

---

## TRADITION AS LIVING VISION: HANS-GEORG GADAMER

George F. McLean

Department of Philosophy  
The Catholic University of America  
620 Michigan Ave., N.E. Washington, DC 20064

In this paper the author treats three important questions of Hermeneutic philosophy. Firstly, the character and importance of tradition as the bearer of the long experience of interacting with one's world, with other persons and with God (it is constituted not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection which have been forged in the human person's concrete striving to live with dignity). Secondly, the implications for the content of tradition of the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development (these do not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the dynamic character of the classical vision articulated in the epics, in law and in political movements). Thirdly, hermeneutics (how can the tradition be understood in its significance for present action?).

**Key words:** hermeneutics, Gadamer, tradition, hermeneutic circle, interpretation, historicity, "Truth and Method", application of tradition, ethos, whole and part.

### PROBLEMS

The term "hermeneutics" is derived from the son of Zeus, Hermes, who served as the messenger of the Olympian gods. Each of its three components, namely: (a) a messenger between (b) gods and (c) men, suggests a dimension of our problem.

#### *The Whole of Meaning and the Freedom of the Person*

As messenger, the figure of Herme suggest in at least three ways of classic dilemma called the hermeneutic circle, namely, that a grasp of the whole is needed in order to understand the parts, while a grasp of the parts is required for an understanding of the whole. This is suggested, first, by the fact that a Greek messenger or herald did not merely pass on a written text; he had to speak or proclaim the word. This could be done only by reading each part of the message in sequence. To do this intelligible, however, he needed to grasp the whole message. Secondly, as any proclamation must take place in a particular historical time and place, and with a specific intonation and inflection, it draws out one particular sense from the full potential of the words. Further, the messenger not only expresses, but also explains the message; to do so he must understand and convey both its content and its ramifications or meaning. For all this he requires an awareness of the still broader contexts of the problematic of the message and even of the language as the repository of culture within which the message was composed. Thirdly, the messenger must also translate or bear the meaning of the text from its source and its context to those to whom the message is being proclaimed in their set of circumstances and with their projects or concerns. This calls for transcending the parts to some knowledge of the human family in order to communicate rightly with any part.

This is reflected also in the etymological root of the term "interpret," namely, "praesto": to show, manifest or exhibit; with the prefix "inter" indicating the difference between the persons from whom and to whom the message is passed [1. P. 12—29]. This difference could be between past and present, as when an ancient text is being

reread today; between one culture and another, as when a text in a language other than one's own is being interpreted; or indeed, whenever there is communication even between persons in the same culture and time. In each case some whole of vision or meaning which encompasses both the interlocutors is required.

### *Values and the Divine*

The reference to the god Hermes, within the term "hermeneutics" points to the ultimate character of the kind of understanding which is sought. For the messages borned by the god, Hermes, are not abstract, mathematical formulae or methodological prescriptions devoid of content, meaning and values. They concern rather the limitless theoretical or speculative wisdom regarding the eternal source, and hence regarding the reality and meaning of all that is.

This was the petition of Hesiod in the introduction to his *Theogony*: "Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever. Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be. These things declare to me from the beginning, ye Muses who dwell in the house of Olympus, and tell me which of them first came to be." Aristotle showed this wisdom to be not only theoretical, but practical as well, for it knows "to what end each thing must be done..., and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature" [2. P. 85]. Such a science is then most divine, "for (1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better" [3. BK. 1,2]. He would agree with the Sutras that perennial wisdom must then undertake "a deliberation on Brahman." Hermeneutics is concerned at its core with the mediation to man of the eternal foundation of all meaning and value. To omit this, to consider things simply in a temporal or totally changing perspective, would deprive human life of both meaning and value.

### *Historicity*

Nevertheless, the need for messengers underlines the distinctive character of the human as living in time and hence the way in which historicity is essential to the hermeneutic enterprise. One must attend not only to the eternal sources from which meaning is derived, but to those to whom it is expressed, namely, to humans in their concrete temporal circumstances. These, in turn, have developed through interaction with nature, with other human beings, developed through interaction with nature, with other human beings, and with God. Thus, human history constitutes the context in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and mobilizes one's own and other's projects toward the future.

This must be done with full attention to the uniqueness of each person within a culture as is required of any adequate sense of freedom and emancipation. Further, given the admixture of good and evil in human action, the realization of the good in human history has always been compromised with evil. Consequently, the past as well as the present must always be deciphered or interpreted in order to distinguish the value content from its contradiction. Plans for the realization of values in the future must also provide for encountering evil and for a way in which evil can be overcome.

In sum, we are confronted with a threefold problematic: how can we achieve that whole of meaning required in order for the parts to be intelligible; how can we achieve the depth of insight required in order to appreciate the meaning and value of the parts; and if both of these are borne in the tradition, how can it leave person in time? In a word, how can it be a living tradition? This places us at the center of some of the metaphysics' deepest mysteries: unity and plurality, good and evil, and eternity and time. It is the right place at which to philosophize.

To do so let us turn: first, to tradition as the locus and summation of human awareness of the most important truths and hence to the normative character of its content: second, to application as the progressive revelation of the meaning of the content of tradition in, and through, the concrete circumstances of history; and third, to hermeneutics as a method for making positive use of the distinctiveness of our own point in history in order to appreciate better the unfolding of meaning and value through historical experience. In this we shall attend especially to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (in a sense the successor of Martin Heidegger) whose *Truth and Method* [4] has become *locus classicus* for the strongest defense and most dynamic vision of the tradition in recent time. Subsequent lectures will look also with Jürgen Habermas at how the antitheses or contradictions of meaning, which are also integral to human history, function in a hermeneutics of value-discovery and projection. With Paul Ricoeur we shall consider how these two can be mutually reinforcing, and with Paul Tillich how as thesis and anti-thesis they are related in the elaboration of a project of emancipation as authentic liberation.

### TRADITION

In modern times the notion of tradition has been looked upon with great suspicion. It has been seen as out of date and hence unenlightened, as imposed by will rather than as stating truth, and hence as oppressive of those who have not played a significant role in the social, economic and political life of society. It tends to be appealed to by those who are satisfied and to be appealed against by those who are not. Tradition in this sense would be rightly rejected. Hence, Gadamer's first task is to refound the notions of tradition and heritage, to rediscover its real nature and foundation, in a word, to revive the sense of tradition. He does this in a series of investigations to rediscover: the roots of leaning in community, the positive importance of time, and the sense in which these two can give a certain authority to tradition. We shall follow these steps.

#### *Community and Discovery*

There could be no tradition if man were but a solitary being. Hence, we must begin from a sense of community. But what has this to do with knowledge and discovery? To answer this, John Caputo traces back his phenomenological description of the actual experience of the person before birth when one's life was lived in, and with, the biological rhythms of the mother [5]. From birth this expands into an ever broader sharing in the life of one's parents, siblings and neighbors. It is in this context that one is at peace, the condition for growth and discovery. From its beginning then, our life has been social and historical; it has always been lived with other persons. This is particularly true of

our learning process. While it is true that it is the individual who sees lightning and hears thunder, anthropological studies show that peoples react to the same phenomena with either fear or joy or sadness according to the tribe to which they belong: their representations have a collective character [6]. Further, our interpretation and understanding of data draws for its development and orientation upon the experience and insight of our predecessors, often elaborated over centuries of controlled scientific investigation and deduction. Above all, this holds true for metaphysical knowledge which is not available to the senses as these are specialized in registering only physical differences. Metaphysics concerns the common characteristics of all reality and the particular characteristics of the ultimate source of being, meaning and value.

The strict bond of the knowledge had by animals to the conditions of space and time enables them to live in safe harmony with their physical world; human knowledge is not so bound, but can understand, question and create. There is an homology with the animal, nonetheless, for just as the animal's knowledge is synchronized to nature, human understanding is synchronized with that of other humans. One's life is with others in a society marked by the culture which that society has developed. From this Gadamer concludes that absolute knowledge simply and without condition, whether regarding oneself or others, is not possible: the knower is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space. But then neither would absolute knowledge be of ultimate interest for one's life develops with others in this culture, time and place [4. P. 305—10].

### *Time and Social Learning*

If it were merely a matter of community, however, this might still be one dimensional or concerned only with the present: there would still be no place for tradition. The wisdom with which we are concerned, however, is a matter, not of mere practical adjustments to temporary threats, but of the meaning of life which we desire to achieve through any and all such adjustments. Hence, as a learning process, contemporary interchange needs to be complemented by historical depth. If the vision we seek must be good enough to improve all ages it must reflect an accumulation of human insight predicated upon the wealth, not only of empirical observation, but of full human experience. In this process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition, history constitutes a type of leaning and testing laboratory in which the strengths of various insights can be identified and reinforced, while their deficiencies are corrected or eliminated. The cumulative result of the extended process of learning and testing constitutes tradition [4. P. 245—53]; e.g., the historical and prophetic books of the Bible are an extended concrete account of the process of one people's discovery of wisdom in interaction with the divine. This convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by the gradual elaboration of ritual and music imaginatively configured in epics such as the Mahabharata and in dance. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, intensifies and extends the range of our personal sensitivity.

Tradition is, then, not simply everything that ever happened; it is rather what appears significant. It does not subsist in itself, but must be described properly and by different voices in order to draw out its different aspects. It is not an object in itself, but

a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn according to the motivation and interest of the inquirer. It needs to be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated. This places considerable emphasis upon the relation of the present inquirer to tradition, a theme which will be taken up below.

For now it should be clear that the content of tradition serves as model and exemplar, not because of personal inertia, but because of both the experience and the cumulative free and wise acts of preserving and passing on what has been learned. We rightly stand on the shoulders of our forebears, without whom we could not begin to choose topic to be investigated or even awaken within us the desire to investigate problems. It is the sensitivity which they have developed and communicated that enables us to draw anew from our heritage, to evaluate our times, and to protect for the future [4. P. 245—53].

### *Authority*

These communitary and temporal characteristics of human learning enables us to respond to the major modern objections against tradition—namely, that it undermines both our freedom and our objectivity—by clarifying the real basis and nature of its authority. Given the corporate character of human learning, dependence upon others is not unnatural; quite the contrary. We come to exist by the gracious power of our creator; we are conceived in dependence upon the mutual love of our parents, and we are nurtured with continual care and concern by our family and peers, school and community. Within and beyond our social group we depend upon other persons according as they are in some way our superior.

This dependence is not primarily one of obedience to their will, but is based rather upon their comparative excellence in some dimension, whether that of the fireman for leading an elderly person down a ladder, of the doctor for his professional skill in healing his or her patient, or of the wise person for his or her insight and judgement in matters where profound understanding is required. The preeminence or authority of wise persons in the community is not something they usurp or with which they are arbitrarily endowed; it is based rather upon their capabilities as these are reasonably and freely acknowledged by others [4. P. 245—53].

It was an unfortunate byproduct of Descartes' disincarnation of clear and distinct ideas, especially as intensified by Enlightenment egalitarianism, that authority came to be seen as based not upon understanding, but upon strength of will and hence as potentially subservient to a narrowness of vision. The effect has been to orient people toward anarchy as the sole response to the aberrations of arbitrary authority in modern totalitarian societies. One of H.-G. Gadamer's major steps in the development of his hermeneutics has been to react against this and to identify the proper basis for authority in competency, and for the authority of tradition in the understanding upon which it is based. This, indeed, was the perspective of Plato's *Republic*: for future leaders education is the prerequisite for their exercise of authority. While the leader who is wise but indecisive may be ineffective, the one who is decisive but foolish is bound upon not only his own destruction but that of his community as well.

### *A Classical Tradition*

What has been seen thus far has progressively broadened the horizons of the modern rationalist context which envisaged an isolated mind dealing with sets of abstract concepts. We have added successively the role of the community in learning, the need for extended time, and the basis of authority in competency. Could these combine in such wise that the wisdom developed over time would constitute a tradition with a certain guiding and even normative authority for subsequent ages? To respond to this question we should note first that there are reasons to believe that tradition is not simply a passive storehouse of materials depending entirely upon the inquiry, a passive storehouse of materials depending entirely upon the inquirer, but in subsequent ages. On the one hand, without such a normative referent or law prudence (or *phronesis*) would be as relativistic and ineffective as muscular action without a skeletal substructure. On the other hand, were the normative factor to reside simply in a transcendental or abstract vision, without attention to historicity or the living of human life in time, the result would be an idealism devoid of existential relevance. Hence, there is need to look into history to find a vision which both transcends its own time and stands as directive for the time that follows.

This would consist of a set of values and goals which each person ought to seek to realize, for its harmony of measure and its fullness would point the way to mature and perfect human formation [4. P. 245—53]. Such a vision would be historical because it would both arise in time and present an appropriate way of preserving life through time; it would be also normative because it provides a basis upon which past historical ages, present options and future possibilities are judged. The fact of human striving manifests that every humanism is committed to the realization of some classical model of perfection.

It would be erroneous to conclude that this is merely a matter of knowledge, for that would engage not the many but the few, and would divide these between different and opposed schools, the project of a tradition is much broader and must be described in terms of love as well as knowledge, and of body as well as spirit. Indeed, it is the entire pattern of our life as we search out others in striving towards ever more complete realization in understanding and love, and thereby in justice and peace.

Such a classical model is not chronologically distant from us in the past so that it would need to be drawn forward artificially. Rather it lives and acts now in our lives which it inspires and judges. Through time it is the timeless dimensions of history. Hence, rather than reconstructing it, we belong to it just as it belongs to us, for the continuity of such a tradition consists in its being nothing less than the ultimate community of human striving. Seen in this light, human understanding is implemented less by individual acts of subjectivity than by our situatedness in a tradition that fuses both past and present [4. P. 258].

This sense of the good of value which constitutes tradition enables us in turn to appreciate the real impact of the achievements and deformations of the present. Without tradition, present events becomes simply the facts of the moment to be succeeded by counter-facts in what constitutes a definition of violence. Subsequent waves of coun-

ter-counter facts would constitute a history written in terms of violence. Without tradition the only hope—though it is itself the archetypal modern nightmare of reducing such violence—would be a Utopian abstraction which eliminates all areas of freedom of expression. This is a kind of “1984” designed on the basis of the reductive limitations of a modern rationalism.

All of this stands in brutal contrast to tradition as the cumulative richness of vision acquired by human through the ages. It is exemplified architecturally in a Parthenon or a TajMahal; it is embodied personally in a Gandhi, a Lincoln, a sage or a saint. Superseding mere historical facts, as concrete universals they express that harmony of measure and fullness which is at once classical and historical, ideal and personal, uplifting and dynamising, in a word, liberating.

#### APPLICATION AND HISTORICITY

There is a second set of problems regarding tradition. These concern not its content but rather its relation to the present, for if our present life is simply a deadening repetition of what has already been then life loses its challenge, progress is rejected in principle, and hope dies. Let us turn then from tradition as a whole to its application in our days.

#### *Novelty*

To understand this we must, first of all, take times seriously, that is, we must recognize that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is idea or form which transcends matter and time; these, in turn, are real only to the degree that they imitate or mirror the ideal. It also goes beyond the perspective of rationalism in its search for simple natures which are clear, distinct and eternal in themselves and in their relations. *A fortiori*, it goes beyond simply following a method as such without attention to content.

In contrast to all these, to recognize novelty implies that tradition with its authority (or *nomos*) achieves its perfection not in opposition to, but in the every temporal unfolding of, reality. For the human person is both determined by, and determinative of, his changing physical and social universe. Hence, to appreciate moral values one must attend to human action, to the striving of persons to realize their lives, and to the formation of this striving into a fixed attitude (*hexis*). In distinction from physical then, *ethos* as the application of tradition consists neither of law nor of lawless, but concerns human institutions and attitudes which change. Ethical rules do not determine, but regulate action by providing certain broad guidelines for historical practice [4. P. 278—279].

What is important here is to protect the concrete and unique reality of human life — its novelty and hence the historicity of one’s encounter with others. As our response to the good is made only in concrete circumstances, the general principles of ethics as a philosophical science must be neither purely theoretical knowledge nor a simple historical accounting from the past. Rather, they must provide help toward moral consciousness in concrete circumstances.

### *Application in Techné's Ethics*

Here an important distinction must be made between *techné* and ethics. In *techné* action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause which is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistême*). Skill consists in knowing how to act according to a well understood idea or plan. When this cannot be carried out some parts of it are simply omitted in the execution.

In ethics the situation, though similar in being an application of a practical guide to a particular task, differs in important ways. First, in moral action the subject makes himself as much as it makes the object: the agent is differentiated by the action itself. Hence, moral knowledge as an understanding of the appropriateness of one's action is not fully determined independently of the situation.

Secondly, the adaptations by the moral agent in applying the law do not diminish the law, but rather correct and perfect it. In itself the law is imperfect for, inasmuch as it relates to a world which is less ordered, it cannot contain in any explicit manner the response to the concrete possibilities which arise in history. It is precisely here that man's freedom and creativity are located. This does not consist in the response being arbitrary, for Kant is right that freedom without law has no meaning. Nor does it consist in a simply automatic response determined by the historical situation, for relativism too would undermine the notion of human freedom. Human freedom consists rather in shaping the present according to a sense of what is just and good and in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what justice and goodness means.

That the law is perfected by its application in the circumstances appears also from the way it is not diminished, but perfected by *epoché* and equality. Without them, by simple mechanical replication the law would work injustice rather than justice. Ethics, therefore, is not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right in the situation. This is a question, not of mere expediency, but of the perfection of the law; it completes moral knowledge [4. P. 281—286].

### *Prudence and Concern for Others*

The question of what the situation is asking of us is answered, of course, not by sense knowledge which simply registers a set of concrete facts. It is answered rather in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered about appropriate human action and exists normatively in the tradition. Only in these terms can moral consciousness go about its major job of choosing means which are truly appropriate to the circumstances. This is properly the work of intellect (*nous*) with the virtues of prudence (*phronesis*), that is, thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means in the circumstances.

This assessment of what is truly appropriate requires also the virtue of sagacity (*sunesis*), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as one in a sense undergoes the situation with the affected parties. Aristotle rightly describes as truly terrible the one who can make the most of the situation, but without orientation towards moral ends or concern for the



good of others in this situation. Hence, there is need for knowledge which takes account of the agent as united with the other in mutual interest or love.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of understanding, but rather co-determines that understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand the good, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather by and in relating this to oneself as sharing the concerns of others. In this light our sense of unity with others begins to appear as a condition for applying our tradition, that is, for enabling it to live in our day.

We must turn now to hermeneutics for a better understanding of the structure of communication between periods and especially between peoples. In the subsequent chapter we shall look also at the dynamisms which separate us, make sagacity (*sunesis*) difficult, impede our moral judgement and thus inhibit living our tradition [4. P. 285].

### HERMENEUTICS

Thus far we have treated, first, the character and importance of tradition as the bearer of the long experience of interacting with one's world, with other persons and with God. It is constituted not only of chronological facts, but of insights regarding human perfection which have been forged in the human person's concrete striving to live with dignity, e.g., the Indian ideal of peace, the Greek notion of democracy, the enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value each stands as normative in relation to the aspirations of those who live within that culture.

Secondly, we have studied the implications for the content of tradition of the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development. These do not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the dynamic character of the classical vision articulated in the epics, in law and in political movements.

It remains for us now to treat the third element in this first chapter, namely, hermeneutics. How can one actually draw upon the tradition as the sum of the great achievements of our heritage in a way that is relevant, indicative, and directive for action in our present circumstance? In a word, how can the tradition be understood in its significance for present action?

#### *A Dialectic of Whole and Part*

We might begin with a simple example of reading a text, say a paragraph from today's newspaper. To begin with, we approach this as a whole, e. g., as being about rice farming, because only a unity of meaning is intelligible [4. P. 262]. Just as it is not possible to understand a number three if we include but two units, so it is not possible to realize an act of understanding if we do not direct it to an identity or whole of meaning. This, of course, does not mean that we could not later come to suspect that, in fact, there are not three units present and come upon reasons to change our supposition from a three to a two. What it does mean is that we cannot make an act of understanding which does not treat its object as a whole, for only then does it have its identity or constitute something to consider. We work always in terms of complete notions. This is true also for the text, culture or tradition to which we turn.

In the example of the paragraph then, before grasping all its individual parts we construe its general area of meaning on the basis of its first words, the prior context, or more likely from a combination of the two. This expectation or construal of meaning, in turn, is adjusted according to read all the parts of the paragraph we reassess our pre-conception of the whole in terms of the parts (e. g., clarifying that it is about irrigation in general, rather than only for rice farming), and the parts in terms of the whole, in a basically circular movement until all appears to fit and be clear.

#### *A Dialectic of Horizons*

Something similar obtains on the macro level of tradition or culture which forms an identity or whole. As the totality of all that can be seen from the vantage point of that culture it is called an horizon. The application of a living tradition involves a dialectic of horizons. As we begin to look into our tradition we construe for ourselves a prior conception or horizon (which Gadamer terms a prejudgement or prejudice, in a non-pejorative sense) regarding the sense of that tradition. Our anticipation of this meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective, fixed content to which we come; however, it is rather what we produce as we participate in the evolution of the tradition and thereby further determine ourselves. Our horizon is a creative stance which reflects the content not only of the past, but of the time in which one stands and the life project in which one is engaged. It is a creative unveiling of the content of the tradition as this comes progressively and historically into the present and passes through the present into the future [4. P. 261—264]. In this light, time is not a barrier, a separation or an abyss, but rather a bridge and opportunity for the process of understanding; it is a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of historical distance in enabling a more complete meaning of the tradition to appear is then not that the passing of time enables subjective factors to disappear and the objectivity of the situation to emerge. Rather than removing falsifying factors, the contribution of time lies in opening new sources of understanding which reveal unsuspected elements and even whole new dimensions of meaning in the tradition. How does this take place?

#### *A Dialectic of Question and Answer*

Not all of our pre-understandings are correct whether they be about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, a set of goals, or a plan of action for the future. Hence, it is particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others. When our initial projection of the meaning of another's words (or of a text or of the content of tradition) will not bear up under progressive questioning we are justified in making needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning and often of the prior understanding or broader horizon from which we were thinking.

It would be erroneous then to consider oneself trapped in one's own horizon. Horizons are vantage points of a mind which is in principle open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own horizon and of transcending this in the acknowledgement of the horizons of others. Indeed, historic movement implies precisely that we not be bound by

one horizon, but move in and out of horizon. By making one aware of one's own horizon historical consciousness liberates one from its limitations [4. P. 267—272, 235—240].

In this process it is important then we retain a questioning attitude. Rather than simply following through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, true openness or sensitivity to new meanings is required, a willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning, our horizon. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concern regarding action towards the future. To be aware of our own biases or prejudices and to adjust them in dialogue with others is to free ourselves to understand the meaning of texts or of others, of tradition. Rather than ignoring or denying our horizon and prejudices, by recognizing these to be inevitable but assuming a questioning attitude, we can make them work for us. Such a process has a number of characteristics.

First of all its object is not the subjective meaning of the author, but the objective meaning which the text has for the present. Thus, in questioning I serve as midwife promoting the historicity or life of the text or tradition [4. P. 267—272, 235—240].

Secondly, the logical structure of this process is to be found in the dialectic of question and answer. The question of whether it is this or that is required in order to give direction to our attention, without which no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or determined. Progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simply indeterminacy, but that of a question with a specific direction such that we can direct our attention and consider significant evident (1).

Thirdly, as discovery depends upon the question, the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, whether working alone or in conjunction with others, our effort at finding the answers should be less towards suppressing a question than toward reinforcing and unfolding it, for to the degree that its probabilities are intensified it can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of opinion which tends to suppress questions and of arguing which searches out the weakness of the others' argument. In conversation as dialogue one enters a mutual search for the object by seeking to maximize the possibilities of the question by speaking at cross-purposes. By mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning truth is discovered [4. P. 325—332].

Finally, and most important, it cannot be expected that the text or tradition will answer but one question, for the sense of the text reaches beyond what even its author intended. Because of the dynamic character of being emerging into time, the horizon is never fixed. At each step a new dimension of the potentialities of the text is opened to understanding, for the meaning of the text lives with the consciousness, not of its author, but of man living in history and with others. The fusion of one's horizon with that of others — whether of a text or of a partner in dialogue—enables one to receive answers that are ever new [4. P. 335—340].

#### **CONCLUSION**

In all of this our attitude requires close attention. If my goal is simply to develop new horizons for the emergence of my mind, my search could be to achieve an absolute

knowledge in advance and thereby an absolute domination over the other. This would lock one into a prejudice that is fixed, closed in the past, and unable to allow for the horizons of others or for life in the present. In this way powerful new insights become with time deadening prejudgements which suppress freedom and cooperation.

In contrast, an authentic attitude of openness appreciates the nature of my finiteness and on this basis is both respectful of the past and open to others; it is thereby able to discern the future. This openness consists not merely in receptivity to new information, but in a recognition of our historical, situated and hence limited vision. Real escape from what has deceived us and held us captive is to be found not through those who are well integrated into our culture, horizon and social structures. Dialogue with them will open our horizons only to a limited degree. Real liberation from our more basic limitations and deceptions comes only with a conscious effort to take account of the horizons of those who differ notably, whether as another society in a quite different place, or as a distinct culture intermingled with our own, or still more definitively — those who live on the margins of all of these societies and are integrated into none.

This type of openness is directed, not primarily to others, surveying them objectively or obeying them unquestioningly, but to ourselves by opening our horizons, extending our ability to listen to others, and assimilating the implications of their answer for changes in our own position. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that tradition(s) has something new to say to me. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is not then methodological sureness, but openness or readiness for experience [4. P. 324—325]. In this sense tradition is not closed, but the basis for a life that is ever new, more inclusive, and more rich.

### ENDNOTES

- (1) Note that we can proceed, not only by means of positive evidence for one of two possible responses, but through the dissolving of the counter arguments.

### REFERENCE

- [1] *Richard E. Palmer*. *Hermeneutics*. — Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1969. — P. 12—29.
- [2] *Hesiod*. *Theogony*, trans., Hugh G. Everland-Whjte (Loek Classical Library: Cambridge, Mass: Howard University Press, 1964). — P. 85.
- [3] *Aristotle*. *Metaphysics*, Bk 1, 2.
- [4] *Hans-Georg Gadamer*. *Truth and Method*. — New York: Crossroad, 1975.
- [5] *John Caputo*. “A Knowledge of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion”, in David Schindler, Jesse A. Mann, and Frederick F. Ellrod, eds., *Act and Agent: Philosophical Foundations of Moral Education* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1985).
- [6] *Lucien Levy-Bruhl*. *How Natives Think*, trans., Lilian Clare. — New York: Washington Square Press, 1966. — Ch. I.

## **TRADITION AS LIVING VISION: HANS-GEORG GADAMER**

**Джордж Ф. Маклин**

Кафедра философии

Католический университет Америки

*620, ул. Мичиган, Вашингтон, округ Колумбия, 20064*

Данная статья посвящена рассмотрению трех важных вопросов: во-первых, характеру и значению традиции как носителя многовекового опыта взаимодействия с миром, другими людьми и Богом (речь идет не столько о хронологических фактах, сколько о способах человеческого совершенства, созданных в результате стремления человека жить достойно). Во-вторых, вопросу рассмотрения возможных последствий непрерывно разворачивающихся исторических событий для самой традиции. В-третьих, проблеме герменевтики, или вопросу того, как сегодня может быть осознана значимость традиции.

**Ключевые слова:** герменевтика, Гадамер, традиции, герменевтический круг, интерпретации, историчность, «Истина и метод», применение традиции, дух, целое и час.