

Hermeneutics and Epistemology

A conflictual convergence

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ABSTRACT

In a collection of essays published in the 1970s under the title *Vernunft in die Zeit-
alter der Wissenschaft*, Gadamer confronts developments in analytical epistemology,
arguing about epistemology from a hermeneutical point of view. But the relationships
between the two traditions remain difficult. Paolo Parrini was among few who opened
a true dialogue, neither superficial nor formal; he considered the hermeneutical
tradition from an epistemological point of view, finding many connections with his
third view between metaphysical realism and strong relativism. This perspective,
theoretically dense and challenging, was expressed in two essays, entitled
Ermeneutica ed epistemologia (1998) and *Ermeneutica ed epistemologia 2.
Heidegger, Kant e la verità* (2011). Parrini focused on the concept of *Offenheit der
Erfahrung* in Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* and later on Heidegger's theory of
truth as *alètheia*. I would like to argue in my paper that original results of Parrini's
research confirm the fruitfulness of encounter between hermeneutics and episte-
mology; I tried at once to identify some friction points and theoretical constraints,
for further development in comparison, in the theory of language and in the theory
of history, on which Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics rests. The first tends to
eliminate any distance between experience and language; the second presents con-
flicting aspects about identity conditions of past events, investigated in history. To
become fully productive, the dialogue between epistemological and hermeneutical
traditions will be able to face a deep revision about these topics.

1. Epistemology seen from a hermeneutic perspective

In a series of essays, grouped in the 1970s under the title *Vernunft in die Zeit-
alter der Wissenschaft (Reason in the Age of Science)*, Gadamer attempted to
take stock of developments in epistemology, following the rupture occasioned

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by *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)*.¹ He reconsidered the evolution of the neo-empiricist currents, identifying an antidogmatic tendency. As such, a number of points for convergence emerged, sustained by an attention that had been absent from his 1960 magnum opus. In the essays of the 1970s we can distinguish an oscillation between two divergent theoretical lines of thought, revealing two ways to consider the status of the ‘objectifying’ sciences. On the one hand, science is a form of derived knowledge, yet legitimate if placed back in the hermeneutic context of its formation, so as to circumscribe the limit of its ideal for objectivity which cannot be extended to understanding the whole of human life. On the other, science is an irremediably alienating form of thought, the part and parcel of humanity’s general self-estrangement in a time of unchecked technological development; an estranged thinking devoted to the search for an objectivity that is intrinsically ‘false’, inherently mystifying, even when it is not extended to the symbolic world of human actions. To begin with, hermeneutic themes can be recognized in the development of the positive sciences, suggesting a project to lay a new foundation for all epistemology. Here are some of the aspects discussed by Gadamer:

- self-critique of the Vienna Circle, along fallibilistic and holistic lines: epistemic certainty does not depend on ‘the immediacy of sense perception or observation’, i.e., on the grounding role of the protocol statements, but rather on the ‘function of sentences within the totality of a given theory’; the reciprocal determination of whole and parts is a typical hermeneutic principle (RAS p.163, VZW p. 141). Scientific endeavours are open-ended, they do not achieve ‘certitude removed from all doubt’ insofar as ‘experience can refuse the anticipated confirmation’, (RAS p.163-164, VZW p. 142);
- the role of Kuhn’s theory of paradigms, decline of the notion of cumulative and unilinear progress of empirical knowledge and recognition of the epistemic weight of questioning (all research questions nature, it is not a mere receiver of objective data) (RAS p. 163, VZW p. 142). The text seems to discard the idea that empiricist currents are linked to a naive and abstract

¹ *Vernunft in Zeitalter der Wissenschaft*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1976, EN trans. *Reason in the Age of Science*, MIT Press, Boston, 1982, henceforth referred to respectively as VZW and RAS. For *Truth and Method* see Hans-Georg Gadamer *Gesammelte Werke - Bd. 1, Wahrheit und Methode*. - Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 1990 (henceforth WM), EN trans. *Truth and Method*, Sheed & Ward Ltd., London, 1975 and 1989 (henceforth TM).

notion of objectivity, fruit of the simple elimination of the subjective elements of knowledge (which seems to be taken for granted in *Truth and Method*).² Gadamer seems to concede somewhat to a more dynamic image of the natural sciences, no longer compromised by obsession with facts, forgetting oneself (understood as an impersonal and disinterested point of view);

- re-dimensioning of the primacy given to the descriptive function of language, stemming from a Wittgenstinian approach of linguistic games (pragmatic understanding of meanings, convergent with Heidegger's, science seemingly escapes an understanding of being that compels it to 'to leave no place unpossessed outside of itself' (RAS p.163, VZW p. 140);
- the fecundity of Popper's criterion of falsifiability: the trial-and-error method focuses on a general structure of reason, thus on practical reason as well, which, as it governs the critical acquisition of all purposes of action, transcends a merely instrumental dimension (that of efficiency of means/ends).

Thus, there seems to be fertile grounds for re-dimensioning the distance³ between two traditions. Yet, without analysing these recognitions (in turn also controversial), the openings are counterbalanced by a second theoretical line, anchored in the ontological framework of Gadamer's theory of understanding, directly derived from Heidegger. Heideggerian critique, Gadamer wrote, 'constituted the crucial breakthrough' (RAS p. 162) against the Husserl and neo-Kantian notion of consciousness (RAS p.162, VZW p. 140); its ontological approach reduces scientific objectivity to 'a derivative mode of human Dasein'

² For example, see TM 307 (WM 314): 'We showed that understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. *Understanding proves to be an event*'; or TM 469 (WM 479): 'The objectifying procedures of natural science and the concept of being in itself, which is intended in all knowledge, proved to be an abstraction' with respect to the original reference to the world and the entities of linguistic experience.

³ Franco Bianco (*Introduzione a Gadamer*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002, pp. 129-130) noted that the Preface to the third edition (1972) downplayed the truth-method dichotomy and recognised a 'methodical awareness' found in the human sciences. Nevertheless, its typical themes were confirmed: emphasis on the creativity of the scholar who interprets, rather than on conformity to a method; polemics against the hegemony of the natural sciences in the way we live.

(RAS p.162, VZW 139). This bolsters the denunciation of a ‘scientific self-misunderstanding’ of reason found in empiricist epistemological traditions and sustains the doubt that hermeneutic themes ‘are not subordinated to an instrumental ideal of knowledge’ (RAS p.165, VZW p. 144).

What we find, essentially, is a reiterated denunciation of the intrinsic limits of scientific thought as such, as an estranged thought, one that incorporates a project of technological control of things and humans, according to the form of rationality typical of the instrumental subject-object relationship. A project with an all-encompassing tendency to ‘homologate’ and objectify every manifestation of life (RAS pp. 14-15, 162-163, VZW 25, 140). Heidegger’s condemnation of calculative thinking (*die Wissenschaft denkt nicht*), an expression of modern subjectivism, dominated by the principle of self-consciousness, intertwines with frequent themes in *Truth and Method* regarding a dialectic, neo-Hegelian critique, of the process of humanity’s self-estrangement (*Selbstentfremdung*).⁴ Methods to dominate nature and society conceal a ‘desire for mastery’ (*Herrschaftswillen*) (RAS pp. 14-15, VZW p. 24). This project opens to us only that part of nature that can be isolated artificially and reproduced in their measurable and calculatable aspects. Modern science has transformed theory into an ‘instrumental concept’. With a double impoverishment, at both the cognitive and the practical levels. *Theory* has ‘lost its dignity’. Practice is tacked on to technique, science applied as an anonymous process, for which no one takes responsibility.⁵

⁴ Natural science reflects modern humanity’s general process of self-estrangement. This should be the key to understanding the ‘claim of being able to explain a fact completely through deriving all its conditions; through calculating it from the givenness of all its conditions; and through learning to produce it by artificial arrangement’, the ‘well-known ideal of natural scientific knowledge’ versus an interpretation as ‘no more than an approximation: only an attempt, plausible and fruitful, but clearly never definitive’ (RAS p. 105, VZW p. 55).

⁵ RAS p. 69, VZW p. 56. TM p. 342 (WM p. 460) Modern scientific theory no longer reflects the ‘visibly structured order of the heavens and the order of the world and of human society’. Practice was transformed into ‘the anonymous and all but unaccounted for [...] application of science’ (RAS p. 69, VZW p. 54). ‘In prescinding from the primarily experienceable and familiar totality of our world, [science] has been developed into a knowledge of manipulable relationships by means of isolating experimentation’ (RAS p. 70, VZW p.55), via abstraction and idealization, artifices reducing things to their calculatable and measurable aspects. What counts is not the model given in nature (by the craftsman for example) but ‘the cognitive ideal familiar to us from the knowledge of nature, where we understand a process only when we are able to reproduce it artificially’ cf. already TM pp. 366, WM p. 457). There is a ‘nexus between methodical

Estranged thinking involves: 1) the split between scientific language and the 'language of everyday consciousness' (RAS p. 12, VZW p. 21). Modern science 'does not provide a whole orientation to the world', nor the possibility to unify natural experience; it does not answer questions that matter the most about being, nothingness, consciousness, free will (RAS p. 144-145, VZW 116-117). These questions, however, find a place in the arts and in the human sciences, which stem from the metaphysical traditions (RAS p. 146, VZW p. 119); 2) Humanity's self-alienation, in virtue of manipulated needs 'bound up with a vicious circle of production and consumption' (RAS p. 12-13, VZW p. 22).⁶

It can be said that this line of thinking ties opening, in an epistemological sense, to a form of anti-scientism that is rigidly dualistic, compared to the relationship between the natural sciences and human sciences; the evolution of the hermeneutic paradigm does not alter its deep implantation. The specificity of the interpretative discipline can be asserted solely in the historical Diltheyan form of an irreducible dichotomy between explaining and understanding. The cultural dimension of human relations is clearly, ontologically, separated from that of natural causal relationships.⁷ These are the bases for reshaping the role of the humanistic field, focusing on the anonymous nature of knowledge, that we call objectivity (*die Anonymisierung der Erkenntnis, die wir Objektivität nennen*). In the social sciences, hermeneutics sparked the transition from the idea of social engineering to that of the social partner (*in den gesellschaftlichen Partner*). History's hermeneutic dimension lies in the constant mediation between past, present and future, not in the recognition of an objective progression (the course of the world, the way things happened); if anything, it unlocks the future. The cultural horizon in which we are immersed, with its *prejudices*, is not a context of objects to submit to the domination of science; rather, it

construction and technical production' and this alters the natural relationship between product and need. The first incites the second, so that using things produced technically means enjoying 'astonishing comforts' and powers 'by means of a primary renunciation of freedom in relation to one's own overall ability to act' (RAS pp. 71, VZW p. 57).

⁶ Cf. *Die Universalität des hermeneutischen Problems* in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 73 (2) (1966). To understand hermeneutics, one can start from 'two experiences of estrangement through detachment' (*zwei Verfremdungserfahrungen*) in two main facets of existence (p. 215), art and the historical past.

⁷ Of particular interest in this area is the essay *Kausalität in der Geschichte?* (1964) (Gesammelte Werke, Band IV, *Neuere Philosophie*, II, J:C:B: Mohr, Tübingen 1987, pp. 107-116.

connects what we are with the actual possibilities offered by tradition, with what can happen, starting from ourselves.⁸

Gadamer provides many examples of the effects of self-estrangement: the conformity of our economic and social life to criteria of a statistical nature (drawn from theoretical physics), the impact of new models for systematic self-regulation that supplanted the traditional models of mechanics (RAS p. 14, VZW p. 23). These methods to dominate nature and society conceal a ‘will for mastery’ (*Herrschaftswillen*) that generated various pathological expressions in late modernity: organised extermination, ‘war machines’ actioned by a ‘mere push of a button’, long-term planning that cancels freedom of decision, bureaucratisation of administrative authority (RAS p. 14-15, VZW p. 24). Moreover, we have not even mentioned other aspects, such as genetic manipulations and disease prevention aiming to remove the prospect of death from our horizon, the subjugation of the ‘natural foundations’ of humans on the pretext that science can find harmony between drives and consciousness, organise the economy, free the ‘formation of public opinion and conduct of war and peace’ from ‘emotional capriciousness’, and render history objective (RAS p. 147-148, VZW p. 121); all this with socio-cultural changes converging with a general effect of exonerating individual responsibility for action taken.

2. Hermeneutics seen from an epistemological perspective.

The theory of clashings.

These Gadamerian themes form a highly complex mosaic comprising spaces of convergence alongside obstacles and difficulties, for anyone who is interested in an unhampered comparison, and (too many) prejudices held by the hermeneutics tradition and epistemology. In addition to other factors for historical-contextual distance, the perspective we have just discussed already presents a conflictual framework. Nonetheless, this is not the sole angle to view the theme. Other voices can be heard, and I would like especially to mention that of Paolo Parrini, a point of view particularly authoritative and of great interest in virtue of his studies conducted. He moves from the symmetrical direction, that of an epistemology that meets the hermeneutics tradition. Parrini’s path, theoretically dense and challenging, was marked by two essays, entitled *Erme-*

⁸ See RAS p. 166-167, VZW p.145.

neutica ed epistemologia (1998) and *Ermeneutica ed epistemologia 2. Heidegger, Kant e la verità* (2011), the second written in the aim to articulate more clearly the perspective compared with others that radically differ'.⁹ It was an outlying position in the scenario of the 1990s, when the first essay appeared. Parrini himself noted (SI p.168) that, at least among epistemologists with an analytical background, there was relatively little interest in building bridges, cross over fences and barriers to identify true nuclei for comparison, concealed behind prejudiced reticence.

The essay *Ermeneutica ed Epistemologia* primarily concerned Habermas and Gadamer (with a slight nod to Ricoeur), identified as the standard bearers of an epistemological dualism largely founded in an epistemologically outdated image of experimental scientific practices in the natural sciences; surely one of the main reasons for misunderstanding between the analytical and continental traditions. This image ascribes to the natural sciences the tenet of freedom from subjective and valuative prejudices as the guarantee for scientific objectivity (SI p. 160); a notion shared by both 'scientists' and 'hermeneutists', to either accredit or discredit a method supposedly universal and applicable to the human sciences. Parrini criticised this characterization, basing himself on ideas acquired in the 'new philosophy of science'¹⁰ in the second half of the 20th century (in particular Mary Hesse's 1973 essay *In Defence of Objectivity*), on broad questions such as the relationship between theory and experience, the metaphorical nature of scientific language that cannot be completely formalized, the dependency of meanings on theory (SI pp.166-167). Thus, following Grünbaum, he proposes a severe critique of Habermas's positions, limited to the specific case of his interpretation of psychoanalysis, affected by significant conceptual misunderstandings about the notion of causality and the timelessness of natural laws.¹¹

⁹ The first essay appeared in *Paradigmi* n. 16, 1998, pp. 7-31, then in *Sapere e interpretare*, Guerini e associati, Milano, 2002, pp. 159-182 (henceforth as SI). The second essay, the fruit of relations forged with the University of Pittsburgh Center for Philosophy of Science, was published in English in 2010 and in Italian in *Il valore della verità*, Guerini e associati, Milano, where it was published in 2011, p. 29 (henceforth cited as VV).

¹⁰ This is reflected in H.I Brown's work: *Perception, Theory and Commitment. The new Philosophy of science*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977; a successful reconstruction of the waning of logical empiricism, based on an empiricist theory of perception.

¹¹ Parrini recalls Grünbaum's analysis of Habermasian misrepresentations of Freud: therapeutic reflection misunderstood as diluting rather than making use of the causal links between a neuro-

A different and much more constructive role was attributed to some of the arguments in *Wahrheit und Methode* on the notion of experience: whatever Gadamer said about the hermeneutic project, *making a significant reference to experience in general*, is confirmed in what at present is usually stated about the scientific project (SI p.168). Given the sequence of the two essays in question, we can say that the through line of the discourse focused on the Heidegger-Gadamer axis, leaving aside the facet of the theory of communicative action. The theoretical cores addressed are the epistemic structure of experience (first essay) and the nature of truth (second essay). In the thread of discussion emerged the more deep-seated motivations for Parrini's hermeneutical interests. Gadamer's hermeneutics are presented as an interesting crossroads to explore the crux of the relations between language, theory and experience, while the theory of truth as *alêtheia* in *Sein und Zeit* lays groundwork for a new, deeper theoretical layer of the comparison.

The 1998 essay, choosing not to analyse the field of truth, focused on analogies between experience of nature and the hermeneutic experience. To elucidate these analogies, Parrini considered it useful to highlight two general theoretical aspects of Gadamer's paradigm: the positive role of prejudices, linked to the concept of foreunderstanding (the mind is not a *tabula rasa*); the notion of the hermeneutic circle – understanding of the whole makes it possible to understand part of a text, while its global meaning is understood when moving through its parts. The criteria for correct interpretation is the harmony between the parts and the whole (SI p.167). The general similarity between interpretation of a text and an approach to natural phenomena is even more vivid when one takes into account the characteristics of the scientific undertaking according to the 'most recent epistemological views'. The most relevant grounds for convergence, from the epistemological point of view, are:

- epistemic relativism: theory of linguistic, theoretical and methodological-axiological presuppositions that render the encounter with nature possible;
- triadic structure of empirical control (hypothesis, experience, and background knowledge);

sis and its cause (SI pp. 162-3); and on the thesis of the non-historical and context-free character of the natural laws of the natural sciences (SI p. 164).

- theory of the structural conflict, of the ‘clashings’ between expectations and empirical data¹², emerging within a theory, but capable of modifying not only her *intra-systemic* beliefs but also her epistemic framework (SI p.169). Although Parrini’s Gadamer does not cut all the knots in this area, this seems to be the main stage where it all plays out, especially with respect to the relativistic or realistic implications implied by the theme; a litmus test of the epistemic strength of experience – in both experimental research and in interpretation, with reference to texts and events of the past.

Parrini refers to various significant passages in *Wahrheit und Methode*, underlining the structural opening nature of the hermeneutic experience, ever oriented ‘towards new experience’.¹³ History and ‘questions coming from the text’ alter the epistemic frameworks, that is, the orientation of the fore-conceptions (SI p.168). By means of this concept of experience, both the epistemological and hermeneutic traditions seem to refer naturally to the fallible and self-correctable nature of the processes described (cognitive or interpretative).¹⁴

¹² The expression *die Anstöße* (clashing) is inspired by *Truth and Method*: that which incites us to reflect, writes Gadamer, is in the experience of being pulled (*die Erfahrung des Anstoßes*), induced by the text either as not making sense (*daß er keinen Sinn ergibt*) or as incompatible with our expectations (*daß sein Sinn mit unserer Erwartung unvereinbar ist*) (TM p.270, WM p. 272). This requires an attitude of ‘listening’ (*vorbeizuhören*), of sensitivity to the otherness of the text (*für die Andersheit des Textes*). This is not related to objective neutrality (*sachliche Neutralität*), nor to self-forgetfulness *Selbstausslöschung*, but to an awareness of one’s own fore-meanings, ‘securing’ them to the object, according to Heidegger’s indication (TM pp.273) of keeping a theme of research safe (*zu sichern*, WM p.274) by founding it on the object.

¹³ The main texts that Parrini refers to are TM pp.314, 405, 407, WM pp. 252, 332, 334.

¹⁴ It is worthwhile mentioning the relation between neo-empiricism and criticism. It was the neo-empiricist movement that definitively received the anti-metaphysics requirements, in a convergence long underestimated by its historiography and its theoretical debate, and shrouded by the basic differences, consisting of the critique of synthetic a priori. Nonetheless, this difference made no dent in the critical stance. On the neo-positivist side, assuming the linguistic perspective (verification and analytical-synthetic distinction) barred metaphysics from the epistemological component of the critique. It is also true, however, that critics unfairly presented the neo-empiricist position as a phenomenist position, anchored in the idea of the mind being a *tabula rasa*. Indeed, the neo-empiricists did not deny the presence in consciousness of a priori elements, but they were understood only as linguistic elements and ‘historically changeable [...] conventions’ (P. Parrini, *Ontologia e epistemologia*, in *Architettura della conoscenza e ontologia*, directed by R. Lanfredini, Mimesis, Milano 2015, pp. 39-77, p. 50). This is a line dating back to the historical-theoretical reconstruction of the neo-positivist question: *Una filosofia sen-*

This approach is to be seen in the perspective opened by the relativistic outcomes of the linguistics turn and by the post-positivist turn in epistemology, which brought to the fore the impossibility of an access direct to things, to 'naked reality', to pieces of the 'uninterpreted' world. The motto 'no independent access to reality' is affirmed: our judgements are always mind-dependent and there is no such thing as a neutral standpoint. In essence, for Parrini, the theory of interpretation is an interesting outlook to sustain in a *third way* between metaphysical realism and radical relativism, which is the guiding line of his research: if our encounter with nature or with a text is always inevitably 'situated' or 'positioned', it is a vain attempt to claim to establish how things are in themselves, free of all epistemic condition of reference (SI p.170). This is enough to take out of play any correspondentist ideal, in the metaphysical sense of the term. At this level, 'convergence' between the two traditions is concrete, insofar as referring to a common counterpart: metaphysical realism and foundationalism. The results of processes of unlimited innovation, depending on the shift in the historical circumstances of the research, are not commensurable on the basis of a 'supposed definite interpretation' of the meaning of a text in itself (SI p.181). Neither can it be established which of our descriptions is closer or less close to the truth, that is, the sole true description of the things themselves (SI p.182).

This is certainly a key theoretical passage that is even more clearly confirmed in *Il valore della verità*. The role of experience, we read, cuts the points at both ends, it brings no grist to the mill of metaphysical realism: we cannot compare cognitive claims with things in themselves, non-conceptualized. However, neither can we leave the field open to radical relativism, insofar as it poses limits and conditions to our interpretative constructions. Epistemic relativism can be articulated and cadenced in levels, respecting the restrictions established by experience, in a relatively independent manner (VV p.214). We will see that it is not easy to have the two philosophical traditions maintain a dialogue at this register and compare them. Nor is it easy to recognise in Gadamer's theory this dynamic of hermeneutic experience.

Accordingly, the 1998 essay distinguishes three possible theoretical strategies in the face of problems posed by the perspectivist theory of knowledge. Each strategy corresponds to a different way of seeing the role of experience and epistemic values (objectivity, truth). The first strategy is that of *radical relativism* – which has been explored by various authors such as Rorty, Kuhn, Sapir (SI p.171) – whereby theoretical systems cannot be compared through objective, empirical or rational criteria. Science is an integrated part of a worldview, *Weltanschauung*, *Lebenswelt*.¹⁵ No autonomous role can be attributed to experience, which is completely shaped by linguistic-conceptual frameworks. Parrini was always quite firm in posing the problem characteristic of this strategy: whoever concludes, from these premisses, that truth itself is relative, will be unable to account for the fact that each and every cognitive and interpretative endeavour is characterized by an ‘anti-relativistic *tension* to attain a truth and an objectivity that are not epistemically conditioned’. It is also characterized by an aptitude for examining the validity of ‘points of view culturally, linguistically, socially and historically conditioned’ that governed the endeavour from the start (SI p.176).

The second position, which could be called *epistemic perspectivism*, recognizes the structural correlation between unavoidable subjective assumptions and the results of knowledge. However, unlike the above position, it accords a relative autonomy to experience, at least within a given system and its epistemic or interpretative framework (SI p.174). A certain distinction is introduced between language and experience; the latter is at least partially independent from subjective epistemic assumptions, which do not completely determine the field of cognitive possibilities. At least some of these possibilities arise from our experience with nature, as well as with texts. Parrini found elements of this position in Reichenbach, through the epistemological culture, and in Gadamer, through the hermeneutics perspective.

In his *The Philosophy of Space and Time*, Reichenbach had already focused on the role of suggestive components in scientific research methods: the objectivity of physical or geometrical judgement was instituted, establishing relations on the basis of certain criteria. Renouncing the pretext of absolute objectivity does not mean that results are arbitrary, rather that they depend on

¹⁵ Radical relativism obviously involves the notion of reality: reality itself is a subjective construction strictly dependent on historical, social and cultural factors that condition our conceptual frame of reference’ (SI p.171).

the parameters adopted. Reichenbach's thesis reveals the 'points of arbitrariness' in calculation conventions (SI p.174), without eliminating all criteria for cognitive objectivity.¹⁶ Likewise, for Gadamer (TM pp. 271, 355, for example), the role of prejudices is forcefully clarified as a condition for possibilities to understand the otherness of a text, its meaning and the truth it holds. For Parrini, these theses give shape to a substantially relativistic issue, one that is able to derive a maximum from the intratheoretical or intrasystemic role of experience, *given certain presumptions* (SI pp.174-5). They do not find the key to the question of the objectivity and validity of knowledge, of its ability to evolve by also calling into question conceptual formulas, accredited and authoritative epistemic frameworks among certain historical worldviews. As we have already seen, the critical point concerns the epistemic strength of the reference to experience, the ability of 'clashings' to alter epistemic frameworks, in addition to individual empirical or interpretative hypotheses. For example, it is not clear whether, in general, and Parrini as well, the relative autonomy of experience that Gadamer recognizes in interpretative practices would have the destabilizing strength to dethrone traditional linguistic-theoretical formulae (or whether they are not always 'tameable', in the slow and gradual evolution of tradition, with a function of 'confirmation', as the theological-legal models of *Truth and Method* seem to suggest).

The third strategy is a moderate form of epistemic relativism; it corresponds to Parrini's 'third way', that attempts to confront the question by combining two typical theoretical claims: a) taking into account the dynamic, horizontal and intermeshed tissue (here again we find Hesse) among the various empirical and linguistic-theoretical components of knowledge; b) extracting the notions of objectivity and truth in knowledge from the grip of radical relativism, and reformulating them in terms of regulative, non-metaphysical transcendence (SI p.176). In this perspective, the distinction, coming from Kant, must be maintained between formal and material dimensions, it is the true driving principle behind cognitive processes, seen as an activity of synthesis. The direct unattainability of phenomena does not force us into radical relativism. Indeed, in this way, the idea of a relative autonomy of experience, irreducible

¹⁶ *Philosophie der Raum-Zeit-Lehre*, (1928), in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2, Springer, Wiesbaden 1977. For the reference, see for example § 8, particularly pp. 57-58.

to the theoretical as well as the linguistic dimension, can be fully deployed and optimally used.

On the one hand it is necessary to maintain a certain value of unitary transsystemic transcendency in the basic epistemological notions of objectivity, truth and rationality. A value lightened by claims of realism and metaphysical correspondence. Truth and objectivity are regulative and formal notions, values 'that guide scientific and cognitive activity towards conceptual syntheses that grow increasingly richer in data, and become more articulated and more inclusive', indicating the correlated unitary ideal of a potentially infinite series of cognitive processes (SI p.178); 'it seems to be a game of force to conceive of truth and objectivity as empty transcendent regulative unitary ideals' (SI pp. 178,179). On the other hand, it is necessary to articulate more broadly the intermeshing of relationships between language, theory and experience, which no matter how nuanced and subtle they are, they are never a matter of static coincidence; knowledge is a moving fabric, in tension between opposing poles, which push it to 'transcend the initial conceptual systems' (SI p. 176).

We find in Parrini many themes that rule out a linguistic resolution that lacks traces remaining of experience, and this since the times of *Conoscenza e realtà*. It is essential to highlight the pragmatic and functional nature of distinctions between theory-observation, analytical-synthetic, a priori-a posteriori, and also to distance ourselves from the linguistic turn, distinguishing between sets of meanings and sets of beliefs/hypotheses. Many core aspects for our *perspective* emerge from the analysis of descriptive expressions with an extra-linguistic reference (how their use is something learned and how they function with respect to experience or other facets of symbolism). The discrepancy between language and experience is attested, among other things, by the role of relations of similarity (some are basic, through causal association between situations and expressions), and by the zones of interference that can be found among various theories.¹⁷ On this subject, the two essays on herme-

¹⁷ For these themes, see *Conoscenza e realtà*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1995, pp. 91 and following, based on the analyses of M. B. Hesse, *The Structure of Scientific Inference*, Macmillan, London and University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1974.

If an intersubjective descriptive language can become *unentrenched*, this happens because at least some predicates can be introduced through causal association with recognizable primitive similarities (pp. 92-3). In primitive recognition and classification, the angle for noticing the most obvious similarities is provided by physics and physiology, in other words, it is not explicit-

neutics and epistemology resume the distinction, of strategic importance, between empiric under-determination of theories – the conventionalist urge to enlarge the spectrum of theories to interpretative liberty (as the same available data fit into different theoretical hypotheses) – and theoretical over-determination of experience – the opposite urge, to restrict the spectrum of theoretical-interpretative possibilities (not all work with the available data).

Parrini starts from the conviction that, regardless of their explicit intentions, the regulative conception of truth and objectivity ‘can apply not only to usual cognitive activity, in particular scientific activity, by also to hermeneutic practices’ (SI p.180). On the empirical side, knowledge ‘is spawned neither by the pure and simple, conceptually uncontaminated, discovery of the characteristics of an object in itself, nor by the creation of the object known’ (SI p.180). On the hermeneutic side, the meaning of a text is not entirely built by its interpreter, but neither is it discovered as something completely pre-existing.¹⁸ On this theme as well, Parrini makes a comparison between Reichenbach and Gadamer. For the former, experience can render irrelevant whole sets of theoretical principles, such as Kant’s sphere of synthetic a priori, although without determining unambiguously which specific component is incompatible. In Gadamer, two significant aspects are confirmed: 1) the theme of

ly adopted, and this primary selection cannot be verbalized initially (pp.93-4). Certain expressions cannot be distinguished as theoretical or observational in virtue of particular logical or natural properties. However, gradually, the more firmly entrenched expressions assume an observative function, even if in an unstable form, reliant on the context. The holistic conception does not eliminate the possibility of an inter-theoretical ‘interference zone’ that can be relied on in order to exercise empirical checks between rival theories (p.102); also when constructive metaphorical extensions and rearrangements are admitted to the theories, there are relatively permanent common parts of speech, with respect to variation of other linguistic and theoretical components, which can be referred to for an empiric application and independent control.

¹⁸ SI pp. 176-177; but, for example see also SI p.42, that derives the principle, usually underestimated, from a suggestion by Reichenbach, which lays out an aspect of Duhem’s view by using ‘empiricist value’, which is often neglected with respect to the tendentially anti-empiricist principle of underdetermination. An empiric theory ‘may contain more determination than what experience can tolerate’. Although a group of data is not capable of determining ‘uniquely’ which of a theory’s components or assertions can be abandoned so as to restore coherency with the material observed, nonetheless the theory overall cannot be maintained or rendered compatible with these data. Among various theses, the Duhem-Quine Thesis of the holistic control of theories, generally emphasizes critique of the theory of crucial experiments: theories can be tested empirically as sets but never as isolated assertions. Experience does not decide on individual statements. Here again see Parrini, VV, pp.212-213.

the ‘tension between the presumptions of the interpretation and what emerges from the text’, at the origin of a process from which leads to the truth of the interpretation, which the philosopher describes as a dialogue directed toward the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) (SI p.181). The clash resulting from the experience calls for more or less profound changes both to specific hypotheses and to conceptual formulas (SI p.181); 2) the rejection of relativism, reiterated on several occasions. This is an aspect, Parrini writes, on which Gadamer is more explicit than Reichenbach, while he appears equally determined in freeing himself from the legacy of metaphysical realism.¹⁹ This is clear in his claims regarding the objectivity of the meaning of a text compared to the diversity and mutability of interpretations (SI p.175): a text always remains the same, even if understood in different manners (SI p.177). Its meaning transcends all the interpretations, but for Parrini it is not clear whether Gadamer sees this thesis in a regulative or metaphysical light (SI pp.178, 180).

Beyond these more specific aspects we can add that, while revealing the theoretical potential of the comparison, Parrini does not see it fully realized in the works of authors such as Gadamer and Reichenbach, for various reasons that have little to do with the philosophical style of the *third way* or with the regulative conception of epistemic values. Nevertheless, particularly in the case of Gadamer, Parrini seems to give credit to the idea that *Truth and Method* contains a strong notion of the openness of experience, at least potentially compatible with the thesis of its active trans-theoretical and trans-systemic function (SI p.181), as an element that impels interpretative practices beyond the bounds of a particular theoretical horizon and a particular worldview. The evaluation of Gadamer’s position, as it were, remains open. A large part of Parrini’s critical attention concerns an anti-realist preoccupation. Indeed, they apply to the theory of the meaning of the text which, in turn, should be light-

¹⁹ To be precise, the text (SI p. 175) stresses the fact that the ‘relativistic’ nature of Reichenbach’s and Gadamer’s positions should not be understood simplistically. For both philosophers, many theoretical elements are a counterweight to relativistic ‘compromises’. In the case of Reichenbach, it is a question of precise epistemological doctrine, such as the theory of empirically equivalent descriptions and the pragmatic justification for induction. In the case of Gadamer it is a question of motivations linked to extra-methodical conception of truth which, as we have seen, was not explored in the first essay on hermeneutics and epistemology.

ened as ‘regulative ideal that guarantees the unitarity of the reference of the multiple interpretations to a one and the same object’ (SI p.180).

From the material analysed so far, I think it has become sufficiently clear that the fixed points of the hermeneutics-epistemology convergence are primarily of a negative nature: 1) critique of the claim to call on a definitive or sole description of things themselves, as criteria for measuring the adequacy of various descriptions/interpretations; 2) rejection of any call for an intrinsic meaning of terms and statements, for a universal structure of all language or a sole narration that transcends the historical and epistemic conditions of knowledge. (SI p.182).

3. Reckoning with Heidegger. The hermeneutic theory of truth

We shall now look into ideas developed in the essay *Ermeneutica ed epistemologia 2*. The general layout for the comparison remains the same, and the attention for Gadamerian concept of experience is fully confirmed, with no noticeable changes for this aspect of the line of argument. The crisis of the neo-empiricist concept opened new scenarios, erasing many of the prejudices that had separated the paths of hermeneutic research and philosophy of science ‘of neopositivist derivation’.²⁰ Nevertheless, this time we find a major detour that aims to reckon with the Heideggerian theory of truth; it is a development that brings into play the physiognomy of the dialogue between two traditions, particularly when we bear in mind that Gadamer had always claimed adhesion to notions of truth such as *alètheia* (*Unverborgenheit, unhiddenness*).²¹

Therefore, we can now leave the theory of experience in the background. In the light of the philosophical scenario at the turn of our century (still tied to the results of the linguistic turn, at the crossroads of post-modernism, conversationalism, neo-pragmatism, neo-Aristotelianism, new naturalistic tendencies), Parrini tests his *third way* by means of a complex theo-

²⁰ See VV p. 199. The author confirms his thesis that the hermeneutic method and the scientific method can be seen as self-correctible processes, supported by beliefs temporarily admitted in order to test others in a ‘virtually infinite process’ that can change either specific hypotheses or presumptions, the abandon of which would alter the frame of reference (VV p.200).

²¹ Amidst the Heideggerian lexical archipelago, Parrini identified two secondary meanings for *alètheia* truth, as *primordial truth, disclosedness* (*Erschlossenheit*) and *ontic truth, uncoveredness* (*Entdecktheit*) (VV p. 200 and footnote 2).

retical reflexion which, as it deals with Heidegger, intervenes in the full field of recent debates on the nature of truth.²² The matter for discussion is provided by a close examination of Heidegger's positions in the 1920s, in particular by the dense and famous §44 of *Being and Time* which raised a large hurdle on the road to 'convergence' and certainly undermines harmony with the concept of hermeneutic experience, in terms of its value with respect, not only to specific hypotheses but also to the epistemic 'frames of reference'. It is interesting to note that Parrini's argumentative strategy entails a close comparison regarding the legacy of criticism and the exegesis of the Kantian doctrine of truth, on the subject of Heidegger's *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (Friedrich Cohen, Bonn, 1929). This is passage that directly touches on the relationship between ontology and epistemology. The main problem is at the heart of the hermeneutic paradigm, in the radicality with which it gives precedence to the ontological facet of truth, unlinking it from any genuine epistemological profile (the question of being precedes and absorbs the question of entity).²³

²² Parrini's most characteristic theses concern the nature of the concept of truth - primitive, undefinable, axiological, yet not emptied of descriptive content. Theses with explicitly Kantian matrices, in an analogy with the relationship between postulates of empiric thought and notions of reality. Saying that a statement is true adds nothing to its meaning, it does not concern the contents of the object. This said, as Frege also discerned, it would be mistaken to say that 'true' does not designate anything (VV nota 3, p. 11). Davidson also argued for the primitive, undefinable, nature of the notion of truth (VV pp.232-233). Those who sustain the theory of the performative (Austin, Strawson) or redundant (Ramsey, Horwich) nature of the predicate 'truth' are mistaken. The methodological features of simplicity, ability to unify and similar features have to do with knowing the truth; in Kantian terms, Parrini thinks that they do not define truth but 'illustrate its application', linking it to the field of possible experience (VV pp.216-217). The notion of truth is closely tied to that of justification, even though it does not coincide with it (VV p.15).

²³ Parrini's more recent positions on the theme confirm (with the necessary distinctions) the Kantian matrix of positive philosophy. See *Ontologia e epistemologia*, in *Architettura della conoscenza e ontologia*, edited by R. Lanfredini, Mimesis, Milano 2015, pp. 39-77. Heidegger as well, proposing a particular interpretation of the category of modality in Kant, addressed the epistemology-ontology relationship, through the distinction between ontic and ontological (p.73) and seemingly wished to reverse the order of priority (p.74), insofar as constitution of the object of an experience depends on a preliminary examination of the constitution of the being that manifests it and discloses as a natural entity. For Parrini, these themes seem to hide the role of the theory of knowledge, which analyses modality, reality and existence through the distinction between the matter and the form of knowledge, which is also decisive for the theory of truth, in that it enables the move from mere definition to the problem of the conditions for truth (precisely formal and material).

Heidegger placed his perspective at a 'level of generality and abstraction' so as to disregard the criterial dimension of truth found in Kant, as well as the related distinction between the form and matter of knowledge (VV p.209). The theory of truth as *alètheia* provides no response to the decisive question: how to distinguish between authentic and fictitious disclosures? Through which epistemic justifications and criteria? Neither does the theory provide other elements of epistemological relevance (for example, the problem of protocols, or that of theoretical hypotheses) (VV p.208). On this subject, Parrini recalls a note by Paul Ricoeur²⁴ on the radicality of a return to the 'sources' that underestimates all the 'derivative problems' (VV p.209, see also p. 206, footnote 5, which is even more explicit regarding the subordination of epistemology to ontology). Judgement and assertion belong to the non-original world of presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*); they are an 'extreme case' of *Auslegung* (VV p.201). In 1929 Heidegger argued that Kant did not overcome, but rather discovered the foundation of the correspondence concept of truth (VV p.203). The cue for this interpretation is in Kant's thesis that accepted the nominal definition of truth. However, Parrini wrote, Heidegger neglected to recall that, for Kant, the nominal definition offered no criteria for determining the truth of ontic assertions, judgements, or truths. In fact, he strove to identify the criterial aspect of truth, the 'epistemic conditions' necessary so that any judgement could be true; conditions that are not of a material, but formal nature, linked to consciousness in general. The point, wrote Parrini, is that Kant, similar to the 'Copernican revolution', goes beyond the correspondence theory of truth, 'both in a naive and (especially) realistic-metaphysical version' (VV p.206), and this despite understanding correspondence as a nominal definition of truth. *Being and Time* proposes a form of Direct Realism (obviously exposed to all sceptic objections): it simply states therein that in true judgement, the thing shows itself, unveils itself in its identity, '[that] which is put forward in the assertion (namely the entity itself) shows itself as that very same thing'. Parrini deemed the idea 'interesting' but incapable of solving the problems of the truth of judgements (which, for Kant, implies a meeting of intuition and concepts of the intellect, VV p.205). The concept of *unhiddenness* is not enough (VV p. 207): 'Heidegger's ontological analysis does not illuminate us on the criteria

²⁴ See P. Ricoeur, '*Logique herméneutique?*' in *Contemporary philosophy. A new survey*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/Boston/London, 1981, Vol. 1. pp. 179-223; in particular pp. 179-180.

that, at the ontical level, allows us to decide the truth [...] of our judgments', whether in the naturalistic field or in that of the interpretative hypotheses typical of the human sciences (VV p.208). This explains why the German philosopher oscillated between traces of metaphysical realism (reality of entities and their relationships independent from *Dasein*) and theses of the relativity of each truth to the being of being there (VV p.210).²⁵

There is another interesting implication of Parrini's analysis, which we can merely allude to here. If we bear in mind Robert Bandom's exegesis of *Being and Time*²⁶, the question is raised regarding scientific objectivity's relative autonomy from the practical aims of *Dasein* (VV 211). Here we find a decisive element in the careful analysis of the passage from readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*) to presence-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*), to scientific objectivity, which responds only indirectly to practical projects. The epistemic justification of descriptive assertions depends, according Parrini, 'among other factors, on elements of an empirical nature that are partially independent from the subjective presuppositions' (VV p.212), and 'empirical control depends on a datum that is relatively autonomous from our assumptions' (VV p.214).

4. Critical nodes

Let us try to retrace the path of the analysis proposed by Parrini. In the two essays, the comparison is articulated in three main sections that discuss three authors of the hermeneutic tradition: the first is Habermas, viewed from a highly specific angle, the epistemological status of depth psychology. The strong critical remarks give to this point a negative connotation.

The second concerns Gadamer. Parrini pays him considerable attention in view of the significance and potentiality of the concept of experience. Beyond any reservations and limits in the encounter with this author, this concept seems to be the point of greater and more promising convergence. Parrini

²⁵ In any case, Parrini's Heidegger seems to vacillate between a general condemnation of scientific objectivity – an ideal instrumentalized for domination, inapplicable, on the one hand, and on the other, the possibility for a new epistemic form of objectivity, in conformity with hermeneutic canons and depending on the primacy of the practical sphere, on significant daily practices – anthropologism (VV 213). A similar indecision can be found in Gadamer.

²⁶ In a 1983 essay, *Heidegger's categories in 'Being and time'*, in *The Monist*, Vol. 66, July 1983, pp. 387–409.

is interested in showing that the theoretical horizon of hermeneutics holds important parallels and points that intersect with developments among the best of the epistemological culture. The time of sterile contrasts had passed - despite specific positions of Gadamer on the trans-systemic function of experience, which did not seem clear to him, nor free of traces of metaphysical realism.

With the third author, one who is even more authoritative and theoretically cumbersome like Heidegger, Parrini sets his sights on the theory of truth. The discussion, quite dense, marks another instance of clear theoretical divergence. Highly important and divisive themes are involved: the ontology-epistemology relationship; theoretical autonomy and the 'thinking' nature of science; transversality of the cognitive rationality model, compared to the distinction between natural sciences and interpretative disciplines (interested in the symbolic contents of texts, events and traces of the past).

As a result, the convergence whose aspects we sought to reconstruct has had several different outcomes. It seems natural to wonder how far Parrini, in his positions, will pursue the impact of the critique to Heideggerian hermeneutics. It is difficult, in our case, to limit the scope of his arguments solely to Heidegger, given that Gadamer has always confirmed explicitly his loyalty to a version of the theory of truth as *alètheia* which, in a nod to a well-known Habermasian term, we could define as 'urbanised' (*urbanisiert*). This, in turn, depends on an idea of language that is not at peace with the recognition that experience has a genuine cognitive role, that is relatively autonomous, and functions in similar modes in the different fields of knowledge; at the same time, it is in tension with the stated anti-relativistic option.

The framework of Gadamer's work is highly composite, not uniform, charged with unresolved tensions that do not form a systematic recognition of the specific cognitive possibilities of experience, in so far as they cannot be reduced to those of their encompassing epistemic, linguistic and conceptual frames. This complexity, in particular, conditions the value placed on the critical potential of the 'clashings' compared to any a priori structure or transmitted preunderstanding. The epistemologically innovative cues are counterbalanced by the weight assumed in *Truth and Method* by models of a theological and aesthetic origin, characterized by rules of validity and reasonableness that differ somewhat from those of a scientific endeavour empirically controlled. In the following pages I will attempt to show that the hermeneutic theory of experience largely depends on ontological and linguistic presumptions that underpin the theory of truth as *alètheia*, and it has inherited their difficulties. I will focus

on texts relating to the language–experience relation, and to identifying the objects of interpretation (texts or past events).

a) Regarding the language–experience relationship

The Gadamer of *Truth and Method* emphasized how language and experience were intertwined in the world, without seeing therein an element of perspective closure: ‘the verbal world in which we live is not a barrier that prevents knowledge of being-in-itself’. Someone who has grown up in a certain linguistic and cultural tradition sees the world ‘in a different way from those who belong to other traditions’. The historical worlds are different, both among themselves and compared to the present world, but each is always a ‘linguistically constituted’ human world, ‘always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its own world picture and is accordingly available to others’ (TM 444, WM 451). And this, as it were, is the Gadamer that Parrini so rightly leverages. The use of the concept of the *world in itself* becomes problematic (being external to language it cannot be a decisive criterium for developing a world view). In any language experience is an extensible and perfectible process, one that is self-correcting, a situated expansion that is never relative in the sense of being opposed to a ‘right view from some possible position outside the human, linguistic world could discover it in its being-in-itself’ (TM 444, WM 451).

On the other hand, it should be noted that, in *Truth and Method*, this major insight goes hand in hand with another of a quite different, if not opposite, significance, dating back to an interpretation of Humboldt through the lens of *Being and Time*: Humboldt taught us to see each language as a particular world view (TM 440; WM 444). This Humboldtian thread in *Truth and Method*, with its accents on the transcendent and constitutive nature of language, tends to reduce or neutralise the gap between language and experience. In some texts the linguistic form seems to determine the entire experience. Gadamer assimilates in depth the theory of truth as *alètheia*, which, with his characteristic oscillation between ontology and epistemology, nourishes the idea of language as *Mittel*, that is, not an instrument but, a *medium* capable of structuring speakers’ experience and interaction. This refers to questions of relativism and the identity of objects/events, explored by interpretative practices.

Various typical themes can be found:

1. absoluteness of the linguistic experience. In the hermeneutic experience, the linguistic form cannot be separated from the contents it transmits. In *Truth and Method*, we find quite strong statements that are not in easy harmony with the theory of ‘clashings’ discussed above, and they rather seem to imply a traceless coincidence between the world and language. There is no world without language, that is not a specifically human faculty: ‘language maintains a kind of independent life vis-a-vis the individual member of a linguistic community; and as he grows into it, it introduces him to a particular orientation and relationship to the world’; ‘the world is not different from the views in which it presents itself’; ‘Verbal experience of the world is “absolute” ‘ (*Die sprachliche Welterfahrung ist ‘absolut’*), ‘embraces all being-in-itself’ (*alles Ansichsein umfaßt*), ‘is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing’. From language as a medium ‘our whole experience of the world, and especially hermeneutical experience, unfolds’.²⁷ What takes shape is a thesis that may be called that of the intranscendability of language (with traces of linguistic determinism), inclined to explain change and interpretative innovation, solely in term of conceptual changes, and definitely not underpinned by an analytical clarification of the role of experience.
2. metaphysics of *belonging* (*Zugehörigkeit*). This position is rich in links with the theory of truth as *alètheia*. It is worthwhile returning to the presumption of antique or medieval thought whereby, Gadamer writes, the Spirit and the world ‘belong originally to each other. The relationship is primary’ (*Das Verhältnis ist das primäre*). There is a transcendental relationship between being and truth, a common origin for language and being; a coordination between man and world (*die alte Zuordnung von Mensch und Welt*), in a sort of pre-established harmony, a metaphysical-ontological guarantee for the relation between words and things. The instrumental conception of language must be abandoned. Language is the *medium* where ‘I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together’. Gadamer mixes classical metaphysics and the Hegelian dialectic so as to illustrate the characteristics of truth: processuality, the ability to reveal itself and ‘impose itself’, its irreducibility to the initiatives of the interpreting subject. In this perspective, it is not worthwhile clarifying

²⁷ Cfr. TM 440, WM 445; TM 447, TM 443-447, WM 453-4; TM 453, WM 461

epistemic procedures. Rather than the priority of ontology, we are dealing with the futility of the epistemological dimension of the problem: the truth of an object manifests itself. It is the content itself that acts in experience, revealed in a relatively independent mode from linguistic practices and interactions among speakers. This is an anti-humanistic theme derived by Heidegger and inspired by recognition of the authority of tradition. Language is the being of experience, in a manner radically diverse from methodical-scientific experience. In language the thing itself develops an activity that, at the same time, 'is a passion' (*Erleiden*). Gadamer writes: 'The articulation of the logos brings the structure of being into language, and this coming into language is, for Greek thought, nothing other than the presencing of the being itself, its *aletheia*'.²⁸ In this way, the metaphysics of belonging establishes the ontological scope of the word, reinforcing the predominance of the linguistic factor in the extra-methodical experience of *Verstehen*;

3. structurally linguistic nature of cultural transmission and listening. The theory of understanding is interlinked with a particular idea of tradition, of a gradualist-conservative tendency, hinging on the overwhelming force of language in relation to its speakers. In the human sciences the essence of the hermeneutic experience is in the linguistic nature of tradition, which transmits a truth to the interpreter, involving him first of all in a position of listening (*Hören*); the tradition questions and does not leave 'freedom to select and reject'. Hearing is something that cannot be refused, unlike seeing (by averting the gaze). Language *speaks* us, rather than we who speak it. Whoever is *inside* a tradition 'must listen to what reaches him from [there]'.²⁹ Hearing, which is necessary to language, does not open the way solely to a specific field, it 'is an avenue to the whole because it is able to listen to the logos'. This adds the dimension of depth (*Tiefendimension*),

²⁸ Cfr. TM 454-455, WM 463; TM 455, WM 462-463; TM 460, WM 469; TM 469, WM 478; TM 453, WM 461; TM 460, WM 469. Naturally, for Gadamer the anti-foundationalist prejudice remains: the language that things speak 'is not the logos ousias, and it is not fulfilled in the self-contemplation of an infinite intellect' (TM 471, WM 480).

²⁹ Linguistic mastery is not the result of 'knowing choices'; 'it is literally more correct to say that language speaks us, rather than that we speak it' (*ist es buchstäblich richtiger zu sagen, daß die Sprache uns spricht, als daß wir sie sprechen.*).

Language represents the genuine hermeneutic event, consisting 'in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition' (TM 459, WM 467).

that of words from the past that reach us present life. The hermeneutic event, its linguistic occurrence ‘is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself.’³⁰

Gadamer’s position thus represents a difficult balancing act between, on the one hand, the thesis of the integral absoluteness of the linguistic experience in the world; on the other, the recognition of the opening and innovative force of experience (the ‘clashings’ of intuition). The world is never the object of language: ‘We cannot see a linguistic world from above’, ‘there is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object’; while ‘the object of knowledge and statements is always already enclosed within the world horizon of language’.³¹ Although Gadamer identifies the innovative role of insight, he does not analyse the ways in which this process of enrichment can come about, considering that experience is always inseparable from linguistic forms, to the very point of coincidence between the world and language. It is not clear how conceptual frameworks and formulas can be criticized and changed, in the hermeneutic experience and even less so in a form that can be assimilated to that of scientific knowledge.

b) Regarding the identity of objects of the human sciences

The ambivalence of the hermeneutic theory of experience is reflected in a highly delicate item for analysing the Gadamerian denial of radical relativism: the question of the identity of the objects of interpretation (texts or events passed down through history). This is an issue that takes shape primarily in relation to the theme of historical knowledge. Gadamer was aware of the emerging problem of interpretative perspectivism. Indeed, he recognized ‘the tension that exists between the identity of the common object and the changing situation in which it must be understood’. A text, for example, ‘must be understood, every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way’ (TM 307-308, WM 314). His analyses seemed to move between the two poles of this tension, leading to two different theoretical outcomes. In the pages of *Truth and Method* we can find texts supporting each one, without a clear resolution of the discordance.

³⁰ Cfr. TM 458, WM 466: *ist das Hören ein Weg zum Ganzen*; TM 459, WM 467; TM 459, WM 467; VM 470, WM 479.

³¹ Cfr. TM 447, WM 454; TM 449, WM 456.

As we have already seen, interpretative pluralism raises two types of problems: regarding the objectivity of the meaning of a text or traces of the past; but also the problem of reference to general expressions used by historians and, in parallel, to the ontology of historiographic entities involved in events having a vast scale, with undetermined borders (French Revolution, Renaissance, crisis of Athenian democracy, and so on).³² According to a widespread idea, shared by Gadamer, historiography, more easily than the ‘hard’ sciences, can explore among a wide variety of standpoints and angles on past events, in virtue of the greater complexity in the variables of the phenomena under study, compounded by their typical symbolic dimension. The process of understanding (texts or events) is of a highly selective and situated nature that arises from the interpreter’s being part of a certain tradition.

We shall start from texts that present what could be called a ‘reassuring’ interpretation of historiographic perspectivism. From this angle, hermeneutic pluralism is explained by referring to the multiple aspects of a past reality under study. Gadamer stresses the versatility of historical phenomena, which evolve over time, revealing various facets of their identity: ‘the subject presents different aspects of itself at different times or from different standpoints’ (*daß es verschiedene Aspekte sind, in denen sich die Sache zu verschiedenen Zeiten oder von verschiedenem Standort*). These aspects ‘do not simply cancel one another out as research proceeds’ (*diese Aspekte sich nicht einfach in der Kontinuität fortschreitender Forschung aufheben*). In these terms we would be dealing with a form of pluralism that is harmless for common intuitions, which presupposes but does not dissolve the identity of the object. Simply we view past events from standpoints also culturally different, but not incompatible: they are nevertheless different versions *of the same object*. Historical tradition must be seen ‘as something always in the process of being defined by the course of events’, which does not call into question the stability of the references. Poetic and philosophical texts are inexhaustible objects whose meaning becomes understandable: ‘it is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material’. Each re-actualisation can be recognised ‘as a

³² On the subject of these concepts, defined as *colligatory concepts*, see the interesting contribution by the British philosopher William H. Walsh. His position sparked a refined debate on the philosophy of history. Cfr. William H. Walsh, *Colligatory concepts in history*, in Patrick L. Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1974, pp. 127-144.

historical potential of what is understood' (*eine geschichtliche Möglichkeit des Verstandenen*), not as one that is arbitrary or imposed on the object from the outside, but as one that resides in the spectrum of possible 'interpretations'. On one side, we know that our descendants will interpret 'will understand in a different way' (*andere immer anders verstehen werden*). On the other side, it is clear that 'it remains the same work' (*dass es dasselbe Werk bleibt*), 'with the same fullness of meaning' (*dessen Sinnfülle*) 'in the change of interpretations' (*im Wandel des Verstehens*). It consists of the 'same history' (*es dieselbe Geschichte ist*); as it comes about, new aspects emerge regarding the importance of what has been passed on: 'yet it is equally indubitable that it remains the same work whose fullness of meaning is realized in the changing process of understanding, just as it is the same history whose meaning is constantly in the process of being defined'³³.

But the case is not closed. This theme (potentially 'realist') fades before the dualistic assumption that underpins Gadamer's 'anti-methodology' position: 'Obviously, in the human sciences we cannot speak of an object of research in the same sense as in the natural sciences, where research penetrates more and more deeply into nature' (TM 285). The hermeneutic paradigm eclipses the naïve schema of history-as-research, with its model of gradual 'expansion' and 'deepening' (*Schema der Erweiterung und des Eindringens*, WM 290) 'as an expansion or penetration into new fields or material' (TM 286). In this manner, interpretative perspectivism assumes a more radical significance: 'in the human sciences the particular research questions concerning tradition that we are interested in pursuing are motivated in a special way by the present and its interests'. In the forefront we find a strong, Heideggerian, sense of historicity of the same historical search, which 'is carried along by the historical movement of life itself and cannot be understood teleologically', on the basis of the object to which it refers; however, 'such an "object in itself" clearly does not exist at all' (*Ein solcher >Gegenstand< an sich existiert offenbar überhaupt nicht*) (TM 285, WM 289). The innovative nature of historical interpretation does not depend on the multiplicity of aspects of the same complex object, but rather on the lack of a similar objective reference, independent and in itself well-determined. For this reason, in the physiology of modern historic research, we can hear 'a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is

³³ For the quotes in this paragraph, see TM 285, WM 289; TM 366, WM 379.

heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist' (TM 285; *eine neue Stimme laut wird, in der die Vergangenheit widerklingt*, WM 289). Hermeneutic terminology tacitly moves between the epistemic and the ontological level; Gadamer writes that the past is truly alone in the 'multiplicity of voices' (*eine Vielzahl von Stimmen*) produced by historiography. Later, he states it even more strongly: the historical object – conceived on the naturalistic model of a complete object in itself, to be approached gradually – is nothing more than a phantom (*ein Phantom*). In this perspective, even the 'meaning' of the trace of the past is something that is fleeting, mutable, ever-changing, without any definite form: 'The significance of an event or the meaning of a text—is not a fixed object existing in itself, which we have simply to establish' (TM 470, WM 479). In other words, what the historian seeks is not an object-*Gegenstand*, but a relationship (*ein Verhältnis*), an interweaving between the past reality and the interpreter's present situation, conditioned by interests that are not purely analytical and theoretical (TM 299, WM 305). Understanding has nothing to do with an object that exists in itself (*an sich seienden Gegenstand*), available, in a second instance, to subjective access. Rather, it relates to contents that can only be understood through mediation (*Vermittlung*) between past and present, which identifies relationships more than objects. The result of this interweaving is not arbitrary, because the interpreter is included in the process and invested with 'consequences', of the changes to what is interpreted (TM 325, WM 334). This way of understanding the relationship between past and present involves an epistemic primacy of the relationship between the interpreter and the present situation, subordinating the element of cognitive autonomy and thus the role of methodological techniques for inter-subjective control of the frame of reference. To this, can be added the idea of an infinite interpretative process, non-linear and 'gradual', structurally open, not anchored in the ideal of an independent unitarian totality³⁴. The theme of the past's plasticity, opening and indeterminate nature, which expects to be understood in a creative manner on the basis of the interpreter's present, from

³⁴The anti-subjectivist value of 'temporal distance' (*der Zeitenabstand*) is multifaceted. One typical effect can be seen in the impossibility to consider an end to 'the discovery of the true meaning of a text or a work of art'. The distance is in constant movement and extension (*Ausweitung*), the process is infinite (*unendlicher Prozeß*), open to new sources of understanding (*neue Quellen des Verständnisses*), with the capacity to reveal unsuspected elements of meaning (*ungeahnte Sinnbezüge offenbaren*) (TM 298, WM 303).

his co-belonging to a set that is under study, is evoked in the suggestive image of a horizon in movement, often cited in *Truth and Method*³⁵.

The hermeneutic argument is based on the intuitive difference between the symbolic entity and the stability of natural perceptible objects, but such a clear contrast faces various problems. It is not certain that natural objects and events do not influence the field of interpretation, even if only as physical vehicles for the symbolic dimension. Yet, even more so, even in the hypothesis that a dynamic ontology of relationships is better adapted to the historical field, denying historical relevance to the existence of identifiable individual entities, Gadamer's thesis appears to lead to a relativistic outcome. On these bases, no one interpretation is better or less controlled than others. The interpretations all differ from one another, with no possibility to refer them to one and the same object or phenomenon, not even in the lighter sense of Parinian empirical realism. The truth of the interpretation is simply relative to the interpretative framework adopted and to the linguistic force of the tradition that nourished it, and, along this theoretical line, without clearly focusing on the autonomy of the experience and of the object (also in the sense of Emilio Betti)³⁶. Undoubtedly, for Gadamer, the meaning of a text transcends author's intention, and understanding it is never merely reproductive, but is also productive. Here we have an increment, which is nevertheless not 'better' understanding (*Besserverstehen*), but always understanding in a different way (*anders verstehen*) (TM 296; WM 302). The true point of these texts is not only to challenge the possibility of 'better' interpretations, but also to deny that this would be the aim in art, history, law or theology. The assessment proposed in an old essay that viewed hermeneutics through the eyes of Antiquity still seems appropriate. Gadamer is fundamentally unresolved between limiting the spectrum of interpretations or else leaving it totally open, composed of infinite possibilities, all equivalent, with no operative criteria for distinction. Either all is false – since the text is an ongoing plot, incomplete and without an interpreter,

³⁵ The idea of a 'closed horizon' (*der geschlossene Horizont*) that delimits a civilisation is an abstraction. We are inside a horizon that moves as we move: 'Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion' (TM 303; WM 309).

³⁶ I think that Emilio Betti's objections were well-founded, in a strictly hermeneutic sense, in *L'ermeneutica come metodica generale delle scienze dello spirito*, Tab edizioni, Roma, 2022, Ed. V. Busacchi, pp. 110-122.

potentially containing an infinity of interpretations; or all is true – as the text is one and the same, but with an infinity of contexts for its interpretation, occasions, thus perspectives that involve it, without having any points of incompatibility that need to be object of a choice.³⁷ In my view, this oscillation is the vital note of a philosophy extraordinarily rich and complex. Here we have concentrated on a thread that is specific, consistent and quite influential, but only a small facet of Gadamer's thought, which, as we have seen, co-exists with other theoretical paths (including most certainly the opening to experience and the anti-relativist commitment).

Conclusions

Together, these themes show that the notion of hermeneutic experience, in *Truth and Method*, is not always anchored in the element of tension between intuition and language; they also show that it maintains forms of historiographical pluralism that entail a few concessions to radical relativism. Both the traces of linguistic determinism and the theory of truth as *alètheia* expose Gadamer's hermeneutics to an oscillation between constructivist (the object-event is invested with an identity that is internal to certain theories and interpretations) and anti-constructivist themes (the object and the truth express themselves in language in virtue of an original coordination between the mind and the world), that fail to find a point of balance. This clearly illustrates the influential role played by the theological and legal origins of the theory of interpretation. Gadamer himself, following a first part devoted to the aesthetic origins, stated this decisive role in Part II section 2 (Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience): 'then we have the task of redefining the hermeneutics of the human sciences in terms of legal and theological hermeneutics' (TM 309, WM 316).³⁸

³⁷ Cfr. G. Cambiano, *Il classicismo animistico di Gadamer*, p. 260 Belfagor n. 3 1985). In a nutshell, Gadamer's position is beyond that of a problem of the truth or correctness of an interpretation, in a cognitive sense. This could possibly work in the aesthetic models he proposes, but it would not function in history or philology, or only at a high cost, as in *Truth and Method*, in terms of the validity/objectivity of an interpretation.

³⁸ Why 'legal and theological hermeneutics are the true model? To interpret the law's will or the promises of God is clearly not a form of domination [Herrschaft], but of service [Dienst]'. The service to 'what is considered valid [*gelten*]', functional for its 'application' in relation to its actual context 'bridg[ing] the temporal distance that separates the interpreter from the text' (TM

At this point, the relationship between the hermeneutic and epistemological traditions can be compared to a confluence between two thoroughfares intersecting at several levels; its crossings become increasingly difficult, and the passageways narrow and begin to wind as one proceeds to lay the positive grounds of the path, moving beyond the common anti-foundationalist platform. Multiple points of divergence emerge when one attempts to find a precise definition for the epistemic role of experience and the notions of objectivity and truth, specify the critique of relativism or even reposition the various models of cognitive rationality. As we have seen, here lies the difficult passage to a constructive comparison – the *pars construens* – between the hermeneutic vocabulary and that of epistemology. To bring the convergence beyond the limits of *pars destruens*, I feel that several significant theoretical changes are needed in both traditions that Paolo Parrini contrasted.

On the epistemological side, a strategic adjustment seems to be needed with respect to the typical question of the interpretative disciplines. In particular, I think that specific and systematic attention must be given to the symbolic dimension of historical-cultural phenomena; to work tools that bring into play types of experience that are unlike those of the empiric-perceptive type, with their relatively unchanging structures. All the analogies and convergences between empiric-based and hermeneutic-based processes must concretely take into account the difference between experience with texts and experience with natural phenomena. There is an intuitive gap between understanding the dynamics of billiard balls or elementary particles and grasping the significance of a historical event – crossing the Rubicon, the battle of Marathon (two examples appearing frequently in literature) or deciphering the meaning of a poetic text. The paradigms of the epistemological culture do not seem to have taken this difference adequately into account. In this perspective, I consider it extremely interesting and crucial to explore in depth a line of research proposed by Paolo Parrini, based on the evolution of models of cognitive rationality, which can help redesign the traditional fora of debate on the specificity of the human sciences and the interpretative disciplines. We should take full advantage of the insight gained, highlighting the transversal nature of ‘reason’ with respect to the tasks of the empirical sciences and the work of interpretative disciplines. A

310) (362-363). The interpretation-historiography task becomes equated, without many distinctions, to a contemporary cultural application, with ethical, political, legal, aesthetical, religious objectives.

particularly significant example of this development can be found precisely in the final pages of *Ermeneutica ed epistemologia 2*, where Parrini states his position on the rationality of knowledge in typically humanist areas such as ethics, law, interpreting works of art, but devotes little space to historical research.³⁹ The analysis moves from the distinction between logical-calculating rationality and that of ‘judging’ – of Kantian ascendancy – or ‘phronesis’ – with Aristotelian ascendancy. Both converge in a new, broader, concept of rational knowledge. Parrini suggests that both types of rationality, calculistic and reflective (not formalizable in a system of principles abstractly formulable), are at work in all fields, not only at times of revolutionary crisis or rupture of normal paradigms; furthermore, they are at work transversally in all fields of knowledge. In the *third way*, the notion of truth and reality as regulative ideals must be associated with the notion of rationality which is ‘equally loose, and thus rather “liberal”’, with an open texture, that is neither ‘purely logical, calculating, or algorithmic’ nor ‘*critical*’ (VV 218), insofar as it is able to mediate between the general and the particular, ‘far from being only conformity to rules that can be codified’ (VV 218-219). It is a rationality that is indispensable at three levels at least: the non-pre-established relation between principles and particular cases, deliberation on the means adequate to meet a certain end, or even on the ends to pursue and consider carefully through comparison, without postulating the ultimate goals (VV 219). These are fields traditionally ascribed to Kantian reflective judgement or, in antiquity, to the Aristotelian *phronesis* through arguments based on performative contradictions, analogies, metaphors, attention to the comparison of particular cases, found in fields such as clinical medicine, moral evaluations and art criticism. They are also forms of rational knowledge, despite the lack of a system of ‘explicitly formulated for-

³⁹ Parrini indeed raised the problem, even if he did not develop his hypotheses. Historiography is a special case of the *free and open* unitary, non-dualistic but articulated conception of rationality. The Introduction to *Il valore della verità* makes it clear that the relationship between the humanities and the exact sciences must be seen in terms of ‘differences solely in degree’ in the variety of expressions that form cultural life (VV 25). All cultural manifestations (religion, literature, art, philosophy) conceptually synthesize and organize experience in a more or less rigorous manner (VV 24). In this context, a reference also emerges to Italian historiography, and its under-evaluation of the role of empirical proof and the rational organization of discourse, and to Carlo Ginzburg’s evolution (VV n. 17 p. 25). It would be more interesting to connect these indications to the now ample set of literature on the philosophy of history, which feeds a quite vivid debate charged with general theoretical implications.

mal, abstract, and general criteria' (VV 219). This philosophical acquisition has major implications for the hermeneutic-epistemology dialogue, and it deals a heavy blow to any form of ontological dualism between the natural sciences and the interpretative field. This makes it problematic to 'continue to contrapose natural sciences and human sciences on the basis of the two types of rationality employed' (VV 220). The distinction between fields of knowledge should not be seen in terms of mutual exclusion, but as a mixture 'in different doses' among the various forms of rationality; a *de facto* mixture that can be found in the human sciences and in studies of a humanistic nature in art, ethics or jurisprudence. The difference between scientific and interpretative rationality does not concern the entities under study, nor is it due to an irreducible essence of *two cultures* – humanistic and scientific. The fields of reference are not compact and homogeneous from the qualitative point of view but are structured as heterogeneous and closely interconnected tissue. From a hermeneutic perspective – both Heidegger's and Gadamer's – the divergence could not be clearer; it becomes even more radical when one bears in mind the different way they conceive the relationship between science and philosophy, which, in turn can no longer be represented in terms of contrast. Not even at this level does it seem possible to erect a hierarchical barrier on the basis of alleged differences in cognitive rank. In Parrini's view, it must be acknowledged that science is not solely *calculating* reason (*the realm of nonthought*), but rather, *thinking* reason in its own right (VV 220).⁴⁰

On the hermeneutic side, it seems to me that the necessary revision of the Heideggerian legacy is more deep-seated and problematic for the theoretical line promoted by Gadamer, but also for the more moderate one of Paul Ricoeur which, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴¹ The difficulty of the 'convergence' grew from the interplay of urges and counter-urges, from inter-

⁴⁰ Parrini makes two quite precise and penetrating remarks in two footnotes on p. 220, concerning the radical, but also oscillating, formulas of Heidegger's position in different works: *Nietzches Wort 'Gott ist tot'* (1943), *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1950) and *Was heisst Denken?* (1954). The thesis whereby if, occasionally, science goes beyond accuracy and moves closer to the truth, at which time it becomes philosophy, is found in Gadamer's essay *Philosophie oder Wissenschaftstheorie?* pp. 125-149 of VZW.

⁴¹ For a critical re-visit and an original theoretical development of Ricoeur's perspective, see Busacchi, V., *Pour une herméneutique critique. Etudes autour de Paul Ricoeur*, Harmattan, Paris 2013; *Habermas and Ricoeur's Depth Hermeneutics: From Psychoanalysis to a Critical Human Science*, Springer International Publishing, Cham (Switzerland), 2016.

nal tensions among the many components of *Truth and Method*. If we are to derive full advantage of the potential offered by the theory of hermeneutic experience along the lines indicated by Parrini, what seems particularly necessary is a 'deflation', a lightening of the ontological charge of the notion of truth, and instead favouring a more agile consideration of the epistemological structures of the interpretative processes. As such it would be possible to reformulate the notions of objectivity and truth in a form more adequate to the effective development of both the natural and interpretative sciences. The ontological commitment of Heideggerian origin is the source of many interconnected elements, which, in my view, hinder positive interaction between the two traditions. These are aspects that become particularly relevant when the comparison occurs in the perhaps more delicate and strategic realm of 'humanistic' knowledge, that of historical knowledge. I will limit myself to just a few examples of themes that, from a hermeneutic perspective, converge to form a decidedly culturalist print to the representation of the past as a realm of meanings: the general thesis of the unobjectifiability of the sense of Being, in its radical form, leads to a sharp rupture between understanding and explaining, far beyond the definition of its Diltheyan source. The contrast between Being and beings, in turn, is used to distinguish, no less forcefully, the sphere of objective relationships (explicative-causal, quantitative) from that of intersubjective relationships (of mutual understanding, not anonymous or detached). All these themes were determining elements of the Gadamerian notion of history, developed in Part Two (*The extension of the question of truth to understanding in the human sciences*) to become a fundamental theoretical axis of *Truth and Method*. These themes came to circumscribe the concept of the opening of experience, reducing it to the sphere of the I-Thou relationship. This then becomes identified as the territory of a genuine experience, excluding any connection whatsoever with the 'naturalistic' experience, at play in scientific experience of phenomena. In interpersonal experiences, which do not have a generalising orientation, we can find negativity and suffering. Thus, the opening of hermeneutic experience, its ability to overcome the horizons that have been formed, is invested with a specific meaning, an irreducible quality, that cannot be found in perceptive experience.⁴² From these themes, ontological herme-

⁴² We must bear in mind that Gadamer strongly emphasizes the opening nature of experience in the I-Thou relationship, drawing on an anti-science and openly Hegelian repertoire. The theme of 'clashing' (innovation in the strong sense of the term) is specified in this context. For exam-

neutics can draw on a physiognomy rich in ideas that pose a serious obstacle to any meeting with epistemological thinking. In the deepest layer of the conception of history – the realm of the human sciences – proposed by Gadamer, we find the roots of its most typical limitation, the field of research being restricted by the ontological orientation of the theory of understanding. Gadamer's approach is presented as an account on the essence of historical spirit in general. Yet, in view of its very implanting, it cannot maintain this promise to cover the complex dynamics of contemporary historical research, differentiated in a series of new thematic, conceptual and methodical dynamics, occasionally unforeseeable, divergent and irreducible to the hermeneutic model. As an example, the rigid dualism between human and natural sciences is largely grounded in the primacy of the written text, as the favoured basis of all reconstructions of the past, founded on the tight link between aesthetic-literary models and historiographic interpretation.⁴³ The main effect of this primacy is to underestimate several interdisciplinary connections of work in historiography, which often intersect and reshape the boundaries with the natural sciences. The hermeneutic processes certainly identify one dimension of historical enquiry, that it must be understood rather as part of a vaster and further branching horizon. This should incite one to relativize its scope, instead of stiffing the centrality of the

ple, he states that understanding the Other implies conceptions quite different from the universal forms, favoured since Antiquity for knowing nature (TM 347ff, WM 359ff). Aristotle presupposes 'that what persists in the flight of observations and emerges as a universal is, in fact, something common to them: for him the universality of the concept is ontologically prior'. This is the way to elude the negative nature of experience, which is not an 'unbroken generation of typical universals'; genuine experience 'takes place as false generalizations are continually refuted by experience', 'and what was regarded as typical is shown not to be' (*enttypisiert wird*). Gadamer makes a distinction between the confirmation of expectation and a new experience: 'only something different and unexpected (*ein anderes Unerwartetes*) can provide someone who has experience with a new one' (TM 347-348, WM 359). This is a sense of total experience, one that is practical-affective, not merely perceptive, embodied by the experienced man (TM 348, WM 361).

⁴³ The thesis is presented as a programme in TM p. 156 (WM 168-169): 'Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind' (*Nichts ist so sehr reine Geistesspur wie Schrift, nichts aber auch so auf den verstehenden Geist angewiesen wie sie*). Writing is the site of understandability, of the magic intersection between strangeness and familiarity. On the other hand, the remnants of past life (*Die Überreste vergangenen Lebens, Reste von Bauten, Werkzeuge, der Inhalt der Gräber*) are rife with 'storms of time', (*verwittert durch die Stürme der Zeit*) and their understanding lacks the life-giving power that characterizes linguistic understanding.

hermeneutic problem and its claim to universality (the symbolic profile of events and texts). To clarify this point, I would like to quote the finely tuned perspective of Krzysztof Pomian, the author of a large body of work on the structures and dynamics of historiography, sceptical regarding the possibility of a general theory of history.⁴⁴ His quite vivid motto reminds us that ‘history is always methodologically plural’. History is not made in just one manner, with respect neither to the object nor to the process. The force of the past represented generates a highly fragmenting and diversified domain; a wide-open field that intersects various types of practices, coming from a wide range of disciplines: the moral, hermeneutic and social (statistics) sciences, as well as natural sciences (regarding physical, biological and genetic findings) and those of an ethological approach. It is crucial to remember that this field does not deal solely with symbolic objects and written texts. In the panorama of contemporary historical research, a quantity of enquiries interact with the interpretative disciplines centred on symbolic productions and actions, without being reducible to their model: from studies on habitats, health, food and hygiene to those on the landscape, climate, the body and the perceptive environment (colours, sounds, odours), genetic heritage; the relevance of research in epidemiology and demographics, as well as economic history, for yet another example, at the

⁴⁴ See K. Pomian, *Sur l'histoire*, Gallimard, Paris, 1999, tr. it. *Che cos'è la storia*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2001, p. 275. I limit myself to merely citing this work, representative of a now vast and robust body of literature on the plurality of ways to make history, which appropriately circumscribe the role of the hermeneutic approach. References to flora, fauna, climate and pollens serve to identify precisely the living conditions of people during a certain period (such as the Middle Ages) (pp.31,33): ‘retrospective statistics’ thus transcends the bio-techno-sociological level, also encompassing a psychological dimension, the study of mentalities (private sexual behaviour, ways of seeing life and death). Pomian draws attention to a naturalistic way to practise history through observing and experiments on material remains, brought to the foreground in order to date and reconstruct forms of habitations, the relationships between all human productions and the environment. Things like the shape of fields and the forests, roads, village plants, industrial buildings, work tools, maps and images become historical sources. To explain price fluctuations, economic historians have built models integrating numerous highly diverse variables: changes in the natural environment, the climate, glaciers, expansion/reduction of wooded areas, hominization processes. These are new bases for resetting the study of politics, culture and mentalities (pp.253,263). Any object whatsoever, natural or produced, can become a historical source, as long as we know how to base our questions on mastery of the appropriate technologies.

very least poses a problem for the predominance and universality of the interpretative methods. This radically pluralistic universe that is continually in motion, tends to fluidify and reconfigure all its boundaries. An all-encompassing theory, one that attempts to grasp its unitary essence, has little chance of success. In any case, the focus must be less on separating the phenomena, and more on their interactions, as well as that of the disciplines that study them. The interpretative processes have their legitimacy, yet their epistemological orientation and their phenomenal field of reference form a particular, not favoured, territory in the 'history' archipelago. Neither hermeneutic paradigms nor those of an explicative nature can be generalized to the whole field of specialized humanist disciplines. It is hard to see how contemporary historical research can be reduced to an epistemological, methodological or ontological unitary model. This perhaps will pose the greatest challenge for the interpretative paradigm, even if it is the obligatory passage point for any attempt to develop a hermeneutics in dialogue with the epistemological traditions, deeply reformed, capable of focusing on the epistemological and methodological dimensions that cannot be dissociated from the theory of truth.
empiricism.

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