

THE AGE OF THE WORLD PICTURE:¹ HERMENEUTICS AND WELTANSCHAUUNG THEORY

Introduction

Philosophy, in a peculiar way like history, repeats itself. Recent hermeneutical and postmodern critiques of the hegemony of Enlightenment science and mathematics find an interesting adumbration in Aristotle's critique of platonic ethics. The classical philosopher criticized the disciples of Plato in their attempt to study the subject of ethics—which for Aristotle concerned the understanding and practice of the good—as a ratio-mathematical science modeled on the notion of the unchanging form of the ultimate Good. In contrast, Aristotle proclaimed that the method and concepts of science must be adjusted to and match the nature of the subject under investigation. In regard to ethics, Aristotle warned that the outcome of the inquiry should not be expected to approximate the certitude and precision that accrues from the study of physics or mathematics. Describing his method at the outset of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wisely asserted that

Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts. ... We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects [political science, ethics] and with such premisses to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true and with premisses of the same kind to reach conclusions that are no better. In the same spirit, therefore, should each type of statement be *received*; for it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally

¹ The title of this paper is taken over, though with a change of meaning, from Martin Heidegger's essay of the same name, "The Age of the World Picture," contained in Lovitt 1977: 155ff. Originally the essay was delivered as a lecture on 9 June 1938, under the title "The Establishing by Metaphysics of the Modern World Picture," as the last of a series that was arranged by the Society for Aesthetics, Natural Philosophy, and Medicine at Freiburg in Breisgau, and which had as its theme the establishing of the modern world picture. The appendices to the essay, contained in Lovitt, were written at that time, but were not presented.

foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs (Book 1: 1094 in Ross 1952: 339-40)¹

This Aristotelian insight—which restricts the sovereignty of classical science and recognizes other legitimate approaches to and types of knowledge—has been exemplified in other times and places including the sophistic critique of the pre-socratic naturalists, the mystical response of Johannes Eckhart to scholastic Thomism, and perhaps even the romantic reaction to aspects of the Enlightenment. Cognizant of this prior critical conversation regarding the role and limits of science in the Western intellectual and scientific tradition, I think I can safely say that the present-day historical, hermeneutical, and postmodern critique (or deconstruction) of Cartesian, Enlightenment science has been the most comprehensive, the most radical, and the most

¹ For additional statements that convey Aristotle's recognition of the relationship of method and outcome to the science under study, see the *Nicomachian Ethics*, Book I, 1096-97; Book VI, 1142. Charles Taylor, exemplifying the Aristotelian mark of the educated man, recognizes that there is an unavoidable hermeneutic component to the human sciences, and thus concludes his paper "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," (1979: 71) by relating his discussion to this observation of Aristotle. He writes, "There are thus good grounds both in epistemological arguments and in their greater fruitfulness for opting for hermeneutical sciences of man. But we cannot hide from ourselves how greatly this option breaks with certain commonly held notions about our scientific tradition. We cannot measure such sciences against the requirements of a science of verification: we cannot judge them by their predictive capacity.... These sciences cannot be 'wertfrei': they are moral sciences in a more radical sense than the eighteenth century understood. Finally, their successful prosecution requires a high degree of self-knowledge, a freedom from illusion, in the sense of error which is rooted and expressed in one's way of life; for our incapacity to understand is rooted in our own self-definitions, hence in what we are. *To say this is not to say anything new: Aristotle makes a similar point in Book I of the Ethics.* But it is still radically shocking and unassimilable to the mainstream of modern science" (emphasis added). Furthermore, V. H. Dykstra (1960: 66) recognizes the danger of imposing exactitude on all philosophic and scientific inquiry, and he quotes Ramsey (1931: 269) to this end: "It is not unusual to find philosophers making the mistakes of thinking that everything that can be done at all can be done completely and exactly, that anything which is intelligible within a specific context is just as intelligible without it, and that everything which has meaning has a clear and precise meaning. As F. P. Ramsey has said, 'The chief danger to our philosophy, apart from laziness and woolliness, is scholasticism, the essence of which is treating what is vague as if it were precise and trying to fit it into an exact logical category.'"

consequential critique of its kind in the history of Western thought. Why might this be the case?

No doubt there are many factors that have contributed to this contemporary appraisal, but one factor keeps imposing itself as a common theme in the literature, and it is this: the historical situatedness of human beings, and the concomitant historically conditioned, and presuppositional nature of the process of understanding and knowing. What I mean by this seemingly omnipresent, historicist theme¹ is that each human being is a historicized individual who has been affected and effected by the particulars of his or her personal experience, who has encountered and been impacted by ideologies, language, society, people, politics, culture, art, books, economics, religion, traditions, etc., and who under the influence of these powerful, life-and-attitude shaping forces, have come to form fundamental perspectives about the life and world in which they are deeply immersed, and of which they must make some kind of sense. Through historical experience, human beings develop a type of consciousness (of which they may very well be unconscious)² that may be profitably compared to what Dilthey called

¹ The concept of the historicity of understanding is derived from the larger movement of historicism (*Historismus*). Drawing on the thought of Troeltsch, Mannheim, Meinecke, and others, Mandelbaum defines historicism as a methodological principle constituted by the belief that "an adequate understanding of the nature of anything and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained by considering it in terms of the place it occupied and the role it played within a process of [historical] development" (1967: 25). He asserts that "historicism involves a genetic model of explanation and an attempt to base all evaluation upon the nature of the historical process itself" (*Ibid.*). Though it is often times expressly denied that historicism itself is a *Weltanschauung*, nevertheless it is not a far step to recognize that behind it is a philosophical naturalism or materialism such that history as a seamless web becomes the "whole show," and that it is the lord of the world (Schlossberg 1983: 13, 23, 25).

² In our own media saturated environment, Marshall McLuhan was right to say that "environments" tend not to be noticed. He affirmed that we may see many of their explicit contents or effects, but that the environments themselves remain unnoticed (1965: vii). We do not see the environment, because we see *with or by means of* the environment. We are under the influence of imperceptible ideas, and are not aware of their powerful effect.

a "world view" (*Weltanschauung*), and what Husserl called a "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*). Through "life" experience, human persons acquire what Gadamer called prejudices or pre-judgments (*Vorurteil*) and horizons (*Horizont*), and find themselves immersed in a tradition, all of which coalesce in hermeneutical procedures, to exercise what Heidegger called the fore-structure of understanding (*Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff*).

What I want **to argue** in this essay is that these specific notions of Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer, in their own unique way, and when combined together, reflect aspects of and contribute to the conception of *Weltanschauung* theory, even though their efforts may have been unintentional and indirect (with the exception of Dilthey¹). I certainly am not trying to identify hermeneutics and world view (the latter is a larger enterprise and construct than the former), but I am suggesting that hermeneutics not only contributes to the understanding of world view, but that one essential aspect of what the hermeneutic philosophers were really saying is that at the basis of understanding and interpretation is a presuppositionally held world view which fundamentally constitutes the historicity of understanding. This means that all knowledge in the human and natural sciences is characterized by interpretative dimensions dictated by a world view, and that every understanding of the historical, social, and natural world is always itself historically conditioned by world view, and is a finite, nuanced expression of the historical self-understanding of the interpreter/scientist. Thus, world views may be seen as the underlying, key feature in the interpretive process, and its relativizing presence destroys any hope of objective, methodological, scientific knowledge as championed by the architects of the Enlightenment, especially Rene Descartes and the tradition which has followed him. It is this that constitutes the

¹ While the term world view was coined by Kant (some say Hegel), Wilhelm Dilthey was the first to consciously reflect upon and theorize about world view. As such he has been recognized as the "father of world view." His *Weltanschauungslehre* essays of 1911 consist of the following: *Das geschichtliche Bewusstsein und die Weltanschauungen* and *Die Typen der Weltanschauungen und ihre Ausbildung in den Metaphysischen Systemen*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* VIII, 3-118.

radicality of the post-modern critique of Enlightenment science, and it is because of this, then, that this hermeneutic era which we occupy may justifiably be labeled, *a la* Heidegger, the "age of the world picture (or world view)."

In order to defend the thesis that this post-Enlightenment age of hermeneutics is the age of the world view (or picture), in this paper I will begin by discussing for background purposes the Enlightenment concept of science and its corresponding foundationalism. I will then survey the specific hermenetical ideas of Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer which contribute to and exhibit a strong relationship with world view theory. And as a result, I will argue for the need to give more serious attention to the history and theory of the concept of world view not only because of its hermeneutical importance, but because I believe that it may be construed as one of the most, if not the most basic, comprehensive *existentialia* of Dasein.

Enlightenment Science and Foundationalism

To appreciate philosophical hermeneutics, and its central tenet of historical, or as I am arguing, world view based understanding, I must first present a cursory overview of Cartesian/Kantian legacy of Enlightenment science and its quest for a firm, unshakable foundation for knowledge.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason (Der Kritik reinen Vernunft, 1781)*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) set about to indicate the path along which reason must travel if it is to arrive at certain results, even if, as he said, it should be found necessary to abandon many of those areas which, without consideration, it had been assigned to delineate. The results of his inquiry are well known, for he was quite content to assign to reason the exclusive task of explicating natural science and to render a "negative verdict for the scientific investigation of those realities which decide upon the meaning of human existence, the knowledge man has of himself... (Bleicher 1980: 21). Fundamental religious and metaphysical ideas were also excluded by Kant's sovereign reason (viz.,

God, freedom, and immortality), even though he sought to posit them in another way. Nonetheless, Kant obviously privileged natural science as the only sure way to know, and relegated everything else to the category of suspicion and uncertainty.

Prior to Kant, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) began his programmatic attempt to establish a firm foundation for knowledge with the experience of an epistemological "anxiety," rooted in false opinions, thus leading him to seek to lay an original foundation in order to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. In his now "celebrated" book *Meditations on First Philosophy (Meditationes de prima philosophia, 1641)*, the *locus classicus* of modern philosophy and science, he sought, as he put it in the second meditation, for an Archimedian point, or unshakable basis upon which to ground human knowledge. In this quest, he thought himself to be successful whether that point or foundation is understood as the *cogito* or God himself. In any case, this book and the Cartesianism that has emerged from it has had radical implications and set the substantive tone for Enlightenment and/or modernist science. While Descartes' philosophy contains several salient points which have been at the center of philosophy ever since, it is possible for present purposes to reduce his complex web of beliefs to two basic ideas.¹ One is the subject/object distinction in which the unaffected, self-

¹ Bernstein (1983: 115-17) summarizes the essentials of Descartes' outlook and the consequent Cartesian legacy under these abridged notions: (1) Descartes introduces a rigorous distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, the sharp distinction between mind and body; (2) If one is to achieve clear and distinct knowledge, the "I" or the subject must engage in the activity of intellectual self-purification by the procedure of methodological doubt, suspending every thing that can be doubted to find the Archimedian point; (3) Though human beings are finite, they are not imperfect; there is no intrinsic defect of mind or will; (4) Truth is primarily ascribed to judgments; the primary source of error is misjudgment, when one allows oneself to affirm or deny what is not understood clearly and distinctly; (5) Once the Archimedian point of knowledge is discovered, a solid edifice of knowledge can be built by the use of strict rules and method; (6) When justifying claims to knowledge, there should be no appeal other than the appeal to reason itself. Skepticism is the appropriate response to any authority or tradition; (7) There is a close link between experience and the senses and a focus is on the role of the senses. In these seven notions are found the essentials of much of

disposited human subject a with perfect, unencumbered objectivity and rationality approaches the object of knowledge which is capable of being clearly perceived and understood. This radical methodology has "inspired many because of Descartes' demand that we should not rely on unfounded opinions, prejudices, tradition, or external authority, but only upon reason itself (Bernstein 1983: 17).

A second derivative tenet is that of foundationalism. An adequate foundation for knowledge is one which depends on nothing else, but is the starting point for the epistemic enterprise. That which constitutes the foundation must be self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible, and the intent of the foundation was to provide a mutually agreed upon basis for knowledge that would be clearly recognized by all, rational, sane, objective thinkers. The foundation must be free from prejudice or presupposition and be the basis from which the rest of perfect, certain, and unlimited knowledge would seamlessly flow. Furthermore, this traditionalist view of epistemology was designed to guarantee the distinction and prevent the confusion between the platonic epistemological notions of *episteme* and *doxa* (knowledge and opinion). Hermeneutically speaking, the foundation meant that there was a distinct difference between knowledge based on the foundation, and interpretation based on opinion. The implications of this distinction, that hermeneutics, or interpretation, and Enlightenment epistemology, or the theory of knowledge are incompatible and cannot co-exist, has been spelled out in hermeneutic terms by Rockmore (1990: 116).

The view of knowledge as a function of the distinction between *episteme* and *doxa*, knowledge and opinion, truth and belief, excludes interpretation, which is restricted to the level of conviction only. To put the same point in other words: on this view when we know, interpretation is unnecessary; and when we interpret, we do not know. It follows that knowledge and interpretation are mutually exclusive categories.

modernity, as well as the specific objects of critique by philosophical, postmodern hermeneuts.

Hence, in summarizing the above ideas, Enlightenment science, among other things, is characterized by (1) the limitation of reason to the investigation of natural science; (2) the unaffected self and its pure objectivity in the knowing process; (3) the quest for an absolute foundation for knowledge; and (4) the distinction between true, scientific knowledge and subjective interpretation or hermeneutics. Of course, each of these propositions can be seriously questioned and has been, especially by the hermeneutical philosophers.

Rather than just raising objections or asking questions about any of these basic tenets, however, is the central ontological critique of Cartesianism that gets at its roots and not just its branches. This critique begins with Husserl, is carried forward by Heidegger, and finds its culmination in Gadamer. In essence it suggests that Cartesianism is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of being and especially that of the nature of human being or Dasein in the world. For Heidegger, in order to formulate the question about Being itself, it was first necessary to understand the being that is concerned about Being, and what this ontic being (Dasein) discloses ontologically. The method by which this existential analytic of Dasein is undertaken is what Heidegger calls a "universal phenomenological ontology (1962: 62). And for Heidegger, a phenomenological ontology of Dasein is an hermeneutic enterprise at its core. He writes:

Our investigation itself will show that the meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation. The *λογος* of the phenomenology of Dasein has the character of a *ερμηνευον*, through which the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which Dasein itself possesses, are made known to Dasein's understanding of Being. The phenomenology of Dasein is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of the word, where it designates this business of interpreting (Ibid.: 61-62).¹

¹ Heidegger goes on to say that this hermeneutic of Dasein will lead to a hermeneutic of other non-Dasein ontological entities and also to a hermeneutic of the existentiality of existence. The above paragraph concludes thusly: "But to the extent that by uncovering the meaning of Being and the basic structures of Dasein in general we may exhibit the horizon for any further ontological study of those entities which do not have the character of Dasein, this hermeneutic also becomes a 'hermeneutic' in the sense of working out the conditions on which the possibility of any ontological investigation depends.

And finally, to the extent that Dasein, as an entity with the possibility of existence, has ontological priority over every other entity, 'hermeneutic', as an interpretation of

As Gadamer points out for his purposes, which entail the purposes of this paper as well, "Heidegger entered into the problems of historical hermeneutics and critique only in order to explicate the fore-structure of understanding for the purposes of ontology. Our question, by contrast, is how hermeneutics, once freed from the ontological obstructions of the scientific concept of objectivity, can do justice to the historicity of understanding" (1993: 265). This recognition of the historicity of understanding actually begins with Wilhelm Dilthey and continues with Edmund Husserl even though both thinkers substantially carried out their reflections in a Cartesian context. Yet with them we mark the conception of philosophical hermeneutics as each contributes to an awareness of the historically conditioned nature of knowledge, and to the nature of world view—Dilthey by means of his significant *Weltanschauunlehre*, and Husserl through his notion of life-world (*Lebenswelt*). To these conceptions we will now devote our attention

**The Beginnings of Hermeneutics:
Wilhelm Dilthey's *Weltanschauunlehre*
and Edmund Husserl's Notion of "Lifeworld"**

My main concern in this section is to develop Dilthey's *Weltanschauunlehre* and Husserl's life-world concept in order to see how they contribute to historical hermeneutics and world view theory. In both concepts there is the recognition of the fact that all thinking, speaking, and doing is grounded in a fundamental historical context that issues in a particular vantage point. The hermeneutical consequences of this recognition are profound, and they instantiate the first substantive critique of Enlightenment methodical science.

Dasein's being, has the third and specific sense of an analytic of the existentiality of existence; and this is the sense which is philosophically primary. Then so far as this hermeneutic works out Dasein's historicity ontologically as the ontical condition for the possibility of historiology, it contains the roots of what can be called 'hermeneutic' only in a derivative sense: the methodology of those humane sciences which are historiological in character "(1962: 62).

Wilhelm Dilthey's *Weltanschauunglehre*

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was both concerned about and challenged by Kant's limited application of the use of reason to the natural sciences. Thus, his hefty ambition was to provide a critique of historical reason on behalf of the human sciences just as Kant had done for the natural sciences. His Cartesian based goal was to provide a means that would guarantee objective, certain knowledge in the *Geisteswissenschaften* that was in no way inferior to, but just as reliable as the kind of knowledge which the application of reason was to said to provide for the *Naturwissenschaften*. Bernstein has described Dilthey's task as

that of determining what is distinctive about humanistic and historical knowledge and of revealing its characteristic subject matter, aims, and methods in a manner that would meet and challenge the belief that only the natural sciences can provide us with "objective knowledge." Dilthey's dream was to do for the historical human sciences what Kant had presumably accomplished for mathematics and the natural sciences: to write a *Critique of Historical Knowledge* that would show at once the possibility, nature, scope, and legitimacy of this type of "objective knowledge" (1983: 113).

In pursuit of this goal and towards the end of his distinguished philosophical career, Dilthey undertook the first serious theoretical reflection on the concept of world views, focusing especially on their significance for knowledge in the human sciences. As Thomas Young points out in his insightful article, "The Hermeneutical Significance of Dilthey's Theory of World Views," (1983: 126), the development of his doctrine represents the final stage of his attempts to work out a credible epistemology and hermeneutic for the *Geisteswissenschaften*. His notion of world views, however, which recognized the historically based nature of thought, threatened to undo his quest for objective, trustworthy historical knowledge in the human sciences. There existed a tension in Dilthey's Cartesian context between the quest for historical certitude and the fact of human historicity which Young explains in these words:

On the one hand, Dilthey wished to maintain that the judgments in the *Geisteswissenschaften* must be characterized by universal validity. On the other hand, Dilthey's conception of world-views appeared to entail the position that

every judgment about matters of fact and value express a historically conditioned and thus relative world-view. The problem of how objective historical knowledge is possible when the knower is himself historically conditioned may be brought into focus in Dilthey's *Weltanschauungslehre* by pointing out the epistemological tension between realist and idealist tendencies which may be found within Dilthey's *Hermeneutik*" (Ibid.).

In Dilthey's teaching on world views, the dual recognition of the plurality of world views, and that each world-view possessed its own universal prejudice frustrated any consistent *realist* approach in the definition of historical facts. "Since there is a plurality of world-views or forms of consciousness, it follows that what constitutes a fact of experience may differ depending upon the prejudice of the world-view. Not only will the constitution of facts differ because any specific region of the given may be interpreted differently, but differing world-views will also include and exclude different regions of the given" (Ibid. 127). Furthermore, Dilthey's hermeneutical use of the concept of world-view, rooted as it was in *Erlebnis* or experience, also frustrated any kind of *idealist* understanding of historical reason. This follows because Dilthey's own anti-metaphysical understanding of history rejected any form of the transcendental ego, metaphysical reason, absolute spirit, or divine revelation any of "which might provide a basis for rectitude in historical judgments while simultaneously affirming the activity of the mind in constituting the nature of the historical world" (Ibid. 132).

Opinions differ on how Dilthey resolved his dilemma to obtain some kind of satisfying historical knowledge, and at the same time avoid the quicksands of relativism (for a more complete discussion, see appendix A).¹ Young seems to suggest that

¹ Bleicher notes that "accounts of Dilthey's backsliding into an objectivist stance differ. Gadamer refers to a conflict between the philosophy of life and a scientific conception of knowledge in which Dilthey ultimately took the side of the later. Habermas considers his objective to be already inherent in the philosophy of life: its tenets seem to 'allow for the transposition of the ideal of objectivity of the natural sciences onto the *Geisteswissenschaften*" (1980: 24). Bleicher's own position favors Gadamer's (1980: 24): "This posture [of critical distance and objectivity] shows Dilthey to be a child of the Enlightenment and as following in the Cartesian tradition; but it leads him to overlook the challenge an historical 'object' may make on the interpreter's conceptions and values, and to remain blind to the need for self-reflection in which the

Dilthey modified his Cartesian scientific spirit by recognizing that the historian is immersed in the historical process, by realizing the hermeneutical implications of his own *Weltanschauunglehre* which denigrated the objectivist model of historical knowledge, and by his awareness of the historicity of his own method of approaching history. He summarizes what he thinks was the final hermeneutical outcome of world view theory for Dilthey.

Being historically conditioned, being within a historical situation, being immersed in a historical tradition—all this means that the epistemologist, as well as the historian, must come to terms with the inescapable finitude of his perspective and abandon the claim to a presuppositionless and a-historical reason which can achieve an absolutely translucent historical self-understanding. For this reason, as Dilthey points out with respect to the hermeneutical employment of his *Weltanschauunglehre*, not only must every substantive interpretation of history have something tentative about it, but so must every set of concepts employed by reason in its approach to the historical (Ibid. 136).

I should draw several important observations in conclusion to this discussion of Dilthey's notion of world view. First is the hermeneutical relevance of the world view concept for Dilthey. Second is the interpretive power of historically grounded world views, and their challenge to Cartesianism. Third is that the significant implications of Dilthey's historically conditioned hermeneutic are taken over and extended in different directions by his successors, Husserl, Heidegger, and especially Gadamer.¹ At this

subject realizes his indebtedness to tradition and language as the bases and media of his thinking: the 'hermeneutic experience', to which Gadamer and Ricoeur refer as *Zugehörigkeit* or *appartenance* (belonging to) respectively." Palmer also sides with Gadamer and asserts forcefully that "Dilthey is a perfect example of the scientific compulsion to method-oriented thought effectively preventing a gifted and sincere searcher for historicity from finding it. We may see in him the archetype of our own present loss of authentic historicity in our tendency to use inductive methods to obtain 'objectively valid' knowledge of literature" (1969: 178-79).

¹As Young proposes, "The criticism of historical objectivism which I believe to be implicit, if not explicit, in Dilthey's hermeneutical account of *Weltanschauunglehre* has been formulated in a very clear fashion by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his essay, *Truth and Method*. While describing the 'historicity of understanding' as a hermeneutical principle, Gadamer proposes what he calls the 'principle of effective history.' This principle prescribes that 'a proper hermeneutics would have to demonstrate the effectivity of history within understanding itself.' It is Gadamer's analysis of the

point we will examine Husserl's concept of life-world which also recognizes the historically condition nature of knowledge.

Edmund Husserl's notion of "Life-world"

The critique of historical consciousness in Dilthey is carried forward by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) in the context of his phenomenology of human consciousness. Though his lingering Cartesianism caused Heidegger to break with him in order to establish his own anti-Cartesian, hermeneutic, phenomenological ontology (Hoy 1978: 5),¹ nevertheless Husserl's phenomenological critique of old school objectivism on the basis of his notion of the intentionality of consciousness contributed to objectivism's demise. For Husserl it became increasingly significant that all persons in one's own world stand within the intentional horizon of consciousness, within what he called the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*). The scientist's objective, cold, detached, observed world is preceded by the intentional horizon in which one lives, moves, and breathes, a world that is personal and shared with others (from Palmer 1969: 179). Noting a connection between Dilthey's notion of "unity of life" and "standpoint of life" with Husserl's idea of "conscious life," Gadamer spells out the substance of Husserl's formulation of the idea of "life-world," and its significant implications in this quote given *in extensio*. In reading,

limitations placed upon the historian's understanding by the consciousness of this principle which particularly explains the mature Dilthey's tendentious aversion to the epistemological model of Cartesian rationalism" (Young 137). This observation shows the close connection between Dilthey's world view theory and at least one of Gadamer's hermeneutic conceptions, a relationship that will be expanded upon later in this paper.

¹ Palmer points out that the biggest difference between Husserl and Heidegger turns on their view of science (1969: 126). Coming out of mathematics, Husserl believed that philosophy needed to become a rigorous science and a higher empiricism. He says, "Husserl's scientific leanings are reflected in his quest for apodictic knowledge, his reductions, his tendency to search out the visualizable and conceivable through eidetic reduction." On the other hand, Heidegger, coming out of theology believed that no matter how rigorous, scientific knowledge was not the ultimate goal; answers to the question of Being were.

note the phraseology in italics that indicates a close affinity to world view conceptions and function.

Using a concept consciously formulated in contrast to a concept of the world that includes the universe of what can be made objective by science, Husserl calls this phenomenological concept of the world "life-world"—i.e., *the world in which we are immersed in the natural attitude that never becomes an object as such for us, but that represents the pre-given basis of all experience*. This world horizon is a *presupposition of all science* as well and is, therefore, *more fundamental*. As a horizon phenomenon "world is essentially related to *subjectivity*, and this relation means also that it "exists in *transiency*." The life-world exists in a *constant movement of relative validity*.

He goes on to add this description of the concept.

The concept of the *life-world is the antithesis of all objectivism*. It is an essentially historical concept, which does not refer to a universe of being, to an existent world." ... But the *life-world* means something else, *namely the whole in which we live as historical creatures*. ... It is clear that the life-world [sic] is always at the same time *a communal world that involves being with other people as well*. It is a world of persons, and in the natural attitude *the validity of this personal world is always assumed* (1993: 246-47).

According to R. Schmidt (1967: 98), the concept of life-world indicated a shift in Husserl's later thought. Earlier on, phenomenological reflection was designed to provide the foundations of scientific knowledge in the fullest sense of the word. Later, he came to distinguish sharply between the world as it is encountered in science, and the world of human experience and awareness. This is the *Lebenswelt*. Scientific knowledge is possible only if the life-world is understood. Consequently the first task of phenomenology was to study the life-world presumably as a preface to scientific knowledge and understanding. This seems to suggest that, like a world view (or Kuhnian paradigm), the life-world influences the objects, methods, and aims of science. Science itself is not a perfectly Cartesian endeavor; it, too, rests on prior assumptions and influences, and, via its human practitioners, is affected by history.

When these thoughts are added to the ideas contained in the above quotations, the affinity of Husserl's life-world concept and world view become evident. First, the phenomenological concept of life-world is to be distinguished from the scientific world,

and is somehow prior to it. Second, it is the world in which we are naturally immersed; it is a world that is assumed or taken for granted; and it is that *with which* or *by which* we see the world around us. Third, the life-world is never the object of investigative analysis *per se*, but is, nevertheless, the basis and foundation for all our thinking, living, and doing; it is the "pregiven basis for all experience." Fourth, this life-world in relation to science is its presupposition, indicating that science is carried out in its context and under its jurisdiction. Fifth, the life-world is a personal, temporal, provisional construct, one that is a dynamic phenomenon of constant movement. Sixth, it is the polar opposite of Cartesian objectivism, since it is essentially a historical concept; it is the subjective realm of personal being in which we live as historical creatures. Seventh, the life-world is shared with other people who assume the value and validity of their unexamined life-world outlook. These features of the Husserlian life-world concept can be equally applied to world views which also:

- Are un-and pre-scientific
- Constitute one's natural outlook
- Determine how one sees
- Are taken for granted
- Are rarely if ever analyzed
- Are the basis of all action
- Ground science and interpretation
- Are subjective, relative, changing, dynamic
- Denigrate objectivity
- Are historically rooted and derived
- Are shared with others
- Assumed to be valid or true

To my knowledge, Husserl did not formally apply the concept of life-world hermeneutically, but Heidegger certainly did, and this by means of his phenomenological and ontological method as we have already discussed (pp. 7-8). Within the general concept of life-world Heidegger began his critique of historical consciousness, especially as this entailed the fore-structure of understanding. His analysis was not carried out as a property of consciousness modelled on the old subject/object distinction, but rather rests in the context of world which already contains both subject and object.

Hermeneutics in Heidegger is really a process of ontological disclosure that obtains in the very process of human existential experience. As Palmer summarizes,

Hermeneutics in Heidegger, then, is a fundamental theory of how understanding emerges in human existence. His analysis weds hermeneutics to existential ontology and to phenomenology, and it points to a ground for hermeneutics not in subjectivity but in the facticity of world and in the historicity of understanding (1969: 137).

Dilthey and Husserl could be said to have conceived hermeneutics by means of the critique of historically based consciousness and its impact on knowledge; after this gestation period, Heidegger gives it birth, and Gadamer raises it up. The central principles of their hermeneutic philosophy that also bear upon elements of world view theory will now be taken up for discussion.

Heidegger's Fore-Structure of Understanding and Gadamer's Prejudice and Horizon

Central to Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological ontology is the concept of the fore-structure of understanding. This notion resembles, not only Husserl's life-world, but functions in a way similar to the concept of *Weltanschauung*. World view structures fore-understanding. Furthermore, Gadamer's ideas of prejudice and horizon essentially constitute the fore-structure of understanding in his hermeneutical reflections, and as such also possess affinity to world view theory. In this section, I will seek to explicate these notions and relate them to world view theory along with their hermeneutical significance.

Heidegger's Fore-Structure of Understanding

Heidegger explains that in interpreting *something as something*, the interpretation is always founded upon what he calls a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception. Thus he was willing to declare that "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless

apprehending of something presented to us" (1962.: 191-92).¹ Rather, interpretation is always carried out, as he puts it, "under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted" (Ibid.: 191). This is true of all types of interpretation, including the exegesis of texts. Heidegger summarizes his viewpoint in these words.

If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual Interpretation, one likes to appeal to what 'stands there', then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption [*Vormeinung*] of the person who does the interpreting. In an interpretative approach there lies such an assumption, as that which has been 'taken for granted' with the interpretation—that is to say, as that which has been presented in our fore-having, our fore-sight, and our fore-conception (Ibid.: 192).²

¹ This theme has been developed in the area of biblical exegesis by Rudolph Bultmann, who in answer to the question of his essay, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" (see Mueller-Vollmer 1992: 242ff.) clearly exemplified by means of his own program of demythologization the presuppositional cast of theological and textual studies. In the introductory paragraph to his essay he writes: "The question whether exegesis without presuppositions is possible must be answered affirmatively if "without presuppositions" means "without presupposing the results of exegesis." In this sense, exegesis without presuppositions is not only possible but demanded. In another sense, however, no exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a tabula rasa, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned" (Mueller-Vollmer 1992: 242).

² In order to grasp the particulars of Heidegger's influential notion of the fore-structure of understanding, his description of the three terms constituting this phenomenon—fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception—must be understood. Together, I suggest that they comprise an affinity with the idea of world view which influences interpretative activity. Here are his descriptions (1962:191). FORE-HAVING: "In every case this interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance*—in a *fore-having*. As the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood—a Being which understands. When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, *and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted.*" FORE-SIGHT: "In every case interpretation is grounded in *something we see in advance*—in a *fore-sight*. This fore-sight 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-having, and it does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted." FORE-CONCEPTION: "Anything understood which is held in our fore-having and towards which we set our sights 'foresightedly', becomes conceptualizable through the interpretation. In such an interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being. In either case, the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it, either with finality or with reservations; it is grounded in *something we grasp in advance*—in a *fore-conception*."

As Heidegger's discussion develops, he makes it clear that the fore-structure of understanding, which is active and influential in every act of interpretation, comes from Dasein's involvement in the world. This prior engagement in the world has equipped the interpreter with traditions, prejudices, outlooks, and concepts that are operative in any hermeneutic activity. When things are encountered, Dasein brings with it essential experience and commitments in life. These commitments, while they may be examined and known, nonetheless recede into the background in the interpretive process. This is the way interpretation works in average everydayness. As the following quotations will bear out, interpretation is not objective, but, in my own terms, is governed by the hermeneutical influence of Dasein's world view.¹

The ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of *a totality of involvements*. This totality need not be grasped explicitly by a thematic interpretation. Even if it has undergone such an interpretation, it recedes into an understanding which does not stand out from the background. And this is the very mode in which it is the essential foundation for everyday circumspective interpretation (Ibid.: 191).

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation (Ibid.: 190-91).

¹ I clearly recognize that Heidegger would not stand for this reference to Dasein's world view or world picture, for from his vantage point, world view and world picture are an Enlightenment construct. In his lecture, "The Age of the World Picture" (1977) he explains that to picture the world as object by a subject is the primary accomplishment of the modern world. The age of the world picture, for him was engendered by Cartesianism, and also by the demise of the Judeo-Christian tradition. As he put it, "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture" (134), and furthermore, "that the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subiectum* [subject] in the midst of that which is" (132). He says that the specific phrase world view itself illustrates the elevation of man as subject: "The fact that...the phrase world view asserts itself as the name for the position of man in the midst of all this, is proof of how decisively the world became picture as soon as man brought his life as *subiectum* into precedence over other centers of relationship" (134). This understanding of the idea of world view as an Enlightenment construct is itself rooted in Heidegger's own fore-structure of understanding as well as his own ontological/phenomenological world view, and as such, is too restrictive.

This ontological context in which Heidegger analyzes the interpretive event entails the historically conditioned dimension of understanding. It is not a neutral undertaking, but is one that is radically influenced by the worldviewish notion of a "totality of involvements" which lay the foundation for "everyday circumspective interpretation." Dasein's world view and totality of involvements from which come the fore-structure of understanding, shapes the interpreter's endeavors, and conditions the possibilities of projections in Dasein's hermeneutical experience.¹

Gadamer's notions of prejudice and horizon seem to function analogously, and are worthy of consideration as well.

Gadamer's notions of prejudice and horizon

As he tells the story in his *magnum opus Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1900- ?) was quite dissatisfied with the Enlightenment/Romantic strand of hermeneutic thought which drew its criteria from the Cartesian ideal of reflective self-consciousness, and prescribed rules to insure objectively valid interpretations. Conversely, Gadamer pro

¹ It is this phenomenon that has created the dilemma of the hermeneutical circle which seems to be a *circulus vitiosus*. Heidegger's own explanation of the difficulty, derived directly from his concept of fore-structure of understanding is explained in the following quote: "All interpretation, moreover, operates in the fore-structure.... Any interpretation which is to contribute to understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted. ... But if interpretation must in any case already operate in that which is understood, and if it must draw its nurture from this, how is it to bring any scientific results to maturity without moving in a circle, especially if, moreover, the understanding which is presupposed still operates within our common information about man and the world? (1962: 194). Heidegger is quick to point out that the circle is not just an orbit in which any kind of knowledge may move. It reflects much more than that: it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. "The 'circle' in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein—that is, in the understanding which interprets" (Ibid.: 195). Hence, the circle is not a vicious circle, or one just to be tolerated, or even extirpated if possible. If this is the case, then the act of interpretation has been totally misconceived. Rather, the circle itself creates for Dasein the "positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing" (Ibid.: 195). What is important is that one come at the circle appropriately. "But if we see this circle as a vicious one and look out for ways of avoiding it, even if we just 'sense' it as an inevitable imperfection, then the act of understanding has been misunderstood from the ground up. The assimilation of understanding and interpretation to a definite ideal of knowledge is not the issue here. Such an ideal is itself only a subspecies of understanding—a subspecies which has strayed into the legitimate task of grasping the present-at-hand in its essential unintelligibility. If the basic conditions which make interpretation possible are to be fulfilled, this must rather be done by not failing to recognize beforehand the essential conditions under which it can be performed. What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way (Ibid.: 194-95).

ceeded to develop his own ontologically based hermeneutics which was founded on phenomenological research, that of Edmund Husserl and especially Martin Heidegger. As far as Gadamer was concerned, Heidegger's advances over his predecessors were especially important. He writes:

Understanding is not a resigned ideal of human experience adopted in the old age of the spirit, as with Dilthey; nor is it, as with Husserl, a last methodological ideal of philosophy in contrast to the naivete of unreflecting life; it is, on the contrary, *the original form of the realization of Dasein*, which is being-in-the-world. Before any differentiation of understanding into the various directions of pragmatic or theoretical interest, understanding is Dasein's mode of being, insofar as it is potentiality-for-being and "possibility" (Ibid.: 259).¹

In this ontological/phenomenological light, the problems of hermeneutics become quite different and thus Gadamer devotes his own reflections to this new aspect of the hermeneutical problem, and starts "by following Heidegger" (Ibid.: 264).²

In the second section of Part II in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer proceeds to that part of his discussion which is of utmost concern in this paper. In this context which sets forth "the essential elements of a theory of hermeneutical experience" and elevates "the historicity of understanding to the status of a hermeneutical principle," the Heidelberg philosopher deals with the hermeneutical and world view related notions of

¹ In this same vein, Gadamer writes: "The concept of understanding is no longer a methodological concept, as with Droysen. Nor, as in Dilthey's attempt to provide a hermeneutical ground for the human sciences, is the process of understanding an inverse operation that simply traces backward life's tendency toward ideality. Understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself. ... Heidegger's radical ontological reflection was concerned to clarify this structure of Dasein through a 'transcendental analytic of Dasein'" (1993: 259-60).

² David E. Linge in his "Editor's Introduction" to Gadamer's *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1976: xlviii) writes: "Gadamer's work can be conceived as an attempt to work out the new starting point [the ontological significance of understanding] Heidegger provides.... Understanding is thrown, that is, situated by the past as a heritage of funded meanings that Dasein takes over from its community.... While the interpreter may free himself from this or that situation, he cannot free himself from his own facticity, from the *ontological* condition of always already having a finite temporal situation as horizon within which the beings he understands have their initial meaning for him."

prejudice and horizon. In what follows, I will seek to spell out the meaning of these basic concepts, and attempt to link them to world view concerns.

Prejudice: For Gadamer, the essence of the hermeneutical experience rests in the dialectical encounter between the prejudices of the interpreter and the text to be interpreted. The hermeneutical task becomes of itself a questioning of things, that of the fore-meanings brought to the text, and that of the meaning of the text brought to the interpreter. Hermeneutics consists of an active, dialectical interplay between text and interpreter, a conversation in which horizons fuse and meaning emerges. This interplay is brought out quite nicely in these words in which Gadamer is the most explicit about the dynamics created by the hermeneutical circle.

...a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither neutrality with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings (Ibid.: 269).¹

Gadamer asserts that texts are understood not *inspite of* tradition and prejudice, but rather *because of* their proper fore-projection in their interaction with the text. On the other hand, the fundamental thrust of the Enlightenment project in its quest for objectivity was the elimination of all prejudice. Responding to the dogmatic control of understanding advanced by the Church, the Enlightenment deemed all prejudices (i.e.,

¹ Weinsheimer offers these helpful comments to clarify Gadamer's approach: "Understanding is projection, and what is projected are expectations that precede the text. They "jump the gun," as it were, because they anticipate a meaning for the whole before arriving at it. What the interpreter projects in advance is what he understands already—that is, before beginning. ... But the meaning so projected is also projected as the text's possibility, something the text could mean; and if it does, he will have understood it. ... However, it is possible to begin by projecting in quite the wrong direction by projecting a sense inappropriate to the text. ... Objectivity in understanding consists not in the avoidance of preconception but its confirmation; and arbitrary, inappropriate preconceptions are characterized not by the fact that they are preconceptions but only by the fact that they do not work out (1985: 166).

all pre-judgments determined by tradition) because they were prejudices to be false. The only judgements admissible in the epistemological court were those stamped with the seal of approval by pure reason, and the objective scientific method. This is the famous equation of *truth with method* which Gadamer so adamantly opposes. Hence, he explicitly points out the Enlightenment's attempted overthrow of the notion of prejudice in favor of an imaginary neutrality.

The recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust. In light of this it appears that *historicism, despite its critique of rationalism and of natural law philosophy, is based on the modern Enlightenment and unwittingly shares its prejudices*. And there is one prejudice of the Enlightenment that defines its essence: the fundamental prejudice of the Enlightenment is the prejudice against prejudice itself, which denies tradition its power (Ibid.: 270).¹

Prejudice, then, even as the Enlightenment's own *prejudice* against prejudice itself shows, is unavoidable. But the Enlightenment's prejudice is quite detrimental to the entire hermeneutic enterprise, for it would deny tradition its central power and role, and thereby eliminate the interpretive process altogether. As Gadamer put it, "prejudice gives the hermeneutical problem its real thrust." For this reason, he found it not only necessary to rehabilitate the prejudice of authority and tradition, but also to make this the centerpiece of his hermeneutic reflections.²

¹ In deploying the Kantian premise, "Have the courage to make use of your own understanding," the Enlightenment critique of authority was directed primarily, as Gadamer points out, against the religious tradition of Christianity, that is, the Bible. The aim was to understand this and other traditions correctly, that is, rationally and without prejudice, for "true prejudices must still finally be justified by rational knowledge" (TM: 273). In the following quotation, Gadamer suggests that for the Enlightenment, the epistemological standard of reason, allegedly untrammelled by historical influences, was the sole and final test for all truth. "In general, the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason. Thus the written tradition of Scripture, like any other historical document, can claim no absolute validity; the possible truth of the tradition depends on the credibility that reason accords it. *It is not tradition but reason that constitutes the ultimate source of all authority*. ...this is the maxim with which the modern Enlightenment approaches tradition and which ultimately leads it to undertake historical research. It takes tradition as an object of critique, just as the natural sciences do with the evidence of the senses (1993: 272).

² The Gadamerian embrace of prejudice launched the debate with Jürgen Habermas who writes in his review of *Truth and Method*: "Gadamer's prejudice for the rights of prejudices certified by tradition denies the power of reflection. The latter proves itself, however, in being able to reject the claim of tradition. Reflection dissolves

The rehabilitation project begins by recognizing the necessity of removing the Enlightenment's prejudice so that the boundaries imposed on our consciousness by historical participation can be recognized. As he puts it, "The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness" (Ibid.: 276). Gadamer thus asks a series of penetrating rhetorical questions to show that the prejudices derived from authority and tradition are not necessarily incommensurate with freedom, and that unaffected rationality is impossible for humanity.

Does being situated within traditions really mean being subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways? If this is true, the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason exists for us only in concrete historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates (Ibid.: 276).

For Gadamer, the historical conditioning of reason applies to and affects its use in both the natural sciences and the human, historical disciplines. Reason is not master of itself; rather history is. Reason is not disconnected, disengaged, and detached from the vicissitudes of historical life. Conversely, reason is a radically situated and conditioned method, is influenced by tradition, and carries its own prejudices right into every act of "rationality." This means that the methodological and global demands of the Enlightenment were not only contradictory, but also entailed unrealistic expectations of historically embedded, traditional laden, and finite human beings. History always is prior to the person, and has radical impact on the development of human consciousness, or, I should say, world view. As Gadamer writes:

substantiality because it not only confirms, but also breaks up, dogmatic forces. Authority and knowledge to not converge" (Habermas 1970; from Ormiston and Schrift 1990: 237). For further discussion on the Gadamer/Habermas debate see Mendelson 1979: 44-73; Misgeld 1976: 164-83; Jay 1983: 86-110; McCarthy 1978; Ricoeur 1981: 63-100.

In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being* (Ibid.: 276-77).

This is a very important statement, especially in connecting Gadamer's notion of prejudice to world view theory: more important than a person's judgments are his pre-judgments; more important than his theories are pre-theoretical considerations; more important than one's suppositions are the presuppositions. It is the pre-judgments, pre-theoretical considerations, the presuppositions that constitute the historical reality of our being and makes us what we are. This is precisely the nature and power of world view.

At this point, Gadamer brings us to what he calls "the point of departure for the hermeneutical problem" (Ibid.: 277). Thus, Gadamer writes, "What appears to be a limiting prejudice from the viewpoint of the absolute self-construction of reason in fact belongs to historical reality itself. If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices" (Ibid.: 277).¹ What tradition or authority—religious or philosophical—that could be the source of "legitimate prejudices," of course, remains unspecified; but what is important is the fact of these prejudices, their historical genesis, their legitimacy, and their interpretative power is most important. What Young said of Dilthey's concept of world view applies with equal relevance to Gadamer's notion of prejudice, namely that "the historian's own *Weltanschauung* operates as a prejudice in his interpretation of historical objects..." (1990: 135).

Time and patience will fail me and the "Reeder" if I delve into other worthy themes that convey Gadamer's rich and seemingly inexhaustive hermeneutical

¹ Weinsheimer makes the helpful comment here that for Gadamer, "knowing and being are united here. We can know history because we are historical" (1985: 170).

thought.¹ In the interests of endurance, then, I will briefly reference his notion of horizon before I move on to the conclusion.

Horizon: Peters' definition of fundamental or ultimate presuppositions in his article "The Nature and Role of Presuppositions: An Inquiry into Contemporary Hermeneutics," probably did not have Gadamer's notion of horizon in mind when he penned it, but it does provide a good introduction to his concept that is central in his philosophy of understanding. He writes:

They [presuppositions] function to provide the basic framework or pre-understanding which make reflective understanding and articulated propositions possible. They refer us to our *fundamental vision of reality* and *the self-evident truths which are tacitly acknowledged in everything we comprehend and assert*. They can be pointed to as ostensibly present but cannot themselves be fully drawn up into propositional form. It is this character of standing in the background *like a horizon* that makes such a presupposition what it is (1974: 210, emphasis added).

A presuppositional-like horizon for Gadamer is part and parcel of what he called the hermeneutical situation, that is, "the situation which we find ourselves in with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand" (1993: 302). This situation, brought to the interpreter's attention by effective history, naturally imposes limits on the possibility of the interpreter's vision. "Hence," Gadamer writes, "essential to the concept of situation is the concept of 'horizon.' The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Ibid.). The history of the word horizon, which goes back to Nietzsche and Husserl, characterizes the connection

¹ Here I speak of his concept of belonging to a tradition: "Thus the meaning of 'belonging'—i.e., the element of tradition in our historical-hermeneutical activity—is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental, enabling prejudices" (295). Also to be cited here is his intellection of the principle of historically affected consciousness (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*): "the power of history over finite human consciousness." Finally, Gadamer's own concept of world view would make for a fruitful study, for the six places where he mentions it in *Truth and Methods*, he shows that he understood there to be a "historical worldview" (pp. 199, 341); an intimate connection between language and worldview (pp. 275, 442, 458), and the fact that aesthetics is a history of worldview, that is, a history of truth, and that the concept itself acquires its own special stamp only in the domain of aesthetics (p. 98).

between thought and determinacy and denotes how one's vision can be enhanced gradually. A person with no horizon is near-sighted and concentrates too closely on what is proximal. A person with an horizon is not limited in thought but rather by means of the horizon is able to gain perspective to see what is both far and near, small and great. There is also an intimate connection between horizon and prejudice for it would seem that the latter provides the contours of the former. As Gadamer explains, "...a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present... (Ibid.: 306).¹

From the fact that a horizon constitutes a vantage point in which an interpreter is located, and insofar as this vantage point is circumscribed by the interpreter's prejudices, and since that prejudices contribute to the interpreter's world view, then it may be concluded that horizon, so understood, serves as a helpful metaphor for world view.

The key question for Gadamer and his *Horizontlehre* is what role do they play in the interpretive process? One thing is for sure: there should be no attempt to seek to escape one's own horizon and leap empathetically, subjectively, or psychologically to the horizon of the object to be interpreted. This is the Enlightenment/Romantic version of hermeneutics, and it violates Gadamer's first order law of always being grounded in the singular historico-ontological situation. Furthermore, it is a scenario that implies two separate and distinct horizons, and as Gadamer queries, "Are there really two different horizons here—the horizon in which the person seeking to understand lives and the historical horizon within which he places himself?" The answer is no, for what actually characterizes the hermeneutical situation is a kind of "historical monism." Gadamer explains that "when our historical consciousness transposes itself into historical horizons, this does not entail passing into alien world unconnected in any way with our

¹ This quotation concludes with the line, "for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see." Prima facie, this seems to contradict Gadamer's earlier claim that horizon, while limiting vision, do provide perspective to see beyond.

own; instead, they together constitute one great horizon that moves from within and that, beyond the frontiers of the present, embraces the historical depths of our self-consciousness" (Ibid.: 304). Working out the hermenetical situation, then, means seeking to achieve the "fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves" (Ibid.: 306). In light of what has just been said, this terminology could be misleading. What happens is the coming together of a shared understanding of truth that is resident in the one great historical horizon the experience of which enriches and enlarges the interpreter's own horizon. In the fusion of horizons, prejudices are risked, tested, confirmed, or discarded. Learning from other forms of life thereby expands one's own self-understanding. It is in this dynamic process that understanding occurs.

Summary and Conclusion

With the completion of this exposition of the notion of horizon, the basis for the argument of this essay is now in place. Each thinker considered—Wilhelm Dilthey, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer—has made distinctive contributions to contemporary hermeneutics that sustain the fact that the epistemological and interpretive process in all areas of inquiry is truly a human and historical endeavor, one that is guided and governed by history, life-worlds, fore-structures, prejudices and horizons. These themes, which fall under and make a contribution to the rubric and theory of the presuppositionally defined world view, have also served to delimit the Enlightenment's methodological, scientific paradigm and program. The ancient Aristotelian insight that acknowledges the propriety of multiple approaches to and consequences from all sorts of human inquiry has, in its own unique way, been rediscovered in these postmodern days. Natural science is not the whole show. The positively prejudiced, hermeneutically oriented, and world view based nature of all epistemic activity opens the possibility of circumscribed though legitimate knowledge in all areas of human inquiry, including the natural and human sciences, and

perhaps even in religion.¹ This new postmodern openness and freedom testifies more faithfully to the wholistic nature of epistemic humanity that ultimate will reject all kinds of epistemological reductionism in its intense, unlimited pursuit truth in every area of human need, concern, and interest. As Aristotle also wisely affirmed "human beings by nature desire to know" (*Metaphysics*, Book I). And this desire to know was unlimited in range and scope.

The conclusion that may be drawn from all this is that the hermeneutically charged postmodern era is truly the age of the world view. If there is any merit in this argument, then a case can also be made that serious attention should be given to the history and theory of this singularly important, and yet mostly neglected concept. Such a study contains many fruitful possibilities, and it is one to which I hope to make a significant contribution.

¹ One of the most recent and much discussed developments in the area of religious epistemology and philosophy of religion has been the contention of the "reformed epistemologists" (especially Alvin Plantinga at Notre Dame) who are offering stringent critiques of Enlightenment foundationalism and evidentialism in its application to religious knowledge and are positing in its place the legitimacy of the notion of God as a properly basic and essentially presuppositional or world view belief. The attempted Gadamerian rehabilitation of the prejudices of authority and tradition cannot, except by prejudice, exclude the religious from reconsideration as a "legitimate prejudice" (1993: 277; for an account of Gadamer's own lingering protestant prejudice, see O'Collins 1977: 562). For a discussion of reformed epistemology, see Pojman 1987: 441ff; Geivett and Sweetman 1992: 133ff.

APPENDIX A:

DILTHEY'S CONCEPT OF WORLD VIEW AND THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

It is easy to see how many observers could assert that Dilthey found no rescue from the grip of relativism in his *Weltanschauunglehre*. As Rickman says, "It has become almost habitual to portray the theory of world views as the ultimate signal of Dilthey's grudging but somehow inevitable capitulation to relativism and skepticism" (1988: 334).

For Dilthey, the major problem of Western culture was the discovery of a means by which to establish a firm foundation for knowledge—especially in the area of the *Geisteswissenschaften*—which had been relativized by the fact of historical consciousness. His *Weltanschauunglehre* was an answer to this dilemma, and by it he felt he had succeeded in this project. Bulhof describes his alleged epistemological victory as follows (1980: 92).

Dilthey claimed to have overcome the moral scepticism caused by historical relativism by having restored reason to a new form of sovereignty over life. In accepting the philosophy of world views, reason is no longer fooled by life, so to speak, it no longer lets itself down by the realization of its limitations and impurity. Reason's present realization and acceptance of its conditionedness frees it to play with past philosophies and to use them for its own advantage.

While clearly recognizing the relativity of all thought systems, Dilthey suggested that insofar as each system, each world view, grew out of lived experience and was vitally connected with life, it had an encounter with and an understanding of reality that gave it an epistemological awareness of at least one corner of the universe. As reason itself, in some transcendental or "etic" (outside) way, surveyed the systems and their claims to truth, an avenue is opened to obtain bits of truth about the universe from these systems of thought.¹ Dilthey explains his method of overcoming relativism by means of his world view doctrine. As he said, "It is the task of the world view doctrine. . . in opposition to all relativism to present the relation of the human mind to the mystery of the world and life" (GS 5: 406). His position is developed in greater detail with these words quoted *in extensio*.

Every *Weltanschauung* is historically conditioned, and therefore limited, relative. A dreadful anarchy of thought seems to result from this. But the same historical consciousness, which has given rise to this absolute doubt, can also set limits to it. First of all: the *Weltanschauungen* have separated from one another according to an inner law. . . . These types of *Weltanschauung* maintain themselves side by side in the course of centuries. And then the second, the liberating thought:

¹ Hodges explains Dilthey's position with clarity (1969: 104-05): "Though no *Weltanschauung* is true in a sense which would make the others untrue, it does not follow that none of them are true in any degree at all. On the contrary, each one of them, while false as a theory, is true as a record of vision. It gives testimony of how the world can appear to a certain type of mind in certain conditions, and how such minds in such conditions can confront their world." The question here is, how can something which is false as a theory still be a true record of vision? And if it is only true as a recorded vision, but not as a theory, then what good is it as an alleged glimpse of reality?

the *Weltanschauungen* are grounded in the nature of the universe and the relation of the finite knowing mind to it. So each of them expresses one side of the universe within the limits of our thought. Each is herein true. But each is one-sided. It is not granted to us to see these sides all at once. The pure light of truth can be seen by us only in variously broken rays (GS 7: 222).

For Dilthey, the sovereignty of the mind as it surveyed systems of thought was the key component in the equation and quest for truth. "The last word of the mind," he wrote, "which has traversed through all of the world views is not the relativity of them all, but the sovereignty of the mind in relation to each single one of them, and also the positive consciousness of how, in the different forms of mental attitudes, the one reality of the world exists for us" (GS 5: 406).

Is the one reality of the world really apprehended by means of the mind's alleged sovereignty? The tone of Dilthey's writings would strongly suggest that the mind in no way can escape its historical condition to grasp even the broken rays of truth in any kind of objective, assurance producing way. I believe it is only by sleight of hand that Dilthey has mitigated the sovereignty of historicism—the idolatry of history—and transferred it somehow to the mind of man to grant him the capacity of knowing truth with certainty. He is still entrapped in the quicksands of time and history.¹

¹ Hodges does not believe that Dilthey is successful in overcoming relativism, and his criticism of Dilthey at this point is illuminating. He says, "Dilthey's philosophy is open in its own way to the criticism which Kierkegaard brought against that of Hegel—viz., that it is full of syntheses where life is full of choices" (1969: 105). On the other hand, see Rickman (1988: 334ff) for an attempt at defending Dilthey's quest to overcome relativism by means of his world view conceptions. Similarly, Karl Mannheim has suggested, rightly in Rickman's view, that "Dilthey's position is really a "relationism," not a relativism.

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