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**“Islam and Modernity and the Promise
of a Dialogical Understanding”
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Abstract:

Echoing Roxane Euben’s felicitous remark that “the study of Islamic fundamentalism suffers not from a dearth of critique but from a paucity of insight”, this paper argues for a dialogical understanding of Islam and Modernity. The paper points out that the failure of the human sciences to adequately understand the emergence of contemporary Islamic and Islamist fervour stems from accounts that are too indebted to the Enlightenment view of the critique of ideology. A reconstructed dialogical theory, drawing upon both Gadamerian hermeneutics and inter-religious dialogue, not only provides more insight than post-Marxist accounts or poststructuralist theorizing into religious challenges to modernity. By drawing upon notions of “suspicion” and “silence” from inter-religious dialogue, a reconstructed dialogical model can also overcome the absence of critique, a charge often levelled against dialogical forms of understanding, without resorting to the Enlightenment critique of ideology. This paper argues against the ascendancy of Critical Theory in its debate with hermeneutics and it also takes aim at deconstruction and discourse analysis, all of which undermine dialogical understanding of the “Other”. Although a reconstructed dialogical framework is not without its own problems, for instance how to overcome the chasm between a foundationalist Islamic worldview and an increasingly anti-foundationalist modern worldview, dialogical understanding remains the best prospect for understanding the Other.

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Dialogue – the exchange of views, the encounter of beliefs on equal grounds with mutual confidence, complete frankness and without ulterior motives – is considered an indispensable element in the search for truth and the realization of justice. Our contemporary world feels the need to base itself on dialogue. Only dialogue makes pluralism, coexistence, democracy, even justice and peace possible.

R. Panikker 1979:

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Political dialogue between two enlightened interlocutors can be a model of our involvements with many others and with nature according to which our self-externalizing activity both fulfills our own expressive needs *and* respects the rights and needs of “the other,” but it human or nonhuman. In this way, dialogue is conceptualized as...an imaginative model – a telos – of free human activity.

B. Agger 1981: 7¹

Introduction

Was it more than coincidence that the attacks of 9/11 occurred in the year 2001, which the UN had declared the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations? 9/11 is all the more ironic since the UN declaration had been suggested by Iranian President Khatami as a response to the “clash of civilizations” thesis. Subsequently, America’s largely unilateral behaviour seemed to confirm opposition to dialogue and the worst fears that had been aroused in Huntington’s (1993, 1996) notorious thesis.²

In spite or, perhaps, because of these developments on the world’s stage, for the lay public inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue appears to be the only viable antidote to the poison of religious and political extremism fed by cultural

¹ No doubt, the irony of juxtaposing the views of a theologian born into Catholic and Hindu traditions with those of a critical theorist following the Marxian utopian socialist legacy will not have escaped the reader’s attention.

² For the sake of accuracy, it is worth noting that Huntington’s thesis portrays the emerging New World Order as increasingly dominated by *three* civilizational actors, the West, the Islamic world and the Sino-Confucian countries. Nevertheless, perhaps owing to similar other arguments (e.g. Barber, Lewis, Pipes), it is the antagonism and friction between the West and the Islamic world that became the fulcrum of the clash of civilizations debate.

misunderstanding. Parallel to the predictable xenophobic reaction, there has also been a deeper interest in Islam³ and Muslims, whom Westerners have finally perceived, for better or worse, as already in their midst.

By contrast, in western academia dialogical understanding of Muslims and Islam has largely been eschewed. Rather, since the late 1970s academic interest has focused on *explaining* Islamic fundamentalism, the emergence of which had been completely unforeseen by secular (and secularizing) academics; even works in the humanities have drawn upon conventional explanatory models from the social sciences. These models typically emphasize the disruption of traditional identities and cultures owing to modernization, industrialization, urbanization, secularization, class struggle and the sudden prosperity from petro-dollars.

Yet these explanatory models rooted in the Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology are limited in at least two ways. One, they project a historical understanding of the West on to Muslim societies. Particularly with respect to the analysis of class struggle, I am reminded of Dumont's (1977) comment that viewing all interests as related to economic interests is a particularity of modern *homo economicus*; similarly, Taylor (1985 [1971]: 42) avers that explanatory models that resort to 'interest articulation' and 'interest aggregation' are defined by the bargaining culture of Western civilization and may not be appropriate elsewhere. Two, even if explanatory accounts do shed light on how political Islam became a more viable option with the decline of liberal, socialist and nationalist options, Sayyid (1996) points out that these accounts amount only to a *description* of Muslim societies rather than to a sufficient explanation for why more and more

³ I have in mind the record-sale of books relating to Islam, from the Quran and interpretive works by K. Anderson, ..., to more controversial works such as *What Went Wrong?* by Lewis, and ... by Pipes.

Muslims are *actively choosing* Islamism as the option they wish to pursue. Despite 20 years of attention, the failure of western political theory to account for Islamic fundamentalism suffers not “from a dearth of critique, but from a paucity of insight” because it fails to understand the appeals of fundamentalism for its practitioners, Euben (1999: 15) writes in a brilliant *coup de grâce*. She argues that Western political theories, which seek to *explain* Islamic fundamentalism distort our understanding because the reflex of a post-Enlightenment, rationalist discourse is to dismiss ‘other’ ideals as being merely ideological and epiphenomenal to concrete material factors.⁴ Instead of dismissing ‘other’ ideals, it is even more necessary to employ interpretive approaches to better understanding them.

In some ways, explanatory-critical accounts have only partially been off-set by theorizing about the “Other” in post-structuralist, postmodernist and postcolonial currents, each of which in its own way has sought to privilege a disrupted, decentred, fragmented and marginalized other. Although there had been other similar works that preceded Said’s *Orientalism* (1978),⁵ this classic text serves as a useful inauguration for social theorizing about Islam, the Other of the West *par excellence*, and its relationship to the West. Said’s critique of Orientalism – that it presents Islam as homogenous, essentialist and unchanging – itself came under attack for essentializing the West. In response to Said’s work and also to counter Islamist hegemony, anti-Orientalists, such as al-Azmeh, el-Zein, and Clifford and

⁴ Euben (1999: 14) asks a very poignant question: why are Marxist, liberal or democratic ideals not subjected to causal, i.e. critique of ideology, analysis? Why are these ideas not seen as the result of socio-economic factors alone?

⁵ Ahmad’s trenchant, and sometimes unfair, critique points to the work of other scholars outside of the Western metropolis, scholars such as A. Malek, S.H. Alatas, et al., whom Said did not adequately credit.

Piscatori presented Islam as constantly evolving, de-centred and de-essentialized by pointing to its empirical diversity in time and space (Sayyid 1996).

But Islam is neither as monolithic and unchanging as the Orientalists posit, nor does it simply dissolve into a plurality of local Islams. Despite the multiplicity of Islamic discourses and despite their polysemic origins, there remains a unifying singularity to those discourses, which, although dismissed by anti-essentialist theorists, remains palpable for believers (ibid). The problem is not the singularity of Islam, but the truncated, reductionistic version of Islam that the Islamists use for their own ends, with which one can rightfully disagree.

Although much of postmodern and postcolonial theory has been concerned with creating a space from which the marginalized other may speak, their very strong anti-essentialist and secular presuppositions has prevented them from genuinely opening up to a *dialogical* framework for understanding the relationship between Islam and modernity. As I will argue in this chapter, the lack of a dialogical framework is partly attributable to post-structuralism's disdain for the agents' self-interpretation,⁶ which also runs through many postmodern and postcolonial works.

In contrast to explanatory models and poststructuralist theorizing,⁷ I propose that dialogical frameworks are best suited to understand the relationship between Islam and modernity because such frameworks bridge the false dichotomy of explanation and interpretation, do not dissolve Islam and the West

⁶ I have in mind not only the strong structuralism of Foucauldian discourse analysis but also Derridean deconstruction. It is not for nothing that Spivak answers her own question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) in the negative.

⁷ Although in practice it has been the case, the distinction between explanatory and interpretive models is not as clear-cut as my presentation may suggest at this point. I return to this problem below.

into a plurality of local forms, nor treat traditions and ideals as merely ideological expressions of false consciousness. Besides, since human beings are inescapably situated in linguistic-cultural traditions, dialogical models are the most suitable for comparative, cross-cultural understanding. Notwithstanding my hesitation with their use of the term 'postmodern', I agree with Bauman (1988) and Smart (1996: 423-424) that postmodern social theory should act as a "translation service", as a means to nurture dialogue and understanding between a plurality of different, and at times radically different, traditions and communities. Such a dialogical framework assumes that disparate cultures are in conversation with each other, even in the face of serious moral and political disagreements (Euben 1999). No doubt, dialogical models are susceptible to distortions of power, but explanatory models may be even more susceptible to distortions of power because, as alluded to by Dumont and Taylor, the reduction of all interests to economic interests may be a particularity of Western civilization. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, interpretive, dialogical approaches are open to the way systemic inequalities are implicated in cross cultural dialogues, can attend to socially mediated understanding, take seriously the legitimacy of the other's truth-claims, and need not fall prey to the extreme logic of anti-essentialism.

Hermeneutical Dialogue

Does a dialogical framework for cultural translation, interpretation, and understanding entail foregoing causal explanation and critique? And does interpretation require understanding the other in the other's own terms, as Euben suggests? Or, does it merely require that we understand the other as best as we can in our terms given our prejudices and biases?

The conventional dichotomy in the human sciences that is drawn between causal explanation and interpretive understanding is increasingly being recognized as a false dichotomy. Critical Theory, feminist poststructuralism, and other approaches each claim to overcome the limitations of outdated conceptions of positivism and hermeneutics, and the terms "interpretive structuralism" or "hermeneutic structuralism" have been coined to indicate this overcoming (Morrow 1994: 24).

It is my contention, however, that in terms of cross-cultural, comparative social theory a dialogical framework can more than adequately handle the elements that are apparently gained by a shift to more overtly structuralist accounts. For instance, in his support of a hermeneutical conception of the human sciences, C. Taylor (1985 [1981])⁸ argues that social scientists seek to explain behavior but the agents whose behavior they are trying to explain already use (proto-)theory to define themselves. Social researchers cannot simply set aside the agents' self-definitions and the self-interpretations, rather researchers need to incorporate those self-interpretations into their explanations. Yet, incorporating the other's self-understanding need not lead to understanding the other in the other's

⁸ Taylor's arguments are made in the context of the repudiation of positivism and naturalism in the human sciences. However, in the contemporary context, it is necessary to extend Taylor's argument against the post-structuralist revolt. I take up this issue below.

own terms. Taylor writes that, “interpretive social science requires that we master the agents self-descriptions in order to identify our *explananda*, but it by no means requires that we couch our *explanantia* in the same language.” (Taylor 1985 [1981]: 118).

Since Taylor’s argument originates in the defense of hermeneutical social science, and in Gadamer’s (1982, 1976) work in particular, it is necessary at this point to enter more deeply into hermeneutics for my purposes of elaborating a dialogical framework.⁹

Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics

As heir to the distinct traditions of Christian exegesis and the philology of ancient texts hermeneutics was born in the attempt to rise above the particularity of the rules of interpretation of these respective traditions (Ricoeur 1981 [1973]). But even as it sought to synthesize these respective disciplinary traditions, Schliermacher’s and Dilthey’s Romantic hermeneutics remained firmly within the Enlightenment focus on epistemology, on the Kantian question “How do we know?” It is Gadamer (1976 [1966, 1967]) who, by drawing upon Heidegger, radically

⁹ It is self-evident that the dialogical models I draw upon in this chapter all come from Western sources. Indeed, this is a fundamental issue for a comparative work that seeks a dialogue between Islam and modernity, as I discuss toward the end of this chapter. But this admission is itself testament to the lack of theorizing in the Muslim world. The problem is not that dialogical models cannot be derived from Islamic sources and traditions. In fact, I think the conceptual tools are already there in classical Islamic sources, not least of which come from the Quran and the Prophetic mission, e.g. the Prophet’s inter-religious dialogue with the Christians of Najran which is narrated in the Quran (see S:VV). The Quranic concept of the *ahl-al-kitab* (people of the book) and *Surah al-Kafirun* could also be strong a basis for fruitful theorizing on dialogue. As well, the role of silence and a temporary refusal of dialogue could potentially be theorized from the verse (s:v) that encourages believers to leave the company of hypocrites and disbelievers when they engage in mockery and to return to their company when they turn to other topics. There has been some re-theorizing (see, e.g., Ramadan 2001, 1999) of the classical concepts of *dar-al-Islam* (the abode of peace or Islam) and *dar-al-harb* (the abode of war), concepts which point to the failure of dialogue. (See also Sachedina ??, and Kugle ??). But the development of dialogical models from the Islamic tradition constitutes another project altogether, outside the scope of this chapter.

reinterprets hermeneutics from a method limited to the interpretation of ancient texts to a universal feature of human understanding. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is active where ever there is an attempt to understand because the process of understanding is itself an ontological event, an interaction between an interpreter and an other. Thus, the understanding of another tradition or culture is much like attempting to understand the meaning of an ancient text because in each case there is an engagement between an interpreter and an other. Given the universal scope of Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics", he argues that the search for understanding is always dialogical because one is, in effect, always engaged in an implicit conversation with an other. Since our understanding of reality is always mediated by language, therefore interpretive understanding of the other must always be dialogical. Hence, Gadamer's use of Heidegger pushes hermeneutics from its epistemological level to the level of ontology, to the (new) question of "What is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding?" (Ricoeur 1981 [1973]: 54)

However, Gadamer recognizes that hermeneutical understanding of the other is never entirely free because both the self and the other are deeply rooted in effective-historical traditions, which impose limits on the possibility of understanding. These limits, these horizons of understanding are never fixed but shift as one's understanding of things itself shifts. Productive dialogical understanding is thus an inter-subjective fusion of horizons, which is transformative for both the self and the other because one takes seriously the truth-claims of the other, as well as being aware of the prejudices of one's own tradition. Gadamer writes that,

It is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text – in hearing its challenging viewpoint – and not in preliminary methodological self-purgation, that the readers own prejudices (i.e. his present horizons) are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness. The hermeneutic phenomena is at work in the history of cultures as well as individuals, for it is in times of intense contact with other cultures (Greece with Persia or Latin Europe with Islam) that a people becomes most acutely aware of the limits and questionableness of its deepest assumptions. Collisions with other's horizons makes us aware of assumptions so deep seated that they would otherwise remain unnoticed" (Gadamer 1982: xxi).

The logic of Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics requires that we remain open to other voices, that we accept the limits of other traditions, even though we cannot entirely escape the limits of our own effective-historical tradition (i.e. of our own linguistic-cultural tradition).

Similarly, for Taylor understanding the other always takes place in one's own terms. He points out that understanding the other in the other's own terms is unenlightening because the other may not be fully informed about his behavior, may be confused or may have contradictory purposes. Moreover, understanding the other in the other's own terms places a false restriction on our *explanantia* (Taylor 1985 [1981]: 118).

The Self and the Other: Gadamerian vs. Bakhtinian Dialogue

Before proceeding to the question of the space for critique in dialogue, I would like to pause briefly and contrast conceptions of the self and other in Gadamer's model with Bakhtin's far more radical model of dialogue. This discussion not only highlights different dialogical models. But more importantly for my purposes it returns to the question of essentialism and the problems attendant upon too strong an emphasis on plurality, heterogeneity and fragmentation.

Like Gadamer, Bakhtin regards the task of interpreting a text or a different cultural tradition as a dialogue between the self and the other; hence, for both of

them truth is constituted dialogically and inter-subjectively because it requires an openness to other diverse points of view, a willingness to modify one's own viewpoint.

However, Bakhtin's (1981) "dialogical imagination" is a much more radical notion than Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" because Bakhtin argues that the self is *a priori* a dialogical self. In other words, the self is already a heteroglossia, a "living mix of varied and opposing voices". Bakhtin admits that the impetus to heteroglossia is off-set by the ideological tendency to unity: while centrifugal forces lead to immense plurality of experience and to heteroglossia, centripetal forces impose boundaries to limit the potential chaos of variety and guarantee some shared understanding (ibid: 290). Nevertheless, for Bakhtin the search for understanding is not a fusion of different, unitary horizons but a recognition of a polyphonic self, of varied opposing voices that constitute the self. It is an overcoming of the ideological tendency to view the self as fully unified and coherent, an acknowledgment that any conception of a unified and coherent self is ideological (ibid: 272). Centripetal forces are simply ideological because the "orientation toward unity concentrates attention in the most stable, least changeable, mono-static aspects of discourse, which are furthest removed from the actual, changing socio-semantic fields of discourse" (ibid: 274).

This model of dialogical heteroglossia is highly reminiscent of strong versions of postmodern and postcolonial theory, which reject essentialism in all its forms.¹⁰ No doubt, this partly explains Bakhtin's sudden popularity: his theory claims to overcome the problem of radical difference in a world that is more and

¹⁰ It is worth noting that where Bakhtin concedes a the necessity of an ideological claim to unity, Spivak concedes the political necessity for a *strategic* essentialism.

more aware of difference but one that is also thirsting for common understanding (Bell and Gardiner 1998).

But the same point that I raised earlier in my discussion on anti-orientalism applies here as well. I find Bakhtin's radical emphasis on alterity, plurality, heterogeneity, fluidity and change, and his relegation of all claims to unity and holism to ideology problematic for a dialogical model. Does not dialogue require autonomous interlocutors? If the self and other are really just different version of the same self, then does not the communication between them amount to a monologue, nay, a soliloquy?¹¹

Gadamer's dialogical model of a self that incorporates and synthesizes autonomous others and transcends one's previous horizons is much more compelling. It is compelling because it takes the other as an authentic and legitimate other without prematurely assimilating the other. Does not a premature assimilation of the other to the self amount to a poorly concealed form of ethnocentrism? The pre-understanding, prejudices and particularities that impose limits on the self are ideological; on the contrary, they are legitimate and enabling.

But if one is always entangled in one's own tradition and thereby limited to one's horizons, is it possible in Gadamer's model to engage in meaningful dialogue with interlocutors from different or radically different traditions? For Gadamer, there is no such alienation that renders two traditions incommensurable because the learning of the first language provides "the grammar" from which we may come to learn and understand other linguistically mediated traditions (Euben 1999). Gadamer writes that, "Only the support of the familiar and common

¹¹ A similar conclusion is to be reached with respect to inter-religious dialogue conducted under the tutelage of the mystical traditions of various world religions. See the discussion below (fn. 20) on R. Panikker's (1999) definition of *intra*-religious dialogue

understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experiences of the world” (Gadamer 1982: xx). Countering Winch’s (date) relativistic argument that it is impossible to understand the other in one’s own terms without falling prey to strong ethnocentrism, C. Taylor argues that hermeneutical dialogue requires a language of perspicuous contrasts,

a language in which we could formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to some human constants at work in both. It would be a language in which the possible human variations would be so formulated that both our form of life and theirs could be perspicuously described as alternative such variations (1985 [1971]: 125).

A language of perspicuous contrasts allows that other’s activities may be crucially different from ours, may have no correspondence with ours, but this crucial difference, this lack of correspondence does not amount to incommensurability and relativism.

Dialogue or the Critique of Ideology

Having assumed the interpretive task, we are then confronted with the question, what is the proper place of critique in inter-cultural encounters? Does critique, threatening to impose itself before the other has had a fair say, interfere with the dialogical task? If not, then what form of critique is compatible with dialogical understanding?

In this section, I make the case that critique is an important element in understanding; however, I reject the Enlightenment mode of the critique of ideology, especially in its reductionistic Marxist expression. Even though Critical Theory departs from classical Marxism and claims to have added to hermeneutical dialogue, I argue that hermeneutics is capable of handling critique without recourse to Critical Theory.

Critical Theory: the normative limitations of dialogue

Generally, the charge of ideology is often levelled to indicate that a truth-claim is mystifying, obscuring or wilfully concealing some other element of truth. This conception is deeply rooted in the Enlightenment view that the task of scientific understanding is to distil “pure”, objective knowledge free from distortions from “impure”, prejudicial knowledge (Hekman 1986). This charge finds its archetypical expression in the classic Marxist view of the production of (a particular kind of) knowledge with specific class interests, interests which the knowledge conceals. Hence, the Marxist critique of ideology attempts to reveal the true economic and political interests that are obfuscated in certain truth-claims.

Indebted to classical Marxism and to Gadamer’s hermeneutics, Critical Theory has been described as “the modern, post-Marxist expression of the critique of ideology” (Ricoeur 1981 [1973]: 90). Still, Critical Theory represents a significant

departure from classical Marxism because in the face of the failure of the proletariat to effect revolutionary change, Critical Theory adopts dialogue in the form of Habermas' ideal speech situation as emancipatory model. A Critical Theory of dialogue regards dialogue as a powerful source of critique of an existing social order, a trigger for fundamental changes to that social order, and a model for all possible non-dominating relationships with other people (Agger 1981: 7). This adoption of dialogue reflects Habermas' view that the hermeneutical task of elaborating meaning is a necessary task in the human sciences.

Nevertheless, for Habermas hermeneutical dialogue remains a limited form of dialogue because it does not incorporate the emancipatory interests underlying the human sciences; hence, hermeneutical dialogue cannot distinguish between a legitimate consensus and one achieved through systematic distortion. Hermeneutical dialogue overlooks the ideological uses of language and does not recognize that the dialogical structure may always already suit the interest of one party over the other. The distortions and biases that are concealed in a linguistic-cultural tradition may subvert the dialogic quality of hermeneutics and the dialogical structure may already legitimize domination. Thus, Habermas critiques the apparent conservatism of Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' is conservative because it only leads to consensus within the context of an accepted tradition, which may have been an authoritarian imposition rather than freely chosen.

From the point of view of Critical Theory, since dialogical hermeneutics does not incorporate the critique of ideology, it does not go far enough in addressing emancipatory interests. According to proponents such as Agger (1981), what distinguishes the Critical Theory model of dialogue is that it alone ensures an egalitarian distribution of dialogue-chances because it includes a critique of

ideology in order to demonstrate both how the chances for dialogue are limited for certain groups and why in some cases dialogue necessarily fails. Only after a critique of ideology is incorporated can dialogue serve as a means of mobilizing the consciousness of the exploited against the status quo. Even if the ideal speech situation does not obtain in the real world, Habermas regards dialogue as emancipatory because participation in dialogue, even a distorted dialogue, makes visible the distortions and mystifications, even if it does not obviate them. Just by taking part in failed dialogues labour and other politically disadvantaged groups can break their silence, can break through some of the mystificatory elements of the scientific-technocratic complex and restore some of their communicative competence (Agger 1981: 21-22).¹²

Critical Theory has become very influential partly because it claims to overcome the explanation and interpretation dichotomy by rehabilitating and completing hermeneutical dialogue with a critical, emancipatory element from Marxism. Euben, for instance, is convinced that Habermas completes Gadamer's hermeneutics by adding what she regards as a necessary space for distancing and critique. Euben accepts Habermas' view that even though a critical theorist works within a tradition, the theorist is able to adopt a perspective that can take the necessary distance to critique that tradition. In Euben's view, this leads to a

¹² Agger's (1981) points out that while Habermas' ideal speech situation takes hermeneutical dialogue a step further by incorporating critique, it does not go far enough. At best, it alerts us to the democratizing and mobilizing potential of failed dialogues because participation in distorted dialogues becomes a political act, breaking the structured silence imposed by a technocratic system. Agger seeks to deepen the notion of dialogue by restoring Marxian socialist utopian imagery. For Agger, the entry into political dialogue ought also to lead to a new set of productive relationships in which everyone has the chance to manage their own affairs, make political decisions currently reserved for elites, work harmoniously with nature and restore the power of self-creation. The unity of productive and creative activity to suggest that egalitarian dialogic relationships can exist among people, as well as between humanity and nature.

post-foundationalist conception of distanciation-within-tradition, which goes beyond the Enlightenment conception of objectivity as one outside of tradition.

Critique Within Hermeneutical Dialogue

The claim by Critical Theory is overblown. Euben accepts Habermas' view because she pays little, if any, attention to Gadamer's response to Habermas, to Ricoeur's reading of the Gadamer-Habermas debate, and she misreads Taylor vis-à-vis hermeneutical understanding and the place of critique.

Gadamer responds to Habermas' claim regarding the emancipatory interests of Critical Theory by arguing that language cannot be purified of ideology. The rhetorical power of language does not operate in such a way as to create distorted communication that can be removed by a critique of ideology; even the revealing of ideology takes place in language. Tradition is formed from elements including labour and political domination and these are bound up with our prejudices. There is no neutral point outside of tradition from where a Critical Theory may criticize it. We encounter domination in language and through language we challenge domination. For Gadamer, viewing the other's truth-claims as ideological amounts to surrendering the attempt to understand. Instead of beginning from the other's truth-claims, the notion of ideology shifts one's attention to *why* the other takes the position that he does. In his discussion of the problem of historical understanding, Gadamer writes that, "Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth" (Gadamer 1982: 304 ?). To presume that what people say is a function of the surrounding circumstances is to kill the dialogue before it starts, as Ricoeur points out (How 1995: 18). While

Gadamerian hermeneutics does not dismiss the external context, it does not constantly search for the motives of a truth-claim in the external circumstances.

For Ricoeur (1981 [1973]), even though hermeneutics and Critical Theory do interpenetrate and complement each other, they do not exactly overlap and complete each other. Ricoeur agrees that interpretation and explanation have been falsely presented as antinomies, yet for Ricoeur hermeneutics and Critical Theory speak from different places and do not share the same goals; bringing the two under the same fold amounts to an unwarranted syncretism.¹³

For Taylor, too, interpretation and explanation are not mutually exclusive. But what I find most compelling Taylor's reading is that hermeneutical dialogue can and does incorporate a critical element without recourse to a Critical Theory, or even more broadly speaking to the tradition of the critique of ideology. According to Taylor, explanation and understanding in the human sciences cannot simply by-pass the other's self-understanding. Yet this dialogical understanding can also lead to *challenging* the other's self-definition. Actually, theory must do this in order to reveal the other's confusions, mis-informations and the contradictions: "we make sense of the other if we grasp *both* how they see things *and* what is wrong, lacunary, contradictory in this" (ibid.). Making sense of the other includes the other's self-understanding but it also includes an attempt to point out the

¹³ Ricoeur (1981 [1973]: 88) is not convinced that critique has a strong role in the hermeneutical tradition. Although the desire for critique is constantly indicated in hermeneutics, it is constantly aborted because the main focus is to return to foundations. According to Ricoeur, hermeneutical experience discourages recognition of a critical instance because it attempts to refute the "alienating distanciation" of the other. But Ricoeur also points out that, despite Critical Theory's claims to universality and to a meta-hermeneutical position, even the critique of ideology operates from *within* a tradition, the tradition of critique, which is different from the Romantic tradition at the heart of Gadamer's work. Moreover, despite its secular outlook, the critique of ideology is itself rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of liberating acts such as the Exodus and the Resurrection (Ricoeur 1981 [1973]: 99).

other's confusion, illusions or contradictions. Dialogical understanding already incorporates the ability to challenge the other; furthermore, in challenging the other's language of self-understanding, one ends up challenging one's own language of understanding as well. Indeed, there are times when one cannot properly question the other without questioning the self.

I disagree with Euben's position vis-à-vis the debate between Gadamer and Habermas because she prematurely distinguishes Habermas' Critical Theory and the foundationalist, Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology. Her turn to Critical Theory suggests that Habermas is not engaged in the foundationalist, Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology, but only in seeking sufficient distance to be able to add critique to interpretive understanding. The result is that Euben views Habermas as much too anti-foundationalist, than his work would suggest and does not give enough emphasis to the way that modern rationalist, social scientific discourse underlies Habermas' project.. Clearly, Habermas is not working from a classic Marxist, still he is fully committed to the universalist, rational discourse of the 'unfinished project of modernity'. Euben's agreement with Habermas thus leads her back to a foundationalist, rationalist discourse, which she has already found unable to adequately understand Islamic fundamentalism. Euben's turn to Habermas' Critical Theory, which she incorrectly reads as completing rather than complementing Gadamer's hermeneutics, has the unintended effect of taking Euben back to the Enlightenment foundationalist conception of critique that she has already disavowed.

The Post-Structuralist Challenge to Dialogical Understanding

One of the threads underlying Gadamer's hermeneutics, Habermas' Critical Theory, as well as deconstruction, discourse analysis and much of postcolonial theory is the 'linguistic turn' in social theory. The 'linguistic turn' amounts to a renunciation of metaphysical foundations in social reality and a recognition of linguistic images and symbols as the basis of social reality. Culler succinctly summarizes the anti-foundational attitude underlying the linguistic turn:

If 'sawing off the branch on which one is sitting' seems foolhardy to men of common sense, it is not so for Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida; for they suspect that if they fall there is no 'ground' to hit and that the most clear-sighted act may be a certain reckless sawing, a calculated dismemberment or deconstruction of the great cathedral-like trees in which Man has taken shelter for millennia (cited in Hekman 1986: 9).

As alluded to above in Ricoeur's history of hermeneutics, it is precisely the Heidegger's linguistic turn that Gadamer follows, and which marks his radical reinterpretation of hermeneutics. For Gadamer the hermeneutical mode is universal because of the linguisticity of the world; that is, people experience the world like a language, as already pre-configured, pre-interpreted. Experiences, in so far as people seek to understand and give voice to them, are already pre-schematized because people must draw upon pre-existing language to express their experiences. People's interpretation and understanding of the world is thus always language bound and tied to a linguistic tradition.

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Before I probe more fully the implications of the linguistic turn for a dialogue between a foundationalist Islam and a post-foundationalist modernity, it is necessary to make a couple of detours. The first detour is through poststructuralism and the challenges that its anti-foundationalism raises for

dialogical understanding. The second detour will be through the model of inter-religious dialogue, which in its commitment to religiously inspired worldviews avoids the anti-foundationalist linguistic turn. As well, I will turn to the foundationalist inter-religious model of dialogue to illustrate how it encompasses critique without recourse to the Enlightenment critique of ideology tradition and how it deals with the possibility of the failure of dialogues.

Deconstruction

In keeping with its post-Enlightenment, anti-foundationalist thrust, deconstruction does not claim to be a newer version of “ideological demystification” (Derrida cited in Spivak 1988: 292). Rather, deconstruction claims that it is able to attend both to the interpretive task and to the goal of the critique of ideology; it claims to attend to the former by a process of dismantling and to the latter by “measuring silences”, that is by attending to what a tradition, or an “other” for that matter, does not say and refuses to say (ibid: 284-286). As an interpretive technique, deconstruction seeks to disassemble the Western philosophical tradition by revealing the ways in which it is held together by an implicit hierarchical ordering of dichotomous categories (Borradori 2003: 138).¹⁴ Deconstruction points out the ways in which one half of each binary opposition is always suppressed, marginalized, omitted or otherwise absent. Deconstruction then sets about destabilizing the tradition by inventing the hierarchical ordering, which has the effect of demonstrating that the hierarchical structuring is not natural, is not intrinsic to the dichotomous categories *per se*. Instead, it reveals that the

¹⁴ Although Derrida makes this case only against the Western logocentric tradition, he does refer to the Abrahamic roots of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Arkoun follows Derrida’s lead and extends deconstruction to Islamic thought. Here I want to discuss deconstruction more generally as interpretation; in the next chapter, I deal with Arkoun’s application of deconstruction to Islamic thought.

hierarchical structure within the tradition has been constructed for specific purposes. Deconstruction then introduces a third category to the dichotomy that destructs the tradition in order finally to transform it anew from the rubble of its deconstruction. Spivak writes that, “The archival, historiographic, disciplinary-critical, and, inevitably interventionist work involved [in deconstruction] is indeed a task of measuring ‘silences’” (Spivak 1988: 284).

Deconstruction claims to point to the limit of dialogue because it posits that one achieves better understanding by gleaning the other’s un-said and un-thought. It is not sufficient to accept the validity of the other’s truth-claims since one half of thought always suppressed and the other half has been constructed for particular purposes. Hence, from the point of view of deconstruction, productive understanding can only take place after each central category is deconstructed to reveal the meanings that it conceals or represses.

In this respect, deconstruction alerts us to the important role of silence, even as I disagree with its perception of silence as necessarily ideological. Even Gadamer’s hermeneutic must concede that underlying every conversation there is much that is not said. In the Introduction to Gadamer’s essays on *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, D. Linge (1976) points out that Gadamer’s contribution to hermeneutics is to regard understanding as an event that exists over and above the specific techniques and methods of understanding. As an event of the fusion of horizons understanding is an essentially linguistic process. But language has a self-transcending character because in the course of a conversation language is porous, open to expansion and absorption of ever new content. The meanings of words depend not on their denotations but on the context of their use. The meanings of words are constantly being re-drawn in conversation. Linge then draws upon Hans

Lipps to indicate how the meaning of a word is both general and specific to the conversation. It is worth quoting Linge's use of Lipps and Gadamer:

As a result, each word has around it what Hans Lipps has called the "circle of the unexpressed," which bears directly on the meaning of the language. In every moment of dialogue, the speaker holds together what is said and addressed to the other person with the "infinity of the unsaid." It is this infinity of the unsaid – this relation to the whole of being that is disclosed in what *is* said – into which the one understands is drawn (ibid: xxxii).

Linge then repeats Gadamer words: "[E]very conversation has an inner infinity and no end. One breaks it off because it seems that enough has been said or that there is nothing more to say. But every such break has an intrinsic relation to the resumption of the dialogue" (ibid: xxxiii). The anti-foundationalism of philosophical hermeneutics and deconstruction is obvious: if understanding is always mediated and limited by language, then we may always point to what is not said.

Beyond this similarity, however, deconstruction entails far more problems for interpretive understanding than it resolves. My discussion of the inter-religious model of dialogue will pick up on this theme of silence but, as I will demonstrate, silence does not amount to an ideological moment. What one refuses to say or cannot say is not an indication of the intentional suppression of thought but is a recognition of incommensurable difference, a recognition of the failure of dialogue to go beyond 'final vocabularies'. Despite its attack on Enlightenment thought, deconstruction remains deeply mired in the Enlightenment goal of the critique of ideology.

Although hermeneutics recognizes that there will always be an element of the unsaid, which can never be exhaustively disclosed through dialogue, one needs above all to engage with what the other actually says and to take seriously

validity of the other's truth-claims. In contradistinction, deconstruction remains radically sceptical of the truth-claims of the other and permanently defers engagement with the other in favour of a monological, deconstructive disclosure. Where hermeneutical dialogue is essentially a constructive endeavour, a *mutual* attempt at understanding in order to better relate to each other, deconstruction is essentially an individuating and de-structive enterprise. Deconstruction takes apart both the other's and the self's foundation without putting anything in its place. Having been shorn of (what deconstruction considers superficial) foundations, how are people and traditions supposed to relate to each other? Deconstruction's claim of providing a new of thinking and relating is itself a false and broken promise. Its compulsive effort to deconstruct all founding concepts goes too far and replaces the metaphysics of presence with arbitrariness, capriciousness, and implicitly with nihilism (Hekman 1986: 194). Rather than aiding in the work of interpretation and cross cultural understanding, deconstruction rejects the classical meaning of interpretation: to be mutually indebted (Kristeva cited in *ibid*: 195).

Discourse Analysis and Postcolonial Theory

As an interpretive approach, discourse analysis regards all knowledge/truth-claims as bound to power relations in a struggle for discursive hegemony. Discourse analysis posits that the analysis of epistemes, the systems of knowledge that construct their own objects of reference, must examine the configurations of power in which those epistemes are implicated. In the discussion of the modern legal-scientific episteme Foucault writes that, "The episteme is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation not of the true from the false, but of what may not be characterized as scientific" (Power/Knowledge 1980: 134, also cited in Spivak 1988: 298). Since all epistemes are implicated with power, therefore

Foucauldian discourse analysis repudiates the Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology; in its strong version, discourse analysis repudiates any conception of knowledge that distinguishes between true and false knowledge.

With the exception of Spivak who follows Derrida rather than Foucault,¹⁵ postcolonial theory, in as much as it follows the path laid by Said, largely takes up discourse analysis as an interpretive method in its analysis of the colonial relationship.¹⁶ The methodological thesis underlying Said's classic study, *Orientalism* (1978), is that discourses which do not acknowledge and testify to their own hegemonic position are especially prone to distortions of power. As a discipline, Orientalism did not contribute to a genuine understanding of the Islamic Other because it was much more concerned with discursively creating the orient of its own collective imagination. In effect, the possibility of the genuine understanding of the Other, of the East, was lost as the discursive formation about the Orient became more and more entrenched. Yet one of the central critiques of Said's use of discourse analysis is that it is unclear whether there is any real 'East' beyond the discursive creation of it. By drawing upon a strong version of Foucauldian discourse analysis Said appears to give up any notion of reality beyond linguistic reality.¹⁷

Although indebted to Said, Bhabha (1994; Rutherford 1990: 210-211) softens the problem of incommensurability implicit in totalizing discourses. His work

¹⁵ See Ahmad (1997), who reads Spivak's (1988) seminal article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as a central moment in this debate.

¹⁶ In the next chapter, I will discuss Abaza's (2002) application of discourse analysis to the reconstruction of knowledge debate, to expose what she argues is the debate's hegemonic and ideological denial of intra-Muslim struggles. At this point, I want to deal more generally with the challenge posed by discourse analysis to dialogical forms of understanding.

¹⁷ This is all the more ironic given his courageous and outspoken position on the Palestinian struggle for a homeland.

posits that it is possible to conflate, for example, the discourse of the colonizer and the colonized; in this sense, although subjects are located within discursive formations those discourses may not be very different and are certainly not incommensurable. According to Bhabha, there exists always the possibility of the “third space” from which a productive, if not a genuine, understanding of the colonizer and the colonized may be achieved. What is required is attending to the configuration of power within one’s own discourses and also acknowledging the always already hybrid nature of the self and the other. Bhabha’s “third space” and his other notions of difference, alterity, in-betweenness and hybridity all suggest that while radical difference may challenge the limits of liberal tolerance, the translatability of radical cultural difference is always possible, if, and only, if the originary myth of the Self and of the Other is renounced.

I have been pursuing deconstruction, discourse analysis and postcolonial theory because I want to suggest that although these perspectives challenge the dialogical approach of hermeneutics, they remain largely insular, insufficient to deal with inter-cultural encounters. That is, they either direct attention to one tradition as in the case of deconstruction, or as in the case of discourse analysis, shift our attention to the internal struggles within a discursive formation. Similarly, postcolonial theory’s treatment of the self-other relationship, in the form of colonizer-colonized, is too indebted to poststructuralist theories of discourse and subject and ideology. Dialogues across cultures often take place under conditions of radical inequality, but cross-cultural understandings are not simply a rearticulation of colonialist power, of Orientalism (Euben). Postcolonial theory’s treatment of the self and other is always de-centred, fragmented, anti-essentialist and does not take seriously the validity of the truth-claims of the Other – and

perforce even of the self! Although in principle these different approaches could be used across or between different traditions, they are better suited to analyzing *intra*-cultural dialogues rather than *inter*-cultural dialogues.

Inter-religious Dialogue

I embark now on the second detour. This discussion is meant to establish three main points: i) to consolidate the dialogical framework, but to provide an alternative to the ‘linguistic turn’ that characterizes the anti-foundationalism of hermeneutical dialogue;¹⁸ ii) to indicate how inter-religious dialogue restores a critical element to dialogical understanding from a foundationalist position, albeit not one rooted in the Enlightenment critique of ideology tradition; iii) to alert us to the problem of silence and the failure of dialogue, which is either dismissed or remains implicit in hermeneutical dialogue.¹⁹

The model of inter-religious dialogue is compelling because distortions of power and purpose and a suspicion of the other’s motives are already part of the experience of establishing dialogue (J.V. Taylor 1980 [1977]). There is no need to add-in this element, as Critical Theory claims to do in its dispute with hermeneutics. In most cases of inter-religious dialogue, the search for interpretive understanding normally amounts to a rational encounter²⁰ on the arena of

¹⁸ Implicitly, this discussion indicates the complementary nature of theology and the hermeneutical human sciences. Unfortunately, although this is an important point, I am not able to pursue it here at length. In any case, this rapprochement has been broached by others. Indeed, as I discuss in the following chapters, in the Islamic context this is one of the main themes of the reconstruction of knowledge debate. In the context of western, secular academia see, for example, Keenan (2003), Martin (1997) and Martin et al. (1980).

¹⁹ As I discuss above, the problem of silence also plays an important function in deconstruction’s challenge to dialogical understanding.

²⁰ Panikker (1999 [1978]: xv) refers to the rational encounter as a dialectical dialogue, and the sentimental encounter as an erotic dialogue. Although complementary, dialectical and erotic dialogues become full inter-religious dialogues only when they lead to *dialogical* dialogue: to a form of dialogue in which the other reveals more about one’s own self than about the other. For Panikker, dialogical dialogue is thus a form of revelation in which the other reveals that which the self is not conscious of, reveals that which the self takes too much for granted (1979: 242-3). Furthermore, a higher stage is realized when inter-religious dialogue leads to *intra*-religious dialogue, to an internal dialogue triggered by the other, an internal dialogue in which the self and the other are no longer distinct object and subject. Instead, it is one in which the other is

doctrines and opinions, to the mutual explication and elaboration of religious doctrines and worldviews. Less commonly, inter-religious dialogue may also be a sentimental encounter of sympathy and antipathy (Panikker 1999 [1978]: xv).

Of course, inter-religious dialogue is not without its own hazards. On the one hand, the ecumenical aim of understanding the other underlying inter-religious dialogues often leads to unwarranted syncretism (Cox 1992). On the other hand, participants may also be motivated by hopes of converting the other. For Cox both are serious negations of inter-religious dialogue.

In inter-religious dialogue the critical element takes the form of a suspicion of interests, whether those are political and economic domination or religious conversion. Yet this is crucially different from the tradition of the critique of ideology because unlike the latter the suspicion of interests does not require a sophisticated understanding of the other, nor the special powers of a Marxist theorist to see through the mystifying economic interests, nor of a psychoanalyst or critical theorist who alone can remove the blockages of a distorted communication. Nor for that matter does the suspicion of interests require the insights of a genealogist of power to reveal the suppression of intra-discursive struggles, or of a deconstructive philosopher the repressions of the un-thought of a tradition. What this suspicion of interests in inter-religious dialogue points to is the continuing legacy of the Marxist notion of ideology and false consciousness in contemporary forms of Critical Theory, Discourse Analysis and Deconstruction, despite the latter's renunciation of the Enlightenment distinction between objective, "pure" knowledge and subjective, "impure" knowledge.

discovered within the self (1999 [1978]: xv-xix). Panikker locates inter-religious dialogue at the sociological and historical levels, and intra-religious dialogue in philosophical anthropology, that is in human nature which seeks to discover within itself the whole human world.

On the contrary, inter-religious dialogue is able to deal with critique without lapsing into economic determinism or false consciousness. The critical element has always been there in the form of a suspicion of the other's missionary quest. We can see this quite explicitly, for example, in a letter from a Hindu participant in an inter-religious dialogue, which is worth repeating here:

Do not think that I am against dialogue...On the contrary, I am fully convinced that dialogue is an essential part of human life, and therefore of religious life itself...Yet, to be frank with you, there is something which makes me uneasy in the way in which you Christians are now trying so eagerly to enter into official and formal dialogue with us. Have you already forgotten that what you call "inter-faith dialogue" is quite a new feature in your understanding and practice of Christianity? Until a few years ago, and often still today, your relations with us were confined, either to merely the social plane, or to preaching in order to convert us to your *dharmā*...The main obstacles to real dialogue are, on the one hand, a feeling of superiority and, on the other, the fear of losing one's identity(cited in Samartha 1980: 162).

Silence

What happens when dialogues fail? From the point of Gadamer's hermeneutics, dialogues never fail permanently for every break in dialogue is itself the promise of a resumption of a later dialogue. From the point of view of Critical Theory, the failure of dialogues points to the illusory nature of equal dialogues in the first place. One of the fundamental presuppositions of the ideal-speech situation is that, given a universalistic procedural ethics and an egalitarian distribution of dialogue-chances, there is no reason that dialogues should ever fail: in an ideal speech situation people will talk about their differences and keep on talking (Agger 1981: 15).

What Gadamer's dialogical hermeneutics and a Critical Theory of dialogue fail to appreciate is that, even in the face of equal power relations, at some point radical differences may be so evident that it may be impossible to keep on talking at least on certain issues. Again, an important difference between an inter-religious

critique and the Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology is that the refusal of dialogue stems not only from a suspicion of the other's interests. One may be suspicious of the other but still be engaged in dialogue. But the refusal of dialogue may also result from what Cox (1992: 165-168) argues are the ultimate questions of life and death. That is to say, despite one's best efforts to understand the other, one is confronted by different and often irreconcilable beliefs about salvation.²¹ An unwarranted syncretism notwithstanding, at this point an inter-religious dialogue may fall short and reveal once more the chasm between the self and other.

C. Taylor's proposal for a language of perspicuous contrasts assumes that there always exist some human constants in different cultures. But C. Taylor does not acknowledge that at some point we may be confronted with silence, that at some point we may have to admit differences in 'final vocabularies' (Rorty ??). The prospect of final vocabularies and the ensuing silence is an important issue not tackled adequately by hermeneutical dialogue nor by a Critical Theory of dialogue. It is not enough to limit dialogical understanding to either areas of consensus or to revealing power differentials. To be truly genuine dialogical understanding must also probe what J. V. Taylor (1980 [1977]: 224) calls the "jealousies of each faith", those irreducible points from which both the self and other claim universality and finality. For J. V. Taylor the irreducible convictions do not bring dialogue to a halt, but should become the common ground for a continued dialogue. This is admirable but too much indebted to the logic of Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons'

²¹ Albeit in quite different contexts, this is remarkably similar to what Rorty (date), despite his anti-foundationalism, calls 'final vocabularies'. But I again challenge the post-foundationalist position. If there is no ultimate, metaphysical grounding to one's philosophy, how then is it possible to claim '*final* vocabularies'? Would not such vocabularies continuously be revised?

and ignores the positive role of silence. Silence points to illegitimate dialogues, and to the recognition of power differentials. Silence also points to final vocabularies and, more positively, temporary silence points to a mutual recognition of some genuine differences.²² Dialogical understanding is the best method that we have for understanding the other. Yet it is crucial not to lose sight of its limits. Although we may hope for sustained dialogue, there comes a point at which we may be confronted by *temporary silence on certain issues* as a legitimate option.

²² The fear, of course, is that silence will inevitably lead to violence. It is true that violence may be a short step from silence. But let us not forget that violence may also occur while one engages in a duplicitous, disingenuous dialogue. Dialogue is not in itself a guarantee of non-violence, a fact that curiously so many theorists seem to forget.

A Dialogical Aporia

What kind of dialogue is possible between foundationalist and anti-foundationalist cultures and traditions? Although hermeneutical and inter-religious dialogue take us a long way toward a model of understanding that can be both interpretive and critical, the problem is that neither of these models takes seriously the differences separating metaphysical, foundationalist worldviews from post-metaphysical, anti-foundationalist ones. What Euben does not realize in her interpretive account of Islamic fundamentalism is that the shift toward anti-foundationalist, dialogical models of understanding may be positive in terms of taking seriously the (religious) other's own account, but in the end there remains a deep skepticism of the foundationalist perspective underlying the other's account. What Euben needs to answer is whether anti-foundationalist, dialogical models can include religious, i.e. foundational dialogue? She argues that anti-foundationalist, dialogical models provide criteria by which to distinguish, not right from wrong, nor true from false, but better from worse interpretations. Is it probable or even possible that a religious other could enter into such a model of dialogue given that the religious other must needs be tied to criteria by which to distinguish right from wrong and true from false?

Hekman's (1986) attempt to resolve this dilemma provides no easy answers but at least it has the credit of staying true to its anti-foundationalist credo. Hekman accepts Gadamer's view that the tradition of critique conceived of by the Enlightenment must be abandoned. However, she argues that abandoning this conception of critique does not mean abandoning critique altogether. Rather, a new, post-foundationalist conception of critique must be formulated that not only takes account of one's belongingness within a tradition but also eschews claims to

pure and objective knowledge. Indeed, this is a problem for all secular, anti-foundationalist interpretive theorists: how to create a space for critique without reverting to religiously or Enlightenment based foundationalism?

I agree that dialogical understanding requires a new conception of critique that is not situated in the Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology. But I do not share the post-foundationalist streak that runs through much of the interpretive human sciences. If a dialogical framework is proposed to understand the Islamic “other”, does this not require a dialogical model that can incorporate foundationalism? To seek to understand an “other” who has not repudiated foundationalism through a model that is committed only to a post- or anti-foundationalist dialogue seems to me to do short justice to the other’s point of view. My disagreement with Gadamer, Euben, Hekman and other post-foundationalist hermeneutists, with whom I am otherwise in agreement, is that they do not take seriously enough the foundationalism of the other. If Gadamer’s hermeneutical dialogue leads to a radical anti-foundational stance as Hekman (1986) claims, how can such an anti-foundational perspective be relied upon for a dialogue involving a religious community, which by its very definition is foundationalist? Given the anti-foundationalism inherent in Gadamerian hermeneutics, one must ask whether the presuppositions underlying hermeneutical dialogue can serve as an adequate basis for a dialogue between Islam and modernity, between a tradition that still upholds transcendent and metaphysical truths and another that in its post-Enlightenment thrust has been repudiating them? Here one finds the limit of Gadamer’s fusion of horizons. For anti-foundationalist, linguistic models of dialogue will always posit that truth and morality can only develop inter-subjectively, not from some transcendental source.

The corollary of this is: can the model of inter-religious dialogue, based in theological commitments and in danger always of lapsing into a “double monologue” (Panikker) be appropriate for an encounter with an Other whose commitment to post-foundationalism often amounts to hostile anti-foundationalism?

I began with a defense of interpretive, dialogical understanding against the explanatory models in the social sciences and poststructuralist theorizing of the other. However, the interpretive models in the human sciences that do repudiate naturalism, positivism and the Enlightenment tradition of the critique of ideology turn to the linguistic basis of reality. Yet this linguistic turn, in rejecting Enlightenment conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘science’, also amounts to a rejection of all metaphysical foundations as a grounding for human knowledge. Hermeneutical dialogue is a vast improvement over explanatory models and poststructuralist based theorizing. However, it is limited in the last instance by its anti-foundationalist presuppositions. This harkens to my hesitation with Bauman’s and Smart’s reference to *postmodern* social theory as a translation service. Postmodernism is already too laden with anti-foundationalist presuppositions that it is difficult for such a theory to be an adequate translation service for a foundationalist other. We must concede that any understanding that is generated will be incomplete and any agreement muddled.

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