and the meaning arrived at by applying it to the concrete moment of the interpretation (309). Here Gadamer takes his cue from legal and theological hermeneutics, where the explicit task is precisely the adaptation of the text's meaning—what a certain law means, what the gospel says—to the concrete situation to which the text is speaking: the significant act of understanding does not consist in mere reproduction or resuscitation of an original meaning, but in "[expressing] what is said in a way that seems most appropriate [to the interpreter], considering the real situation of the dialogue, which only [the interpreter] knows since [s/he] alone knows both languages being used …" (308).

Gadamer claims that this is not restricted to legal and theological hermeneutics but is valid of historical hermeneutics in general, applicable to translating texts from a foreign language, imitating them, reading texts aloud correctly, and engaging in dialogue (310). The hermeneutic task common to these diverse endeavors is to establish a common language between the partners that will show the 'subject matter' at hand, in Gadamer's use of this Hegelian expression, while doing justice to both the interpreter's present moment and the unique configuration of the text/other. This common language is in turn possible because we are always situated within an 'event of tradition', which is a prior condition of understanding (309). In this way Gadamer intends to bypass the dichotomy between the objectivity of meaning and the subjectivity of interpreter in formulating his

version of the hermeneutical task. Translation between different languages, interpreting texts, and coming to an understanding in conversation all involve the basic hermeneutical difficulty, namely, alienness and its conquest (387). What takes place in this mediation of otherness is not a reconstruction of how a certain text came to be, nor how another person could have arrived at such and such an opinion, but rather coming to an understanding of the text itself (388). This means that the interpreter's own horizon is inherently involved in the process—"not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces"—and it helps one "truly to make one's own what the text says": this is a fusion of horizons that "takes place in conversation, in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's, but common" (388).

Gadamer claims that linguistic tradition has a priority over all other tradition. In the form of writing, tradition becomes contemporaneous with each present time. This involves a "unique co-existence of past and present, in so far as present consciousness has the possibility of a free access to everything handed down in writing" (390). This is because the 'ideality of the word' raises everything linguistic beyond psychological and temporal particularity and assures the continuity of memory. In this way tradition becomes part of our own world and enters into immediate communication with us (390). However, writing is also self-alienation, to the extent that the texts within which tradition is deposited must be transformed into and reanimated by speech and meaning (393).

This overcoming of linguistic self-alienation constitutes, for Gadamer, the real task of hermeneutics. In this process of recovery, we must avoid both the anachronistic interpretation of the past through uncritical generalization of our own concepts and the naïve attempt to understand the past as it was in-itself, uncontaminated by our present concerns and beliefs. What we strive for in understanding is not a reconstruction of the past; it is rather "… about sharing in what the text shares with us" (391). Hence interpretation is not to be limited essentially by authorial intention or the reception his/her contemporary readers gave to the work: "what is stated in the text must be detached from all contingent factors and grasped in its full ideality, in which alone it has validity. … precisely because it entirely detaches the sense of what is said from the person saying it, the written word makes the understanding reader the arbiter of its claim to truth" (394).

Although this conception seems to relativize meaning and truth completely with respect to what the reader makes of the text, this is not the case for Gadamer. His answer seems to involve the claim that despite the multiplicity of interpretations, they remain interpretations of one and the same text, united with and different from it at the same time by the dynamic of application. The separation between language and its reference is not absolute for Gadamer and he is critical of theories of language—he explicitly mentions the use-theory of meaning—that institute this separation as too concerned with form. Gadamer also suggests that, despite the essentially linguistic character of hermeneutical phenomena and the apparently incommensurable nature of the particular languages in which interpretations are given, understanding is not captivated by

language. This is because "thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself verbally constituted" (402).

For Gadamer then the explication of the structure of understanding reveals the active engagement of the past and the present in the 'act' of interpretation, which takes place in the medium of language. This act is not governed by the willful representations of a subject; it is guided by the imposing claims of the tradition over the interpreter. In fact, precisely because our understanding is inherently finite, it has to renounce the claims to an ahistorical objectivity it cannot support and embrace the fact that it is always already situated in a tradition it cannot master completely. But rather than indicating a deficiency on the part of interpretive understanding, this structural limitation opens up the possibility of history and communication. This dialectical merging of the past and the present in 'historically effected consciousness' is an unfinished event that is always 'moving' in the continuous process of what Gadamer calls effective history (301). This process is also that of the hermeneutical situation.

The fundamental characteristic of being in a situation is that it is not possible to move outside it to acquire objective knowledge of it. The task of hermeneutics then becomes the never completed process of throwing light on the situation in which we find ourselves. This is particularly true, for Gadamer, with respect to our situatedness within a tradition: "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" (302). The concept of 'horizon' is essentially tied to the notion of hermeneutical situation; it designates the inherent limitation of every finite present. The horizon is the range of vision available to a particular vantage point. To have a horizon means that, on the one hand, we are limited to our own perspective, but on the other hand we are not blinded by what is nearby and are able to see beyond it.[3] The task of historical understanding in its relationship with the past is to acquire the right horizon so as not to reduce the otherness of a bygone epoch or that of a historical text to the familiar concepts of its own perspective. This is achieved by transposing ourselves into the horizon characterizing the past we are trying to understand.

Gadamer, however, rejects the notion of independently existing horizons this view seems to imply. We are not supposed to think that the horizon characterizing one's present time is ever closed. Historical situation is never one with closed horizons. Historical movement, for him, consists in the fact that we are never absolutely bound to any one horizon: "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" (304). Hence transposition into historical horizons does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected with our own, but rather it indicates that historical consciousness is embraced by a single historical horizon: "our own past and that other past toward which

[3] See, for example, (Husserl, 1972).

our historical consciousness is directed help shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition" (304).

We have seen above how interpretive understanding is subject to a 'logic' of application. The meaning of the past becomes intelligible only by virtue of being incorporated, assimilated, in short, applied to a concrete present situation. Just like the law is not an inert historical object waiting for its accurate representation, but must rather be applied to the changing circumstances of the present; so does the past become a living tradition by being incorporated into the vicissitudes of a present. This tension between the past that has its own reality to be respected and the necessary structure of application through which it must be mediated is better understood in terms of the notion of horizon. So, on the one hand, we have the prejudices that make up the horizon of the present and it would be to do violence to the demands of tradition if we understood it only in terms of our own concerns, interests, and concepts; but, on the other hand, we cannot help but interpret the tradition for it to retain its living value and for us to have access to it.[4] Gadamer claims to resolve this dialectical tension by claiming that "there is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired … understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (306). This is not so much a resolution of the tension as rendering it as the positive ground of the process of historical understanding. Gadamer acknowledges that there is a difference between the past and the present that comprises the different set of opinions, beliefs, and values characteristic of each. But he also claims that these differences are *always already* mediated by the finitude of understanding, which finds itself always situated within a tradition. As such, the event of tradition serves as the ground of historical understanding, which, in a dialectical reciprocity, carries out the process of fusion that combines the old and the new into something of living value through its interpretations.[5]

Gadamer's claims about what seems to amount to a paradoxical immediate mediation of the past and the present can be seen as ultimately deriving from his understanding of the classics. For Gadamer the classical is a truly historical category, for it is more than a concept of a period or of a historical style, while not becoming a concept of a suprahistorical value. It is not a quality we ascribe to a particular phenomenon but to a mode of being historical: "the historical process of preservation (Bewahrung) that, through constantly proving itself (Bewärung), allows something true (ein Wahres) to come into being" (287). Hence the classical becomes more than a descriptive category, 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 through the recognition that it carries something of enduring significance that cannot be lost, "a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present (288). Gadamer again affirms that the relationship to the classical is not one of passive reproduction or reconstruction of the world to which it belongs. Rather, when we interpret a classical work, we retain the

[4] On this point see (Esenyel, 2020).
[5] See (Fakioğlu Bağcı, 2022).

consciousness that we too belong to the world from which it speaks to us, and correlatively the work belongs to our world (290).

Thus, for Gadamer, the temporal distance that separates the present and the past is seen no longer as a gap that limits understanding and has to be overcome; it becomes the productive condition enabling understanding, since it is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition. This continuity also allows Gadamer to retrieve a notion of authority that is proper to tradition and has a legitimate binding force over any concrete situation.[6] We have seen how the models of the classical and the objects of legal and theological hermeneutics suggest that in the dialectical interplay of present prejudices as conditions of understanding and the tradition that is the object of this understanding, tradition itself becomes the condition of this process by guiding understanding. Gadamer claims that this authority is not to be seen as blind obedience, but rather as doing a service. The legitimacy of this authority derives from the fact that in acknowledging authority one believes that "what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true" (280). Tradition thus also becomes the ground of validity of our prejudices. Acknowledging the indispensability of tradition contrasts, for Gadamer, with the modern Enlightenment that is abstract and revolutionary.

2.2. The dispersion of events and the discontinuity of history.

Although sharing some of Gadamer's complaints against the objectifying and naturalizing approach to social phenomena, it is fair to say that Foucault subscribes, at least within the parameters of his work I am using in this study, to opposite values:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of oblivion; its task is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. … On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents … that gave birth to these things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being lies not at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault, 1998a)

Thus genealogy under the aspect of *Herkunft* as search for descent is not only not a search for foundations, but it is also supposed to vaccinate one against thinking that the heritage of the past is an acquisition that grows and solidifies. In fact, a genealogical investigation 'uncovers' the heterogeneous elements making up the proffered unity of tradition and thereby threatens the unity of the inheritor. Moreover, a genealogical approach to history moves outside the element of meaning and communication to reestablish the play of dominations characterizing the emergence (*Entstehung*) of events and situate them as "the current episodes in a series of subjugations" (376).

[6] On this point, see (Aydın, 2020).

Hence genealogy as the analysis of emergence delineates the struggle of the forces that are at play in the 'production' of events. In this struggle the adversaries do not belong to a common space that could provide a mediation between them. The differential analysis of forces brings to view how differentiation of values arises and how the latter are engraved in procedures of legitimation: "humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination" (378). Underlying this conception are two different views of interpretation. In fact, Foucault considers this process as a series of interpretations. But here interpretation is not to be understood as the exposure of the hidden meaning lying dormant in some origin; rather, "… interpretation is a violent … appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules" (378).

Genealogy thus conceived as the investigation of descent and emergence is what Foucault terms, borrowing Nietzsche's notion, an effective history (*wirkliche historie*).[7] Effective history opposes the introduction of a suprahistorical perspective to establish a finality in the development of history so as to reconcile all the displacements of the past and establish the sovereignty of the interpreter (as conscious subject) over a past so constituted. In fact, history becomes effective for Foucault to the extent that it introduces discontinuity into our very being. It disrupts putative traditional continuities and thereby excludes any concern for recognition or rediscovery (and in particular the rediscovery of the self through assimilation of the otherness of the past): "'effective' history differs from the history of the historians in being without constants. Nothing in man … is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (380). Moreover, effective history differs from traditional history in that it emphasizes the most singular characteristics of an event (conceived as the reversal of a relationship of forces) rather than dissolving it into an ideal continuity. Events manifest a fundamental arbitrariness that cannot be pinned down by reducing them to an intention or purpose and that reveals "our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (381). And finally, effective history affirms its perspectival character without effacing its own values in the name of a disinterested objectivity.

Genealogy so conceived is strictly anti-Platonic. It opposes an understanding of history in terms of reminiscence and recognition, it does not view history as the continuous bearer of tradition, and it does not consider history as the possible domain of objective knowledge. Effective history is a counter-memory to the extent that it severs history's connections with memory as its model and foundation: "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation" (386).[8]

2.3. Tradition as contest and the place of the human

[7] The main development of Nietzsche's conception of genealogy is in (Nietzsche, 1994).
[8] For more on Foucault's notion of 'counter-memory', see (Foucault, 1980).

The accounts provided in (2.1) and (2.2) help articulate the basic differences between Gadamer's hermeneutics and Foucault's genealogy. For Gadamer the task of hermeneutics is the overcoming of the self-alienation that occurs when the meaningful expressions of culture are forgotten in the annals of history. In recovering these sediments of no longer conscious expressions, hermeneutics revives the past to its validity and enriches our horizons by establishing the active presence of the past in the present. His project does not consist in the introduction of a teleology or the positing of an absolute knowledge; however, by virtue of his claim that any finite present is always already situated in history that is at once separated from and participant in that very present, he claims to have established that the dialectical interplay of the old and the new takes place within the single horizon of historically affected consciousness. Hence, he claims that historical understanding as the fusion of horizons is possible. Foucault, however, does not address his genealogy to the domain of meaning and communication; the task of genealogy is to bring out the contingent play of forces and the heterogeneous events that take on the appearance of a stable and continuous tradition. If Gadamer is appealing to the continuity of human memory in order to foreground the sources of authority that lie outside the domain of rational insight and argumentation, namely, within the depths of tradition, and thereby produce new forms of legitimate knowledge; Foucault invokes a counter-memory in order to show the '*pudenda origo*' of human institutions,[9] what is covered-up by all attempts at legitimation, and the not so legitimate uses to which they are put.

It is not stretching it too far to say that for Gadamer there is only one event, namely the mysterious event of understanding, for which he sets out to establish the conditions of possibility. This is an incomplete and unfinished event, not directed by human consciousness, but what guides human consciousness along in its movement. The dialectical structure of question and answer, and the broader form of conversation, carries along those who openly participate in it in the gradual unfolding of what Gadamer calls interchangeably as 'being', 'subject matter', 'world-view'. This process amounts to a cultivation possibly culminating in the manifestation of a sort of practical wisdom. Foucault's world, however, is a "profusion of entangled events" (381). These events do not bear witness to the unfolding of a positive world-view with a potentially infinite horizon, but rather they manifest the chance occurrences that affect the minute interplay of power relations.

Despite Gadamer's rich analyses of the hermeneutical situation and his attempts to save the problematic of understanding from the private domain of empirical psychology or transcendental subjectivity, his version of hermeneutics remains within the bounds of what Foucault calls the analytic of finitude.[10]An analytic strives to establish on what grounds representations are possible and to what extent they are legitimate. Its basis, since Kant, is the finitude of human existence. Human beings are taken to be limited by

[9] For the connection between the genealogical project and 'shameful origins', see (Foucault, 1998b, 24-37) and (Foucault, 1998a), "My Body, This Paper, This Fire".

[10] The following will trace some of the claims Foucault makes in the section called "Man and his doubles" in (Foucault, 2001), in particular, pp. 312-340.

their organic bodies, the processes of which elude fully conscious reflection, by a language they use but the totality of which eludes their knowledge, and by a history within which they are situated but which remains inscrutable.[11] The analytic then attempts to show how these factual limitations imposed from the outside are actually the conditions of possibility of the representation and knowledge of any facts whatsoever. Hence the possibility of knowledge is claimed to be grounded by the very finitude that seems to limit human beings. Foucault claims that there are a limited number of strategies that carry out this attempt. These strategies are inherently paradoxical because they must affirm finitude both as limitation and as condition of possibility, while maintaining some difference between the two characterizations. Thus we get the assertions that human beings are both contingent empirical objects in the world *and* the transcendental conditions of possibility for there to be a world, that they are surrounded by elements that they cannot master with their thought alone *and* the potential sources of all intelligibility, and that they are situated within a history the beginnings of which elude them constantly *and* sources of that very history.

Foucault's discussion of Husserl and Heidegger in this context is particularly illuminating with regard to Gadamer.[12] Husserl recognizes that explicit consciousness of an object presupposes a background of practices and relations to other objects, which he calls 'horizon'. For human experience to become fully intelligible, this implicit background must be made intelligible. Husserl claims that this is possible because the unthought, implicit horizon turns out to be a sedimented set of beliefs and facts that could be reawakened through reflection. He argues for the ambiguous task of representing the horizon, whose very implicitness and unrepresentability make representation possible. Phenomenology thus becomes an infinite process of making explicit the set of implicit beliefs that can in turn be objectified only on the basis of further implicit beliefs, etc. This grants the phenomenologist the power to occupy at once the inside and the outside of her cultural field.

Heidegger, for his part, attempts to show that the origin of temporality is the structure of authentic human being (*Dasein*) (Heidegger, 1962). Human beings always already have a history precisely because their practices organize events historically. Their very ability to understand themselves and the world 'indicates' the three-fold structure of temporality that opens up the field of history. Nevertheless, they find themselves within a history that is already there and the beginnings of which are completely obscure for them. By arguing that *Dasein* is the clearing which makes access to all other entities possible and by making the temporalizing practices of human beings the origin of history, Heidegger seems finally to have accomplished the contemporaneity of the origin of history; but the origin retreats again because human beings' primordial temporality is not accessible to them. The origin retreats also when Heidegger claims that history is made possible by the original questioning of the pre-Socratic philosophers. However,

[11] For the different interpretations of the analytic of finitude in Foucault, see (Flynn, 2005; Gutting, 1989; Oksala, 2005; Tiisala, 2015).

[12] For Gadamer's situatedness within the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions, see (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

this attempt to give some cultural content to the origin of history is also doomed to failure since the origin cannot be an empirical event, for any such identification gives rise to a further retreating of the origin. Hence all attempts to ground the possibility of history in the structure of human beings fail, because we are not able to get back to the beginnings of history through empirical enquiry or reflection; nonetheless this limitation is said to be the condition of possibility of history. The origin becomes the mystery that either retreats further into the past or is pushed into the distant future.

What is striking in Gadamer's working out the conditions of finite human understanding is precisely the way in which he affirms apparently contradictory positions and resolves their very incompatibility through making this the positive condition of possibility of understanding. As we have seen above, he claims that the meaning of a text is nothing but the interpretations we give it, but at the same time it is the one and same meaning that is articulated through these interpretations; it is the text itself that speaks to us in our interpretations. He also claims that hermeneutical interpretation is one that respects the alterity of the text without reducing it to the already familiar; but at the same time, he claims that all interpretation is an application that arises from a present context of interests and prejudices. In this way he holds on to a Platonism of sorts with respect to meaning and a complete denial of Platonism by arguing against any ahistorical objectification of meaning. Rather than establishing an impossible tension, this is the very condition of understanding precisely because we are always already in history and the past is always already active in the present. Moreover, he claims that all interpretation necessarily involves prejudices that must remain uncritical and that have their sole justification in the kind of authority tradition has over us; but at the same time, he argues that these prejudices do not issue in blind obedience since we are able to recognize that they have their basis in a tradition that is ours. Thus, although he is critical of the prejudice of the Enlightenment against prejudices, his appeal to legitimate prejudices resembles the Enlightenment belief that only that which we can give to ourselves is valid; this is so because tradition for him is essentially a handing down, and by recognizing our active participation in the tradition we save our prejudices from the stigma of superstition. Finally, his appeal to the classical as the model for historical intelligibility—because of the immediate and enduring significance the latter manifests—claims for it, on the one hand, the status of something more than a merely descriptive designation for a historical period or style and, on the other hand, refrains from making it a suprahistorical category. This gives rise to the paradoxical claim we mentioned in the exposition above that the classics manifest a kind of timeless present contemporaneous with every present *and* an identification with either the Greek antiquity or classical humanism.

It would be premature to claim that the way in which Gadamer's hermeneutics reproduces some of the strategies Foucault outlines in connection with the analytic of finitude condemns him to a fatal error. Foucault's own strategy is to show how the various moves in this analytic eventually turn into something like bad research programs (because of their endless oscillations). Nonetheless there is a risk in Gadamer's notion of conversation as an infinite process in which the unfinished event of

understanding unfolds; the risk is that, as Foucault says of the analytic of finitude in general, "it indicates the monotony of a journey which, though it probably has no end, is nevertheless perhaps not without hope" (Foucault, 2001, 314).

But insofar as the constitution of tradition is concerned Foucault is able to show how the appeal to tradition can serve to iron over the antagonisms that are present in the social field. By telling us a coherent story of the beginnings, vicissitudes, and ends of a people ('we come from a, we have been through b, and we are on our way to c'), the discourse of tradition occludes the ways in which this 'we' is split. This division is integrated not merely through acts of dialogue but also through acts of violence, both calm and raucous, and the way in which tradition presents its subject/object, 'we', as self-evident veils these acts, as well as the remainders that resist them. Foucauldian genealogy teaches us that the constitution of a community is rarely a communion of meaning.

3. Conclusion

At first sight the works of Gadamer and Foucault with respect to history seem to have too little in common to consider even a critical comparison or justify a reading of the one through the lenses of the other.[13] Foucault's polemical jabs at hermeneutics under the rubric of commentary are well known. Hermeneutics is charged with the futile passion of running after hidden meanings so as to express them, and thereby bring them once again to the domain of consciousness. For the most part, especially in his earlier studies, Foucault tends to bracket the issue of meaning altogether and instead articulates the set of anonymous rules that govern the production of discourses; he emphasizes the 'eventful' discontinuities that rend the fabric of history over the constants that give the latter the stability of a heritage; and finally, he argues for the interstitial existence of power that accompanies our practices making up the shifting bedrock of history. Gadamer, for his part, privileges what remains constant beneath the surface play of historical change. He brings to light the conditions of historical understanding to articulate a dialectical notion of experience in which the tensions between the old and the new, the same and the other, are sublated into the mysterious event of understanding. Finally, he argues for the revival of a hermeneutical approach to the human sciences, which, once liberated from the artificial demands of the scientific method and restored to a mode of investigation that has the form of conversation, will aid the essential task of self-knowledge through the knowledge of tradition.

At the same time, these two visions of how the past becomes tradition share some common elements. Both are against the notion of subjectivity that has been the dominant feature of modern philosophy under the various forms of the cogito; both share the view that may be broadly referred to as 'interpretation all the way down,' against truth as correspondence of propositions to an independently existing reality; and finally, both

[13] So much so that, as one study initially suggests, we may be comparing apples and oranges passing in the night. See (Wickham, 2000).

are unequivocal in their estimation of history. Gadamer claims that 'in fact, history does not belong to us; we belong to it"; Foucault seems to express a similar sentiment when he says: "since it is the mode of being of all given us in experience, History has become the unavoidable element in our thought" (Foucault, 2001, 219). These overlapping claims and estimations, however, should not overshadow the significant divergence to the effect that, from a genealogical perspective, Gadamerian hermeneutics remains within the analytic of finitude despite itself. This is due in no small part to the fact that the central notion of tradition, which inherently relies on the always presupposed and already (implicitly) achieved fusion of horizons, understates the extent to which the past as much as the present is riven with conflict.

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