

8 Gadamer and Philosophy of History

*A Conversation Waiting to Begin*¹

HERMAN PAUL

The year that saw the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* also witnessed the appearance of *History and Theory*, a journal whose subtitle, *Studies in the Philosophy of History*, suggested a scope of interest closely related to issues explored in the second part of Gadamer's book. Indeed, the first issue explained that *History and Theory* was intended as a platform for exchange on 'theories of history', 'historiography', 'method of history', and 'related disciplines'. The journal solicited articles on 'historians' and 'historical philosophers' as well as on matters of causality, explanation, interpretation, objectivity, and what it described as the 'social and cultural implications of the historian's method'.² As any reader of *Wahrheit und Methode* knows, these were exactly the sort of issues Gadamer addressed in the second part of his book. Given this parallel, it seems not unreasonable to expect a lively interest for *Wahrheit und Methode* in *History and Theory*, the world's leading journal in philosophy of history.

Nonetheless, neither the German original nor any of the two English translations that have appeared since 1960 were ever reviewed in its pages.³ If Gadamer was mentioned, during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it was mostly in passing, in one breath with others, and quite superfluously.⁴ While his name began to circulate more frequently during the 1990s, Gadamer did not, by far, receive as much attention as Hayden White, William Dray, Michael Foucault, Arthur Danto, or Louis Mink. A real engagement with *Wahrheit und Methode* failed to take place.

This lack of interest in Gadamer's work is symptomatic for the entire field of philosophy of history, at least in the English-speaking world. As I explain in the first three sections of this paper, virtually nobody working in the field that adopted *History and Theory* as its main journal paid more than cursory attention to Gadamerian hermeneutics.⁵ I suggest a few reasons why this was, and often still is, the case. After this historical survey, I continue with two suggestions as to how Gadamer might be brought into conversation with philosophy of history as practiced in the pages of *History and Theory*. One is to apply Gadamer's notion

of tradition to how historians look back upon their ‘founding fathers’; the other is to recognize that historians are always engaged in what Gadamer calls a dialogue between past and present – a dialogue that requires the active practicing of such Gadamerian virtues as openness and honesty.

1

Why did *History and Theory* never review *Wahrheit und Methode*? Although such contingencies can have rather trivial causes – the book was lost in the mail, the solicited reviewer got ill, or caught up in other obligations – a content analysis of the forty volumes published between 1960 and 2000 suggests a couple of more substantive reasons. One only needs to browse through the four articles that made up volume 1, number 1, to notice that, despite initial appearances, the journal’s philosophical agenda was markedly different from Gadamer’s. In this first issue, one author compared ‘the canons of explanation and logical justification used by the sciences and the humanities’, another evaluated Arnold Toynbee’s explanatory laws, a third inquired ‘how far the historical explanation of occurrences in international politics may proceed without explicit reference to theoretical laws and concepts’, whereas a fourth author examined some of the key concepts in Gibbon’s explanation of the decline of the Roman Empire.⁶ Clearly these authors had a shared interest in matters of explanation.

For a great majority of the scholars contributing to *History and Theory* during the 1960s and early 1970s, much the same was true. The most frequently-posed and hotly-debated question was what counted as a valid historical explanation. Inspired by Carl G. Hempel’s classic paper, ‘The Function of General Laws in History’,⁷ a host of authors crossed swords over whether or to what extent historical explanation required general laws of the type ‘whenever A, then B’. Although the debate surrounding this so-called covering law model was well underway when, in 1960, *History and Theory* appeared, the journal was so successful in attracting further reflections on the theme that philosophy of history as practiced in its pages became almost synonymous to what one author wearily described as ‘the Popper/Hempel/Dray/Donagan/Mandelbaum/Gallie, etc., etc., controversy’.⁸ In later years, editor Richard T. Vann also observed that up until the early 1970s, ‘*History and Theory* continued to devote most of its philosophical articles to further refinements of the controversy about explanation, causation and covering laws’.⁹

As such, this focus on matters of explanation did not preclude interaction with *Wahrheit und Methode*. Since Gadamer's notion of understanding (*verstehen*) was clearly envisioned as an alternative to explanation (*erklären*), it could well serve the purpose of those critics skeptical about Hempel's methodological monism. Indeed, in the first issue, Isaiah Berlin somewhat approached a Gadamerian position when he defined historical understanding as *verstehen*. Although Berlin, in contrast to the German philosopher, believed that historians should aim, and are in principle able, to reconstruct the words and deeds of such individuals within the contexts of their own time and place, he agreed with *Wahrheit und Methode* that interpretation is a matter of *phronesis*, more than of *techne* or *episteme*. Significant, though, was that he attributed this insight, not to Gadamer, but to Wilhelm Dilthey, among others.¹⁰

This, again, reflects a broader pattern. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Dilthey was frequently mentioned, often not alone, but with other so-called 'historical idealists', such as Benedetto Croce and Robin G. Collingwood.¹¹ Whenever authors writing in *History and Theory* considered the claim 'that historical study aims at a kind of understanding quite different from that which is characteristic of the natural sciences', they attributed this idea to 'Dilthey, Weber, Collingwood, and others'.¹² In so far as Gadamer in the 1960s made it into *History and Theory*, it was as a philosopher carrying on this Diltheyan tradition. No matter how strongly *Wahrheit und Methode* criticized Dilthey's version of *verstehen* for the aporias in which it had become entangled¹³, Gadamer was seen as a sort of Dilthey *redivivus*.¹⁴

If one wonders why Gadamer was not studied more carefully, it seems mostly due to the fact that the 'historical idealism' attributed to him did not fit the agenda *History and Theory* sought to pursue.¹⁵ As Richard Vann concludes from a pile of rejection letters archived in the editorial office, the journal actively tried 'to establish some boundaries around what, at least for the journal, would count as "philosophy of history"'. This was philosophy of history in the analytical sense: focused on scholarly knowledge, eager to develop normative accounts of scientific reasoning, and proceeding from analytical rather than continental philosophy. Work outside this scope rarely made it into *History and Theory*. Indeed, papers engaging in what was condescendingly called 'speculative' philosophy of history were rejected 'on the grounds that no reader or reviewer could be found who could evaluate their claims. That was a polite way of saying that these were not falsifiable.'¹⁶

Against this background, it comes as no surprise that philosopher

Moltke S. Gram, in his 1974 review of Gadamer's conference volume, *Truth and Historicity*, showed little affinity with Gadamerian hermeneutics. Not unlike Eric Donald Hirsch, the American literary critic whose attack on Gadamer he approvingly cited, Gram protested against the 'infinite regress' of interpretation that *Wahrheit und Methode* seemed to permit and, more generally, against Gadamer's suggestion that truth could be historical, that is, subject to change, 'in any hermeneutically significant sense'.¹⁷ Indeed, the Heidelberg philosopher did not (yet) fit philosophy of history as practiced in *History and Theory*.¹⁸

2

The 1970s, however, saw a drastic change in topics and approaches. Some thirty years after Hempel's seminal paper, the debate over covering laws came to an end – not because any of Hempel's ideas had been proven wrong, but because other questions began to draw attention.¹⁹ The most important of these was the status of the historian's narrative. From the late 1960s onwards, there had been authors arguing that historians typically explain the past, not by invoking causal laws, but by telling stories, that is, by situating persons, events, and occurrences in narratives showing 'how they came to be'.²⁰ But if historians write narratives, then how do their narratives relate to those of novelists and other story-tellers? To what extent can they be said to employ the same narrative techniques or rhetorical devices? Literary scholars were among the first to explore these issues. But a young generation of philosophers of history quickly followed, eager to approach historical studies from another angle than that of explanatory methodology.

The new philosophy of history was probably best epitomized by Hayden White, an existentialist-inspired historian whose book, *Metahistory* (1973), was a Nietzschean sort of diatribe against scientification of historical studies, culminating in a passionate plea for the legitimacy of 'pre-professional' modes of history writing, such as embodied by Jules Michelet or Alexis de Tocqueville. White tried to justify this preference with an eclectic blend of literary theories. Briefly summarized, his argument was that any kind of historical writing presupposes a sense of realism. Such realisms, in turn, depend on social norms and literary conventions that can only be justified on moral and aesthetic grounds. Accordingly, the realism of Leopold von Ranke, inspired by the nineteenth-century realistic novel, could be said to be as plausible as the realism of Jacob Burckhardt, which had closer affinities with the

modernist anti-novel. In White's hands, then, literary theory became a means for emphasizing the moral dimensions of historical studies and for advocating the legitimacy of a more presentist form of historical writing.²¹

In response to all this, *History and Theory* decided that the days of the covering law debate were over. It issued an 'editorial moratorium', declaring that the subject of causal explanation was 'exhausted except as a first-year seminar exercise for graduate students'.²² This did not imply that the editors openly embraced the turn inaugurated in *Meta-history*. Neither the editorial board nor 'any conceivable *History and Theory* editorial referees' developed much of a taste for submissions so different from the careful, argumentative pieces in which analytical philosophers used to communicate.²³ The journal nonetheless solicited several pieces from White, including one of the first American essays on Michel Foucault.²⁴

Indeed, unlike an earlier generation of American philosophers of history, White was thoroughly at home in twentieth-century European thought. He was strongly influenced by Max Weber and Benedetto Croce, had published on such figures as Robin G. Collingwood, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Roland Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Lucien Goldmann, and frequently dazzled his audiences with references to René Girard, Jacques Lacan, or Jacques Derrida. Moreover, unlike the covering law theorists, White was interested, not in academic historical knowledge *per se*, but in how citizens could live a responsible life in a world that, after the so-called death of god, can only turn to history for moral reflection. Does this not suggest that, in circles around *History and Theory*, White was an obvious person to engage with *Wahrheit und Methode*?

In reality, nothing remotely resembling an encounter with Gadamerian hermeneutics took place. For one thing, White was an outspoken anti-traditionalist, whose existentialist affinities led him to contrast individual freedom with collective enslavement and liberty of choice with conventions and traditions. Also, not unlike the campus radicals of 1968, with whom he sympathized, White intended his work to contribute to liberation from what he called 'bourgeois' modes of realism. Most importantly, his message was a thoroughly constructivist one. On White's view, historians are free to adopt alternative styles of realism, that is, to challenge or even to change the conventions of their discipline, because any realism and, by implication, any historical interpretation is a construct, an invention, or a fiction.²⁵ White did not

conceive of interpretation in terms of 'fusions of horizons', but rather as impositions of meaning upon a sublime, that is, meaningless past.²⁶ Unsurprisingly, then, White seldom referred to Gadamer, lumping him together with Hegel and Dilthey on those rare occasions he did mention his name.²⁷

To be sure, White's constructivism did not remain unchallenged. It gave new impetus to an age-old debate between so-called realists and anti-realists, that is, between philosophers of history emphasizing the constructive nature of historical knowledge and those trying to anchor that knowledge as securely as possible in the past or in the historian's source-material. In *History and Theory*, philosopher David Carr was among the most resolute in challenging White's work, arguing that not only historical knowledge takes the form of a narrative, but that human life is narratively structured, too.²⁸ Others put forward that narratives are best seen as interpretative proposals, based on research and open to scholarly debate. Indeed, if the 1980s and early 1990s witnessed one controversy, it was a debate between what William Dray called 'realist' and 'anti-realist' narrativists, that is, between constructivists such as White and opponents who sometimes tended heavily towards opposite extremes.²⁹ Outside the pages of *History and Theory*, White's work even invoked unadulterated positivist responses, especially from historians who perceived their 'craft', that is, their professional self-image, threatened by Whitean constructivism.³⁰ The net result of all this was a reinforcement of one of the very dichotomies that Gadamer's hermeneutics sought to overcome, namely, the dichotomy between subject and object, reader and text, or historian and source material. Instead of seeing the two as involved in a dialogical relationship, a majority of scholars writing in *History and Theory* portrayed the subject either as supreme over the object (in White's case) or as wholly dependent on it. Again, Gadamer and hermeneutics were strikingly absent.

3

Of course, in the 1980s and 1990s, *History and Theory* also published different types of work, for instance on those thinkers with whom Gadamer was previously lumped together. A handful of examples may suffice to show that this, on the one hand, resulted in more frequent references to *Wahrheit und Methode* but, on the other, hardly contributed to a genuine appreciation of Gadamer's work. Take Collingwood, the British philosopher who had previously been portrayed as an idealist

in a Diltheyan-Crocean tradition, but in the 1980s increasingly became extracted from that artificial context and appreciated as a theorist in his own right. Although this happened primarily in Great Britain, where The Collingwood and British Idealism Centre (1994) was founded at the University of Wales, *History and Theory* also devoted increased attention to the British philosopher, even if the authors involved were not seldom European scholars.

For these authors, Gadamer often played either of two roles. In so far as Gadamerian hermeneutics offered an anti-scientific account of historical interpretation, focused on what Collingwood called the delicate art of historical judgment, the German philosopher could be portrayed as an ally of his British colleague.³¹ Like Collingwood, whose ‘logic of question and answer’ played a vital role in the second part of *Wahrheit und Methode*, Gadamer seemed to offer intellectual ammunition for those who wanted to resist a scientification of historical studies without succumbing to Whitean constructivism.³² At the same time, Gadamer’s critique of Collingwood – concentrated on his conviction that historical interpretation involves a reconstruction of the questions an author had tried to answer – evoked defenses of Collingwood that blamed Gadamer for misinterpreting the logic of question and answer.³³

This criticism reflected a more profound concern, which may help explain why Gadamer did not become a major conversation partner in *History and Theory*, or more generally for those philosophers of history who confine their task to reflection on what historians do when they study the past. As Gordon Graham correctly observed, Gadamer’s ‘historical consciousness’ involves much more than ‘historical understanding in the limited sense’ of painfully reconstructing what people in former ages thought, said, or did.³⁴ Whereas historians typically aim for reconstruction of the past – well-aware that Ranke’s *wie es eigentlich gewesen* is unfeasible, but nonetheless committed to giving an as accurate as possible account of how Alexander the Great financed his campaigns, why *salonnières* played such crucial roles in seventeenth-century Paris, or what Thomas Hobbes meant to say in the *Leviathan* – Gadamer conceives of historical interpretation as focused on a *Sache* that transcends the particularities of time and place. Gadamer is not interested in author’s intentions or historical states of affairs; he rather studies a classical text in the hope of discerning a ‘voice that speaks to us from the past’ – a voice that questions us, in the here and now, and draws us ‘into a communion in which we do not remain what we were’.³⁵ Although the historical discipline contains a rather broad variety of

interpretative practices – everyone nowadays does what is right in his own eyes, says Peter Novick, echoing the Book of Judges³⁶ – historians, nonetheless, almost without exception are committed to an ideal of reconstruction that Gadamer, judging by his criticism of Collingwood, refuses to accept as intellectually appropriate.³⁷

To be sure, *History and Theory* did provide a platform to such philosophers of history as Dominick LaCapra, who voiced deep concerns about the reconstructionist agenda of intellectual historians. In response to an influential *History and Theory* article in which Cambridge historian Quentin Skinner championed such a reconstructionism in the history of ideas³⁸, LaCapra approvingly cited Gadamer's rejection of any interpretative theory that reduces the meaning of text to its author's intentions. He read *Wahrheit und Methode* as offering 'an extensive criticism of the attempt to center interpretation on the *mens auctoris*'.³⁹ Along opposite lines, more familiar to historians, Frederick Olafson took issue with such a deliberate neglect of what he called 'original meaning' and argued for the legitimacy of reconstructing, say, what different sorts of meaning Hobbes's *Leviathan* had for its author, its first, mid-seventeenth-century British audience, and later generations of readers.⁴⁰ If Olafson displayed little affinity with Gadamer, more in the spirit of *Wahrheit und Methode* was Martyn Thompson's contribution, conceived from the idea that reconstructionists such as Skinner and 'recent German theorists of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*' need one another to prevent one-sidedness.⁴¹

Once again, however, what seemed like a debate in which Gadamer could play a constructive role became, in *History and Theory* at least, a conversation almost completely devoid of hermeneutical input.⁴² Although the merits and demerits of reconstructionism in intellectual history – better known as 'intentionalism' – remained a topic of debate during much of the 1980s and 1990s, Gadamer often received little more than a footnote or two.⁴³ For one thing, Skinner's Cambridge school of intellectual history, rather than Gadamer or Collingwood, became the epicenter of the debate. Even though Skinner and Gadamer were sometimes played off against each other, the debate around Skinner predominantly took place in Great Britain and was conducted more in journals of political history than in *History and Theory*.⁴⁴ Moreover, whereas in earlier decades the journal had kept philosophical hermeneutics at a distance, something of a reverse took place in the 1980s. Those few American philosophers of history who were drawn to Gadamer preferred to present their work at conferences or in journals

devoted to phenomenology, critical theory, and continental philosophy – fields in which Gadamer was a more familiar name than in the historical discipline.⁴⁵

The exception that proves the rule, finally, was a 1991 article by C. Behan McCullagh. It was an exception in so far as the Australian author engaged more than in passing with *Wahrheit und Methode*. Simultaneously, it proved the rule by judging this book on the contribution it made to McCullagh's own ideal of 'establishing an historically correct basis interpretation of an old text'. Attributing to Gadamer the view that historians are never in a position 'to say that an interpretation of a text correctly states what it meant in the past', McCullagh seemed to overlook that *Wahrheit und Methode* is, among other things, an extended polemic against the sort of assumptions that allow demarcation between 'correct' and 'incorrect' historical interpretations. Moreover, by contrasting Gadamer's supposed 'skepticism' to his own view that historical interpretations can be objective, 'both in the sense of being rationally defensible and in the sense of being correct', McCullagh unwittingly reinforced the very subject-object dichotomy that Gadamer tries to overcome in his notion of 'belonging' (*Zugehörigkeit*).⁴⁶

In sum, then, Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* in philosophy of history, as perceived through the prism of *History and Theory*, is a story of missed encounters.⁴⁷ Although *Wahrheit und Methode* was occasionally mentioned, few authors engaged in depth with the hermeneutics it offered. Indeed, few philosophers of history recognized that such an hermeneutics might help them overcome the tenacious assumptions that turned so many a debate in *History and Theory* – on Hempel, White, Collingwood, and Skinner – into a confrontation between 'objectivism' and 'relativism'.⁴⁸ If the hegemony of this subject-object dichotomy offers part of an explanation for Gadamer's conspicuous absence in *History and Theory*, another crucial factor was the reconstructionist agenda that dominated, and still dominates, the historical profession. Must we conclude, then, that the twain shall never meet? Or does *History and Theory*, in its most recent volumes, suggest some opportunities for a conversation between Gadamer and philosophy of history?

4

If one obstacle for such a conversation is the historians' aim to reconstruct the past, an appropriate place to start might be the question whether there are any exceptions to this rule. Interestingly, such an

exception not only exists, but is also practiced on such a wide scale that few historians can claim to be unfamiliar with it. The history of their own discipline – the history of historical writing, sometimes known as historiography – is an area of study in which the aim of reconstruction is often accompanied or even surpassed by other intellectual aims. In a 1990 *History and Theory* article, Irmeline Veit-Brause explained that studies produced in this area often (consciously or not) serve the goal of legitimizing a new perspective, a new approach, or a new paradigm in historical studies. They ‘tend to emphasize disjunctions rather than continuities, epistemic ruptures rather than transformations and adjustments’. For example, they date the birth of modern historical scholarship in the 1820s, when Ranke published his ground-breaking *Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker* and obtained a chair in Berlin, thereby relegating all historical writing prior to the 1820s to a dark ‘prehistory’ of the discipline. ‘Their tenor is a reckoning, more or less severe, with the past and present “mainstream” of professional practice in order to legitimate what is stylized as a self-proclaimed new paradigm.’⁴⁹

Although such ‘disciplinary histories’, as Veit-Brause calls them, perhaps no longer enjoy the popularity they once had, they still circulate in introductory classes and textbooks. Courses in historiography often provide what Stefan Collini identifies as a defining feature of disciplinary histories, namely, ‘an account of the alleged historical development of an enterprise the identity of which is defined by the concerns of the current practitioners of a particular scientific field’.⁵⁰ Typically, such disciplinary histories present Herodotus, Thucydides, Francesco Guicciardini, and Ranke as ‘forerunners’ of modern historical scholarship, because of their ‘contributions’ to practices, ideas, or methods that the authors currently regard as constitutive of historical studies.⁵¹ They are presented as ‘fathers of history’, in whose footsteps current practitioners are supposed to follow.⁵²

Admittedly, such father figures can serve a variety of goals. They can be commemorated as origins of disciplinary genealogies, as identification figures, as embodiments of good professional behavior, as examples of epistemic virtue, or as sources of inspiration.⁵³ Yet in all these cases, historians treat such father figures differently than most other historical topics. They not only reconstruct their predecessors’ thoughts and practices, but also relate to them by attributing exemplary value to their work or by positioning themselves in a tradition that is supposed to go back to their initiatives. What takes place in such cases is not

only reconstruction, but also appropriation of the disciplinary past.⁵⁴ Fathers of history may therefore be said to function as ‘classics’ in Gadamer’s sense of the word. Although the norms and values embodied by these classics are seldom regarded as binding – standards of good performance often are a result of negotiations between insiders and newcomers and of continuously renewed engagement with received ideas and practices – they exercise a certain normative power over the historian’s professional ‘attitudes and behavior’.⁵⁵ Fathers of history, in short, are not merely objects of study, but voices from the past that ‘say something to the present’ and invite historians to participate ‘in an event of tradition’.⁵⁶

Although historians increasingly dissociate themselves from teleological and narrowly disciplinarily-oriented accounts of the history of historical writing and, consequently, employ such expressions as ‘fathers of history’ only between derisive inverted commas⁵⁷, historiography by and large remains a field which primary (educational) purpose is to tell where the historical discipline in its current state originates and how demarcation criteria between professional and non-professional history writing have developed themselves.⁵⁸ Even when disciplinary histories have come under suspicion, historiography is still an exercise in delineating and appropriating certain traditions of historical writing. Besides, although ‘fathers of history’ are currently less appreciated than in former decades, the study of historians and historiographical practices remains an ‘edifying genre’.⁵⁹ This is to say, in Gadamerian terms, that historians studying the history of historical writing deal not merely with persons, book-titles, and professional practices, but also with a *Sache* – with such timeless questions as: What is history? How should the past be studied? What makes a good historian?

5

If this is one area in which a conversation between Gadamer and philosophy of history might emerge, a second area is that of the historian’s ‘relations with the past’. Whereas much of recent analytical philosophy of history has focused on the epistemological dimensions of historical scholarship, Mark Day convincingly argues that historians relate to their subjects of study in more than merely epistemological terms. Entangled with the epistemological relation are relations that Day designates as ‘evaluative’, ‘preservative’, ‘dialogic’, ‘material’, and ‘practical’.⁶⁰ For example, historians stand in a material relation to the past

in so far as they are 'a product of the past, including that portion of the past which they choose to study'.⁶¹ In *History and Theory*, this material relation has recently been explored by Eelco Runia, who draws on psychological theories to argue that the past 'haunts' the present in more and other ways than historians usually acknowledge.⁶² Scholarly traditions as discussed in the previous section might also be rubricated under this heading.

Most interesting, for the purpose of this chapter, is the dialogic relation that Day postulates between historians and their subjects of history. Although it is not uncommon to find historians describing their work as 'an unending dialogue between the present and the past'⁶³, Day notes that among philosophers of history the concept of dialogue is still underdeveloped:

In attempting to apply Gadamer's hermeneutics specifically to historical practice, the key challenge is to specify how historians can be meaningfully treated as entering into dialogue with authors and actors who are dead. I think that the most promising answer is to be found in emphasising the dialogic virtue of *openness*, and consequently focusing on the ways that the historian must be open to being challenged by the past.⁶⁴

Interestingly, by highlighting the intellectual openness historians have to practice in their encounters with the past, Day seems to anticipate the criticism that a dialogue with the past can only exist metaphorically (the past does not talk back) and asymmetrically (the past cannot practice dialogic virtues in the way historians can).⁶⁵ Although this criticism presupposes the rather un-Gadamerian idea of a past that is fixed and unchangeable, Day does not seem prepared to defend Gadamer's alternative of a past that is identical with its *Wirkungsgeschichte* and therefore continuously subject to change. By restricting his application of Gadamer's dialogic hermeneutics to the sort of intellectual virtues historians have to practice if they want to 'recognize' the past in its distinctiveness⁶⁶, Day implicitly acknowledges that there is a distinctive past that historians might want to reconstruct, in so far as they can.

On the other hand, Day insists in Gadamerian manner that all interpretation, historical reconstruction included, is fundamentally dialogic in nature. Even though historians who consult a text for factual information that it provides about a past state of affairs have a different interpretative aim than Gadamer's ideal reader, who rather prefers to

be addressed about a *Sache* that transcends the particularities of time and place, a continuous back and forth between text and reader occurs in all interpretation. Historians aiming for reconstruction of the past also engage in such a back and forth movement, if only by discovering that the people they encounter are, in some sense, different from themselves. 'Interpretation begins with some kind of puzzlement; a difference between the past writer being studied and the contemporary historian, such that the historian can agree that "if I had been in that situation, I would not have done that, or said that". It is that difference that permits that past work to question the historian.'⁶⁷

Although it is correct to say that 'the animating impulse behind Gadamer's interpretative exercise departs in important ways from that which drives the mainstream historian'⁶⁸, Day hints at the possibility of a genuine Gadamerian contribution to current-day philosophy of history by presenting the dialogic virtue of openness, as discussed in *Wahrheit und Methode*⁶⁹, as a prerequisite for recognizing and respecting the 'otherness' of the past. Only by practicing the virtue of openness – not to mention such related virtues as intellectual curiosity, accuracy, and honesty – do historians have a chance of achieving some success in their aim of reconstructing the past. Only by acknowledging that their knowledge is provisional, that their findings are in need of continuous adjustment, and that their conclusions are often less than certain, can historians learn from and be corrected by the past under examination. In Day's own words: 'In a genuine dialogue, one recognises not only difference, but does not presume that one's own position will be the correct one prior to the dialogic process. The same goes when engaging in historical interpretation. One's own position is put into question as much as the other's.'⁷⁰

This, finally, resonates with two broader concerns addressed in recent volumes of *History and Theory*. One of these is the historian's moral responsibility towards the past, which Antoon De Baets, echoing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formulates in terms of rights and duties. In his view, historians have a moral duty to 'respect the dignity of the living and the dead they study' and 'the responsibility to search honestly for the historical truth'.⁷¹ Such an ethics of historical practice presupposes that historians have more than an epistemological relation to the past. The past is populated by human beings – or former human beings, as De Baets would say – who deserve to be treated in much the same way that human rights declarations stipulate the moral treatment of contemporary human beings.⁷² If this fits well with a view

164 – HERMENEUTICS AND THE HUMANITIES

of historical interpretation that emphasizes the moral dimension of an encounter between past and present, so does the second concern, which addresses such cognitive values as ‘impartial objectivity’ and ‘respect for evidence’ on which the historical profession claims to be based.⁷³ More specifically, such values can be said to correspond with intellectual virtues, or the proper exercise of certain character traits, of which the openness demanded by Gadamer and Day is a prime example.⁷⁴ As soon as such intellectual virtues are recognized as indexes of what historians regard as professional behavior, Gadamer’s notion of a dialogue between past and present may help elucidate the context of intergenerational human relations from which the practicing of such virtues emerges as a moral demand.

In sum, then, despite the broad divides that separated *History and Theory* from Gadamerian hermeneutics during the greater part of its existence so far, there are glimmers of hope for those philosophers of history who would like to convince their confreres in the field that Gadamer has important things to say about the historians’ interpretive work – even if those historians, in a rather un-Gadamerian manner, devote themselves to reconstructing past intentions, actions, and circumstances. Philosophers of history might recognize the sort of scholarly conventions epitomized by ‘fathers of history’ as traditions in Gadamer’s sense of the word and examine the extent to which such traditions are not merely ‘invented’, but received from the past as points of departure from which historians may choose to proceed or not. Moreover, they might draw attention to such epistemic virtues as openness and honesty, which are increasingly regarded as constitutive of the historians’ professional ethos. Under reference to *Wahrheit und Methode*, they might argue that a demand for such virtues arises in the context of an intergenerational encounter devoted to a dialogue between past and present. If such considerations make it into the pages of *History and Theory*, the journal might develop a greater receptivity to Gadamerian hermeneutics than has been the case so far.

Notes

- 1 As I write this chapter shortly after a stimulating conversation with the British theologian Oliver O’Donovan, I cannot think of a better subtitle than one echoing his *A Conversation Waiting to Begin: The Churches and the Gay Controversy* (London: SCM Press, 2009).
- 2 Unpagined backmatter of *History and Theory* 1 no. 1 (1960).

- 3 *Wahrheit und Methode* only made it into the bibliographies through which the journal, in the early years of its existence, tried to demarcate its fields of interest: Lewis D. Wurgaft, 'Bibliography of Works in the Philosophy of History – 1966-1968', *History and Theory*, Beiheft 10 (1970), 49.
- 4 See, among other examples, Georg G. Iggers, 'The Decline of the Classical Nation Tradition of German Historiography', *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 394; Larry Shiner, 'A Phenomenological Approach to Historical Knowledge', *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 261; Sande Cohen, 'Structuralism and the Writing of Intellectual History', *History and Theory* 17 (1978), 177. Exceptions include James Farr, 'Hume, Hermeneutics, and History: A "Sympathetic" Account', *History and Theory* 17 (1978), 285-310 and Moltke S. Gram's review essay mentioned below in note 17.
- 5 It may be more accurate to say that the field emerged around *History and Theory*, given that, at least in the first decades after its inception, the journal was almost the only infrastructural institution in the field. For example, there were (and are) hardly any chairs in philosophy of history. Philosophers of history were usually scholars employed in departments of history, philosophy, or English, pursuing their specific interests in spite rather than in accord with their teaching assignments. For various reasons, only in the Netherlands, philosophy of history became well anchored within the educational system. Accordingly, it may be of no coincidence that the first four volumes of *History and Theory* appeared with a Dutch publishing house (Mouton and Co. in The Hague) and that the number of Dutch subscribers has always been disproportionately high. See Richard T. Vann, 'Turning Linguistic: History and Theory and *History and Theory*, 1960-1975', in *A New Philosophy of History*, ed. Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), 43 and 248 note 2. For the relative success of Dutch philosophy of history: Jo Tollebeek, 'De ekster en de kooi: over het (bedrieglijke) succes van de theoretische geschiedenis in Nederland', in Tollebeek, *De ekster en de kooi: nieuwe opstellen over de geschiedschrijving* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996), 11-32.
- 6 Isaiah Berlin, 'History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History', *History and Theory* 1 (1960), 12; William Dray, 'Toynbee's Search for Historical Laws', *History and Theory* 1 (1960), 37; Arthur Lee Burns, 'International Theory and Historical Explanation', *History and Theory* 1 (1960), 55; Gerald J. Gruman, "'Balance" and "Excess" as Gibbon's Explanation of the Decline and Fall', *History and Theory* 1 (1960), 76.
- 7 Carl G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', *The Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942), 35-48.

166 – HERMENEUTICS AND THE HUMANITIES

- 8 Hayden V. White, review of *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* by Morton White, *The Journal of Modern History* 38 (1966), 422.
- 9 Vann, 'Turning Linguistic', 48.
- 10 Berlin, 'History and Theory', 21, 30. Berlin also mentioned Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Max Weber. Connie Aarsbergen-Ligtvoet is right, then, to argue that Berlin positioned himself in a 'pre-Gadamer *Verstehen* tradition'. See her *Isaiah Berlin: A Value Pluralist and Humanist View of Human Nature and the Meaning of Life* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 131.
- 11 Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 205.
- 12 W.B. Gallie, 'Historical Understanding', *History and Theory* 3 (1963), 149. See also Louis O. Mink, 'The Autonomy of Historical Understanding', *History and Theory* 5 (1966), 36.
- 13 Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 205-228.
- 14 As one historian summarized it rather crudely: 'The German Idealistic conception of history remained very much alive in the writings of Theodore [sic] Litt, Eduard Spranger, Erich Rothacker, Hans Gadamer, and others'. Georg G. Iggers, 'The Decline of the Classical National Tradition of German Historiography', *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 394.
- 15 Language barriers were not among the main reasons for Gadamer's fate in *History and Theory*. Georg G. Iggers, a relatively frequent contributor, was a German-born American. His German colleagues Gerhard Ritter and Wolfgang J. Mommsen made their debuts in the journal as early as 1961 and 1963, respectively. And although the review sections featured mostly English-language books, no less than thirteen German publications were reviewed in the first ten volumes.
- 16 Vann, 'Turning Linguistic', 41. On the distinction between analytical and speculative philosophy of history: W.H. Walsh, *An Introduction to Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson, 1951).
- 17 Moltke S. Gram, review of *Truth and Historicity*, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *History and Theory* 13 (1974), 94 note 12, 95. Cf. E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 1967), 245-264.
- 18 Much the same goes for Gadamer's French colleague, Paul Ricoeur. See, for example, George Boas's harsh review of Ricoeur's *History and Truth* in *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 265-270.
- 19 Arthur C. Danto, 'The Decline and Fall of the Analytical Philosophy of History', in Ankersmit and Kellner, *New Philosophy of History*, 85.
- 20 Alan Donagan, review of *Analytical Philosophy of History* by Arthur C.

- Danto, *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 430-435; Maurice Mandelbaum, 'A Note on History as Narrative', *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 413-419; W.H. Dray, 'On the Nature and Role of Narrative in Historiography', *History and Theory* 10 (1971), 153-161.
- 21 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). My interpretation of White draws on Herman Paul, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge; Oxford: Polity Press, 2011).
 - 22 Vann, 'Turning Linguistic', 48.
 - 23 Vann, 'Turning Linguistic', 59.
 - 24 Hayden V. White, 'Foucault Decoded: Notes From Underground', *History and Theory* 12 (1973), 23-54.
 - 25 Hayden White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in *The Literature of Fact: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. Angus Fletcher (New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1976), 21-44.
 - 26 Hayden White, 'The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation', *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982), 113-137.
 - 27 Ewa Domańska, *Encounters: Philosophy of History After Postmodernism* (Charlottesville, VA; London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 37.
 - 28 David Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity', *History and Theory* 25 (1986), 117-131.
 - 29 William H. Dray, 'Narrative and Historical Realism', in Dray, *On History and Philosophers of History* (Leiden; New York; Copenhagen: E.J. Brill, 1989), 133-135, 156-157.
 - 30 E.g., Arthur Marwick, 'Two Approaches to Historical Study: The "Metaphysical" (Including "Postmodernism") and the Historical', *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995), 5-35; Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Telling It As You Like It: Postmodernist History and the Flight from Fact', in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997), 158-174.
 - 31 Something similar, though on a smaller scale, happened when Dilthey gained increased attention in the early 1980s: Gadamer was not seldom presented as a heir and critic of that nineteenth-century pioneer in hermeneutics. See Michael Ermarth, review of *Historical Understanding in the Thought of Wilhelm Dilthey* by Theodore Plantinga, *History and Theory* 20 (1981) 323-343; Howard N. Tuttle, review of *Wilhelm Dilthey: A Hermeneutic Approach to the Study of History and Culture* by Ilse N. Bulhof, *History and Theory* 21 (1982), 125-131.
 - 32 Donald S. Taylor, review of *History as a Science: Collingwood's Philosophy of*

- History* by Willem Johannes van der Dussen, *History and Theory* 20 (1981), 179.
- 33 E.g., David Bates, 'Rediscovering Collingwood's Spiritual History (In and Out of Context)', *History and Theory* 35 (1996), 33; Karsten R. Stueber, 'The Psychological Basis of Historical Explanation: Reenactment, Simulation, and the Fusion of Horizons', *History and Theory* 41 (2002), 34-38. Also, outside the pages of *History and Theory*: W. J. van der Dussen, *History as a Science: The Philosophy of History of R. G. Collingwood* (The Hague; Boston; London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 3.
- 34 Gordon Graham, 'Can There Be History of Philosophy?' *History and Theory* 21 (1982), 44.
- 35 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (hereafter: *TM*), trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 1998), 374, 379.
- 36 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 628.
- 37 Gadamer, *TM*, 373.
- 38 Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory* 8 (1969), 3-53.
- 39 Dominick LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts', *History and Theory* 19 (1980), 254 note 11.
- 40 Frederick A. Olafson, 'Hermeneutics: "Analytical" and "Dialectical"', *History and Theory*, Beiheft 25 (1986), 36-37. The Hobbes example is my own, not Olafson's. See also, under reference to Olafson, F.R. Ankersmit, 'The Dilemma of Contemporary Anglo-Saxon Philosophy of History', *History and Theory*, Beiheft 25 (1986), 6-7.
- 41 Martyn P. Thompson, 'Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning', *History and Theory* 32 (1993), 248.
- 42 Frank Ankersmit makes a similar observation in 'The Dialectics of Jameson's Dialectics', *History and Theory* 51 (2012), 99-100.
- 43 E.g., Peter L. Janssen, 'Political Thought as Traditionary Action: The Critical Response to Skinner and Pocock', *History and Theory* 24 (1985), 143; Mark Bevir, 'The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism', *History and Theory* 31 (1992), 294-295; Mark Bevir, 'Objectivity in History', *History and Theory* 33 (1994), 328, 340.
- 44 That Gadamer was carefully studied in circles around Skinner is evidenced by William Outhwaite, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 21-39 and John Ibbett, 'Gadamer,

Application and the History of Ideas', *History of Political Thought* 8 (1987), 545-555. See also Reidar Maliks's chapter on Gadamer and Skinner, elsewhere in this volume.

- 45 I am indebted to John H. Zammito for this observation. A good example is Martin Jay's paper, 'Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate', presented in 1980 at Cornell's School of Criticism and Theory and published in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 86-110. For impressions of how Gadamer was first received among American philosophers, see Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969); the special issue of *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975) devoted to hermeneutics and critical theory; David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1978). On Richard Rorty's idea of a Gadamerian culture, see Marc-Antoine Vallée's contribution to this volume.
- 46 C. Behan McCullagh, 'Can Our Understanding of Old Texts be Objective?', *History and Theory* 30 (1991), 320, 323.
- 47 Although *History and Theory* is arguably the leading journal in the field (see note 5), a somewhat different story could be told about Gadamer's reception history among continental European philosophers of history, many of whom only sporadically published in *History and Theory*. Such a story would feature, among others, Herta Nagl-Docekal, Jörn Rüsen, Chris Lorenz, and Frank Ankersmit, each of whom, in various ways, engaged with *Wahrheit und Methode*, often to find out that Gadamer's questions and concerns did not exactly resemble their own. See, e.g., Herta Nagl-Docekal, *Die Objektivität der Geschichtswissenschaft: systematische Untersuchungen zum wissenschaftlichen Status der Historie* (Vienna; Munich: Oldenbourg, 1982), 162-196; Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 193-239.
- 48 In *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), philosopher Richard J. Bernstein showed how Gadamerian hermeneutics might contribute to a perspective beyond subject-object dichotomies of the sort that underlay both McCullagh's objectivism and White's constructivism. More specifically, he argued that Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* points a way out of such dilemmas as objective versus subjective, or, as White and his critics put it, knowledge

- 'imposed' and 'based' upon historical reality. In the pages of *History and Theory*, a similar attempt was made by Chris Lorenz, who drew on Bernstein's analysis of the problem, but offered a solution that was more inspired by Hillary Putnam's 'internal realism' than by Gadamerian hermeneutics. Chris Lorenz, 'Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A Plea for "Internal Realism"', *History and Theory* 33 (1994) 297-327.
- 49 Irmline Veit-Brause, review of *Die Oekumene der Historiker* by Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *History and Theory* 29 (1990), 360. For an empirical justification of this claim, see Horst Walter Blanke, *Historiographie-geschichte als Historik* (Stuttgart: Bad Cannstatt, 1991). See also Brian Fay, review of *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* by Peter T. Manicas, *History and Theory* 27 (1988), 288.
- 50 Stefan Collini, "Discipline History" and "Intellectual History": Reflections on the Historiography of the Social Sciences in Britain and France', *Revue de Synthèse* 109 (1988), 388. Similar definitions can be found in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *The Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4-5 and Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter, 'Introduction', in *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity*, ed. Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-2.
- 51 On these metaphors: Robert Alun Jones, 'On Understanding a Sociological Classic', *American Journal of Sociology* 83 (1977), 284-285.
- 52 Herman Paul, 'Introduction: Fathers of History', *Storia della Storiografia* 59/60 (2011), 224-230.
- 53 Herman Paul, 'Fathers of History: Metamorphoses of a Metaphor', *Storia della Storiografia* 59/60 (2011), 251-267. Some Dutch and Belgian examples are discussed in Herman Paul, 'Voorbeeld en voorganger: Robert Fruin en Godefroid Kurth als vaders van de geschiedwetenschap', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 126 no. 1 (2011), 30-53. On disciplinary father figures in the natural sciences, see Pnina G. Abir-Am, 'How Scientists View Their Heroes: Some Remarks on the Mechanism of Myth Construction', *Journal of the History of Biology* 15 (1982), 281-315 and *Commemorative Practices in Science: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Collective Memory*, eds. Pnina G. Abir-Am and Clark A. Elliot (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- 54 I borrow the Hegelian concept of 'appropriation' from Elliot L. Jurist, 'Recognizing the Past', *History and Theory* 31 (1992), 177-178.

- 55 TM, 280.
- 56 TM, 290.
- 57 E.g., Markus Völkel, 'Neither Father nor Children but Elective Affinities: Pleas for an All-Inclusive Genealogy of Historiography', *Storia della Storiografia* 59/60 (2011), 282-293.
- 58 Herman Paul, 'Self-Images of the Historical Profession: Idealized Practices and Myths of Origin', *Storia della Storiografia* 59/60 (2011), 157-170.
- 59 Thomas Söderqvist, 'Existential Projects and Existential Choice in Science: Science Biography as an Edifying Genre', in *Telling Lives in Science: Essays on Scientific Biography*, ed. Michael Shortland and Richard Yeo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 45-84.
- 60 Mark Day, 'Our Relations with the Past', *Philosophia* 36 (2008), 418. Although this list might prompt additions (an aesthetic dimension) as well as criticism (dialogue is not a separate category, but the form that epistemic and evaluative relations take), Day's consistent anti-reductionism is particularly welcome in a field that suffers from too many 'isms'.
- 61 Day, 'Relations', 421.
- 62 Eelco Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 1-29. A detailed case study is presented in Eelco Runia, "Forget About It": "Parallel Processing" in the Srebrenica Report', *History and Theory* 43 (2004), 295-320.
- 63 Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (London; New York: MacMillan & Co; St. Martin's Press, 1961), 24.
- 64 Day, 'Relations', 420.
- 65 Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 153-155.
- 66 Jurist, 'Recognizing the Past', 177-181.
- 67 Day, 'Relations', 421.
- 68 Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 58. See also Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 132-133.
- 69 TM, 268: 'All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text.'
- 70 Day, 'Relations', 421. Elsewhere, Day elaborates on this idea with help of what Charles Taylor calls the 'language of perspicuous contrast.' See Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), 164-165; Charles Taylor, 'Understanding

172 – HERMENEUTICS AND THE HUMANITIES

- and Ethnocentricity', in Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), esp. 123-130.
- 71 Antoon De Baets, 'A Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations Toward Past Generations', *History and Theory*, Theme Issue 43 (2004), 159.
- 72 This parallel is more fully developed in Antoon De Baets, *Gebruik en misbruik van de geschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2008), translated into English as *Responsible History* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009). In a review of this book, I have criticized De Baets's deontological language and hinted at the possibility of a virtue-ethical alternative (*Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 124 [2009], 467-469).
- 73 Aviezer Tucker, 'The Future of the Philosophy of Historiography', *History and Theory* 40 (2001), 53. Tucker elaborates on these cognitive values in his *Our Knowledge of the Past: A Philosophy of Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. 36-39.
- 74 Herman Paul, 'Performing History: How Historical Scholarship is Shaped by Epistemic Virtues', *History and Theory* 50 (2011), 1-19.