

# Western Hermeneutics and Inter-Religious Dialogue

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## Introduction:

The aim of this paper is to show how contemporary Western hermeneutics may clarify certain central aims of modern inter-religious dialogues. The clarifications are four-fold in logically sequential order: first, how a hermeneutics understands what dialogue is and what it is not (Section One); second, how there is a need, at crucial times in dialogue, for the interruption of the dialogue by various hermeneutics of suspicion (Section Two); third, what are basic limits to hermeneutical-dialogical understanding; fourth, how does experiencing a limit to dialogical-hermeneutical understanding also open dialogue to new non-dialogical ways of thinking in the transcendent-immanent realm of the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Impassable, and even, in a relatively recent candidate for naming that realm opened at the limit, the Impossible (Section Three). The present paper is philosophical with a few theological moments. My hope is that these reflections on Western hermeneutics may serve as a modest heuristic guide for inter-religious dialogues.

## I. Hermeneutics: The Model of Conversation-Dialogue

In modern Western philosophy, the most persuasive model for interpretation-hermeneutics remains the Gadamerian hermeneutical model of conversation.<sup>i</sup> This model remains basic but also in need of several qualifications, expansions and even radical corrections or interruptions, especially for inter-religious dialogue.

First, however, the model itself and several frequently overlooked points about its radicality and even strangeness. The basic model is this: the event of understanding happens to us through dialogue; i.e., we are taken over by the question of the dialogue through the logic of questioning. That logic is the logic of question and answer between dialogue-partners (whether two conversation partners or a reader and a text, symbol, ritual, historic event, etc.).

Moreover, in this Gadamerian model, the logic of question and answer which constitutes a dialogue is ontologically a particular kind of game. As in any game (e.g., sports or drama), the conversation is not ruled by the consciousness of the players. Indeed, a self-conscious actor destroys the communal drama by a refusal or inability to enter a game other than his/her own ego drama. The player must abandon self-consciousness to the logic of the to and fro movement of the game (in conversation, the to and fro movement of the logic of question and answer in questioning). Then one experiences the ontological reality of being-played as when we say in sports games that we are 'in the zone.'

If the key to dialogue is the logic of question and answer, not self-consciousness nor Schleiermacher's self-conscious empathy,<sup>ii</sup> then clearly the emphasis of dialogue must shift from the self to the other--the person, the text, the symbol, the event--that is driving all the questioning in the dialogue. Equally clearly, in this model, the self is not in control. Indeed, the self should be as fully attentive and critically intelligent as possible but, through the dialogue acknowledge itself as not in control of the dialogue, indeed never fully self-present or self-transparent. Rather the self-in-dialogue-with-the-other through the 'game' of conversation is always a self interpreting, discovering, constituting (i.e., not inventing) an ever-changing self. That self--changing through conversation--manifests the self's finitude and historicity. First, finitude: the self can never, contra Hegel, achieve self-transparency or full self-presence; that remains an infinite, never completed task. Second, the self-in-dialogue always finds its self-reflective understanding exceeded by the event of dialogical understanding it experiences in the dialogical event of understanding the other. Dialogical understanding is an event that happens; it is a blow to ordinary self-reflective consciousness.

In sum, Gadamer emphasizes as much as Heidegger and Derrida (whom we shall examine in sections two and three) the following four shared characteristics of modern Western hermeneutics:

(1) a strong acknowledgment of the finitude and historicity of all human understanding;

(2) the all-important fact that the focus of hermeneutical philosophy must be on the other as an alterity not as a projected other of the self;

(3) The hermeneutical self experiences an excess to its ordinary self-understanding that it cannot control through conscious intentionality or through desire for the same. Therefore each self must 'let go' to the dialogue itself;

(4) The dialogue works as a dialogue (and not an exercise in self-aggrandizement) only if the other is allowed--through the dynamic of the to and fro movement of questioning--to become in the dialogue itself a genuine other not a projected other. A projected other is an unreal 'other' projected upon some real other by the ego's needs or desires to define itself. An example of non-dialogue: the frightening history of Christian anti-Semitism began with the supersessional New Testament Christian anti-synagogue refusal consciously or unconsciously to allow the religious Jew to be other than a projected other used to define what the Christian is not, viz., a Jew whom the Christian 'supersedes.'

These four characteristics are shared by Gadamer and post-Gadamer hermeneutics despite the other important differences we shall analyze below among Gadamer and Ricoeur, Habermas, Levinas, and Derrida, Blanchot and others. These four characteristics demonstrate that, in this Western model of hermeneutics, a genuine dialogue focused on the other and on the logic of questioning as the peculiar game of dialogue must involve a willingness to put oneself and one's tradition(s) or the fragments of a tradition at risk. Then one either encounters the other (Gadamer-Buber) or exposes oneself to the other (Levinas-Derrida). This movement also implies that one enters a dialogue with one's critical consciousness vigilant and with a knowledge and respect for one's own traditions. To risk oneself in dialogue does not mean to enter with either a lack of self-respect or a lack of knowledge of and affirmation of at least the most important fragments (or, better, frag-events) of one's traditions. Gadamer's now classic model for genuine dialogue may well inform although it is not identical with the dialogical elements in inter-religious traditional negotiations. In the latter honorable, even noble and necessary discussions in our new global situation, one need not demand the full risk of a full-fledged dialogue. Within what we label Islam and Christianity or Buddhism and all other major religious traditions we must always remember that these names are practically useful for generalization and abstraction purposes but are not concretely accurate. Each general 'tradition' is a general label for multiple traditions within the tradition. Every pluralism is sometimes considered a positive reality by participants but sometimes not, especially not by authorities within the tradition. Consider, for example, the more conflictual rather than welcoming assessment of mysticism in ethical monotheistic Judaism before Scholem's scholarship on kabbalah; the still unresolved debate on Sufi mysticisms in Islam; and the major rethinking of the complexity of medieval Christianity since the extraordinary discoveries or reevaluations of the Dionysian apophatic and mystical traditions in Christianity and especially in the rediscovered medieval women mystics.

There are other valuable exercises besides genuine dialogue as described above. For example, there are surely dialogical elements in most official inter-religious dialogues even if they do not fully fit the full model of hermeneutical dialogue. Otherwise religious participants would not be involved at all in any attempt at dialogue. Fundamentalists in every tradition are almost never dialogically involved. Contemporary admirable, indeed necessary, official inter-religious dialogues do not usually involve the participants in much risk of 'conversion' to the other. Rather, they are perhaps better described as dialogical negotiations clarifying the genuine differences and similarities of the official dialogical partners. Official dialogues are usually guided by a common religious ideal become a common question. For example, is the religious ideal of 'love of God and love of neighbor' a shared religious ideal between Christianity (in its several forms) and Islam (in its several forms)? Clearly there are genuinely dialogical moments involved in official dialogues in the attention to the other as both different but possibly sharing some common or similar religious and/or ethical ideals.

In Gadamer's hermeneutical model there are four other less central but important elements to be mentioned (and, in my judgment, affirmed) before moving on to certain problems and interruptions of the Gadamerian model of dialogue.

First, it is important to note that despite many misreadings of his position, Gadamer is not presenting a methodology for dialogue although there are, more than he admits, clear implications for a dialogical method. As Gadamer makes clear over and over again, he is presenting a philosophical not methodological analysis of dialogue as constituted by a peculiar questioning to and fro movement. This claim is not primarily epistemological but ontological. His dialogical model focuses, therefore, on the ontological event of dialogical understanding that happens over and above our intentions, our desires, our needs.

Second, a major Gadamerian emphasis is his elaborate argument against historicism,<sup>iii</sup> the claim to reconstruct the past as it really was. In place of historicism Gadamer proposes a historically conscious not historicist hermeneutic. For example, there is Gadamer's theory of Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein: i.e., there is always an excess of history as tradition (as consciously or unconsciously present) in all hermeneutical-dialogical understanding; for Gadamer, we can never escape this history of effects in the tradition any more than we can escape our own shadows. Moreover, we should be as aware, i.e., historically conscious, of our own historical context as possible in a manner analogous to Michel Foucault's call for a 'history of the present' as a major part of all historical work.

Third, this Gadamerian emphasis (overemphasis?) on the inevitable reality of history as tradition and as a history of effects in all understanding leads as well to his emphasis on language. A linguistic emphasis is common to all modern hermeneutical thinkers; even Schleiermacher shares it with his intriguing notion of 'grammar' as a counterpart to Schleiermacherian 'empathy' and 'divination.'<sup>iv</sup> In fact, all hermeneutical thinkers (whether self-described as hermeneutical or not) are oriented to language. Hermeneutics is part of the more general 'linguistic turn' in both analytic and Continental philosophy. In hermeneutics the major contemporary influence is Heidegger and his very different trajectories on language: either in his Being and Time period where hermeneutical understanding is a basic existential of Dasein; or alternatively, in his later period where certain poetic and religious language evokes a call for a 'new poetic or meditative' non-calculative thinking.<sup>v</sup> Heidegger dropped his earlier emphasis on hermeneutics for reasons we shall see below. In addition, the 'late Heidegger' trajectory for a new post-hermeneutical way of thinking is the one that Derrida also attempts. But for Gadamer, his hermeneutical-dialogical model of understanding remains, contra Heidegger and Derrida, the philosophical key. Gadamer even claims a universality for his model as applied to all understanding, not only explicit dialogues. Gadamer plausibly insists that insofar as we understand, we understand through language and therefore hermeneutically; insofar as our understanding is always finite and historical, we necessarily understand differently than did the original author or the original audience of a text.

Gadamer is both a major contemporary philosopher (here his mentor was Heidegger) and a classical philologist (here his mentor was Friedlander). Gadamer's most original philosophical work includes both his now classic Truth and Method and his dialogical interpretations (contra Heidegger) of Plato and neo-Platonism.<sup>vi</sup> As both philosopher and philologist, Gadamer makes the intriguing suggestion that modern hermeneutics is basically a historically-conscious (i.e., modern) expression of classical rhetoric.

Our historicity is carried by many social, cultural, economic, aesthetic, ethical and religious traditions. The most important carrier of these traditions (Gadamer unfortunately usually speaks of 'the tradition') is language. Insofar as we speak, we understand first and foremost through our native language. We can, of course, learn other languages well, even excellently, like Joseph Conrad or Vladimir Nabokov learned and brilliantly wrote in English or as Emile Cioran or Samuel Beckett wrote French so well that many considered them the best French stylists of their period. We understand

reality as intelligible through language insofar as we understand reality at all. The infant (i.e., the human being before language) certainly experiences the ocean but has very little intelligible understanding of that powerful experience.

The hermeneutical emphasis on language also reminds us how important translations become for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Fortunately, many of those involved in inter-religious dialogue know the relevant languages and cultures. For others like myself confined to the usual Western scholarly languages, reliable translations of non-Western languages becomes a necessity. We must also acknowledge, however, that every translation is an interpretation--and one that includes many conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious realities. For example, one of the great translators of Greek tragedy, David Grene, once observed in an essay on translation, that one difficulty for the translator of Greek texts is that all of us, whether we are aware of it or not, possess some pre-conscious sense of the correct rhythms of our native language. That sense may help or hinder translation. Grene grew up hearing throughout all his childhood in his Anglo-Irish family the King James Bible with its powerful, sonorous, unforgettable Elizabethan rhythms. As a result, Grene found translating Aeschylus natural, but translating Euripides very difficult. An earlier translator of Greek tragedy, Gilbert Murray, was part of a generation who in their formative years recited the rebellious, strangely musical, seductive rhythms of Swinburne. As a translator, therefore, Murray was the exact opposite to Grene. Murray was a first rate translator of Euripides but a failure at Aeschylus. Pre-conscious and usually unrecognized early influences with our native language affect us for life, even in reading translations.

Fourth, there is another important but often overlooked aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics: Part One of Truth and Method is Gadamer's claim (like the late Heidegger, like Ricoeur, Derrida, Blanchot, Benjamin, Adorno and, in an important self-correction, the later Habermas) that any great work of art is a shock to our ordinary understanding. We will return to this important claim in Section Three to assess its relevance to understanding the shock of art to ordinary understanding of art, the analogous shock of the ethics of the other to ordinary morality, and the excessive shock of a powerful religious vision to one's ordinary sense of possibility.

Before explaining the most important correctives and interruptions to Gadamer's model of dialogue, accuracy demands that I mention two further aspects of Gadamer's model which I have not examined above. As will become clear only after discussing the most important corrections and interruptions of Gadamer's model, I cannot subscribe to one important emphasis of Gadamer for dialogue: his notion of a necessary drive in dialogue to an achievement of 'mutual understanding' and a 'fusion of horizons.'<sup>vii</sup> This insistence seems to me a mistake. Genuine dialogue after all may end in aporias (as in Plato's 'early dialogues'). Dialogue need not reach full fusion of horizons or mutual understanding in order to be a successful dialogue on the Gadamerian model itself. For example, several distinguished Lutheran theologians find the 'consensus' announced in the official Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue on justification not accurate at all: the announced consensus is not merely fragile, it is false. Nevertheless dialogue did occur. On the other hand, some historians of the relationships of Jews, Muslims and Christians in medieval Spain argue that some medieval polemical arguments did, at times, include a dialogical element. Some medieval polemics were attempts through civil polemical arguments to clarify differences and establish boundaries. These famous medieval Muslim-Jewish-Christian exchanges, therefore, were not dialogues as defined above. They should not be romanticized as such. However, especially in 11th and 12th century Muslim Cordoba and 13th century Christian Toledo, the polemical exchanges of Muslims, Jews, Christians did at times include dialogical elements geared to help each understand the boundaries of each religion.<sup>viii</sup>

Gadamer's insistence on the need for a fusion of horizons is for me an admirable dialogical ideal but by no means a necessity for dialogue. This Gadamerian emphasis on a 'fusion of horizons' is linked to another typical Gadamerian emphasis on the need for a 'unity' of meaning in a text for a correct interpretation of a text. For example, Gadamer defends Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's metaphysics of will as the unity of meaning in Nietzsche's text. Other

interpreters (e.g., Derrida or Deleuze) strongly disagree: there is no unity of meaning in 'Nietzsche' but rather a non-unified play of differences produced through Nietzsche's many styles, genres, forms. Whatever one's judgment on these contradictory readings of Nietzsche,<sup>ix</sup> the issue stands: does Gadamer too readily agree with Heidegger's 'Nietzsche' because Gadamer overemphasizes a unity of meaning as a necessary result of hermeneutical-dialogical meaning? The issue is clear: contingently there may be a consensus on a unity of meaning in interpreting a given text. But this is not always so. Textual meaning may, in fact, never unify; horizons may not fuse; consensus may not arrive. And yet dialogue still happens.

To conclude this section on the basic hermeneutical model of dialogue, I see no persuasive reason to consider these latter Gadamerian emphases as necessary for his model of dialogue. Indeed, there are several good reasons to deny the Gadamerian emphasis on unity of meaning, mutual understanding and fusion of horizons. At the same time, we can accept the basic Gadamerian model for dialogue described above.

In sum, dialogue is the attempt to understand some other, some subject matter by allowing the event of understanding emerge as a 'blow' to one's earlier self-understanding as well as one's initial understanding of the other person or text. The dialogical event of understanding happens through the to and fro movement of questioning itself. In dialogue, one must learn to risk one's present understanding by exposing oneself to the other as other (person or text or ritual, etc.). Only in that manner does one fully enter into dialogue, i. e., into the to and fro movement of the peculiar question and response at issue in the subject matter under question. For genuine dialogue one must learn ever anew the skills to play well (as in any game). If one plays well one reaches the point of being played by the dialogue itself. One is 'in the dialogical zone.'

## II. Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Besides the hermeneutics of trust made possible by a radical attention to the other (person, text, symbol etc.) in the hermeneutical-phenomenological model of dialogue there are also occasional but necessary 'interruptions.' First, as in Plato, one finds at times there is a need to interrupt the more conversational mode of inquiry to remove confusions, lack of clarity and errors by analytical precision or arguments on disputed or unclear points. Platonic dialogue, as dialogue, is attentive to what we moderns call historical context. In his dialogues Plato elucidates the distinct temperaments and the different levels of knowledge of the various interlocutors. Plato also takes pains to clarify the particular setting of the dialogue: a lively even raucous evening drinking party (Symposium), a walk in the country (Phaedrus), a deliberate walk from below (The Piraeus) to Athens above (The Republic). Arguments are non-contextual. Plato, the philosopher-artist, structures his dialogues both philosophically and artistically with full attention to the concrete particulars that specify the different characters and the particular setting. Simultaneously, Plato and even more, of course, Aristotle, employ arguments at crucial moments in the dialogues. Aristotle also wrote dialogues which Cicero considered quite good. Unfortunately Aristotle's dialogues are now lost to us. However, Aristotle is the master not of dialogue but of argument. Aristotle ('the master of those who know' as Dante called Aristotle with medieval surety) is the thinker to turn to among the ancients to find out what kind of arguments are proper to different subject-matters: logic, analytics, rhetoric, poetics, ethics, politics, metaphysics. Aristotle is to Plato as Habermas is to Gadamer. One thinker (Plato, Gadamer) of course endorses arguments as sometimes necessary but places them within the wider context-laden inquiry called dialogue. The other thinker (Aristotle, Habermas) allows for dialogue as general inquiry but clearly prefers arguments and propositional definitions. Argument and formal logical analysis, therefore, are the first necessary interruptions of dialogue from Plato and Aristotle forward. The wider category of conversation allows and calls for argument when the matter at issue is too vague, too unclear, or seems counter-intuitive. Plato's Socrates masters elenchic back-and-forth arguments and constant

attempts at logical definitions. A definition, as Aristotle says, is a proposition that applies to all cases of X--virtue, eros, piety, courage, etc.--and only to cases of X.

Arguments and logical analyses do not define inquiry (despite analytical philosophy's occasional claims to the contrary) but should be part of any dialogue, including inter-religious dialogue. As Paul Ricoeur argues, dialogue today may also involve the use of peculiarly modern formal and historical-critical explanatory methods.<sup>x</sup> Ricoeur, for interpretation, uses certain modern explanatory methods, such as structuralist methods, to explain how the structures produce the meaning 'in front of the text,' not 'behind' the text as in the proper use of historical-critical methods. For this reason Paul Ricoeur does not reject the basic Gadamerian model of conversation in hermeneutics while, at the same time, arguing for the use of all relevant explanatory methods (structuralist, semiotic, historical-critical, formal aesthetic, etc.) to challenge or to correct one's initial understanding of the other by showing how certain structures and other linguistic, social, cultural, economic, religious, historical networks embedded in the text can be decoded through the use of the relevant method not to replace (as Gadamer fears) but to enrich the final hermeneutical understanding of the other. Ricoeur's hermeneutical model of 'understanding-explanation-understanding,' therefore, does not eliminate Gadamer's basic hermeneutical model of conversational understanding. Rather Ricoeur expands and partly corrects Gadamer's hermeneutics. In my judgment, the Ricoeurian model is a helpful addition to and partial corrective of the Gadamerian model: Ricoeur's model of understanding-explanation-understanding shows a hermeneutical way to render more coherent the meaning of the text. For Ricoeur, too, dialogical understanding is both first and last; explanation is merely a valuable interruption to clarify how the ultimate meaning dialogically understood is produced 'in front of the text.'

A radical correction of Gadamer's model, indeed a temporary rupture of that model, is what Ricoeur named a hermeneutics of suspicion.<sup>xi</sup> All hermeneutics of suspicion is allied to a critical theory to spot and partly heal the problem disrupting the conversation.<sup>xii</sup> In hermeneutics of suspicion, one does not focus on conscious errors. All errors and logical confusions can be removed by further arguments and formal analyses always intrinsic to the self-correcting power of reason. Critical reason is, by definition, operative in any dialogue. In contrast, a hermeneutics of suspicion, as the word 'suspects' suggests, has a far more radical task than traditional critique of errors. Freud is not another Voltaire. Modern hermeneutics of suspicion (and their attendant critical theories) are modeled initially in the early Frankfurt School (especially by Benjamin and by Horkheimer and Adorno)--on classical Freudian psychoanalytical theory and therapy.

Psychoanalysis, after all, is not like a traditional theory; it is a theory that attempts not only to explain difficulties in the human psyche but as much as possible to cure it. Psychoanalysis is a prime analogue for a theory that both explains and, in its therapeutic practice, emancipates one from some unconscious systemically functioning distortion repressed in the psyche.

Classical psychoanalysis is not strictly speaking a dialogue. Analysis attempts to bring some repressed unconscious feelings to the surface of consciousness in order to allow ordinary conversation and life to resume without the disruptive power of unconscious systemic distortions. Psychoanalysis is a non-dialogical interaction the analyst possesses a critical theory and thereby acts as a blank screen to help spot the analysand's unconscious illusions and self-delusions and thereby to make transference possible. Psychoanalytic theory, put in practice by the analyst through extended therapy, hopes to provide some emancipation from repressed feelings understood to be caused by childhood traumas. Conversation is interrupted when one partner notices what she believes to be conscious errors which are curable by taking the time for arguments, explanatory methods, formal analysis and critique. But we cannot argue with feelings. I cannot argue you into loving me. In matters of the heart, 'the more we explain, the less we understand.' 'le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.' If this is the case for all matters of the 'heart' in its ordinary

functionings, it is doubly the case for dealing with repressed, unconscious but systemically functioning distortions. Then one needs a hermeneutics of suspicion and its attendant critical theories.

Thanks to the self-correcting power of reason, we can trust arguments and explanatory theories to deal adequately with conscious errors. But can argument suffice for unconscious distortions which we suspect are in fact functioning powerfully by constantly disrupting the very possibility of a dialogue? If we suspect some deadly unconscious systemic 'distortions' (e.g., sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, repressed hostile feelings, elitism, classism, homophobia, Eurocentrism, ressentiment, Islamophobia, colonialism, etc.) are disrupting the conversation, we must stop the conversation and use some appropriate critical theory to determine whether the suspicion is justified or not. If justified, can the unconscious but systemically functioning distortion be first acknowledged and treated as best one can by the use of some critical theory before the dialogue can proceed? The unconscious bears both great unacknowledged truths about us as well as repressed systemic distortions. Freud held that the unconscious holds the truth about every self. Even if we do not accept that strong Freudian claim, the reality of unconscious truths and unconscious systemic distortions is clear,

The difference between occasional conscious error (even Homer sometimes nods) and unconscious but systemically functioning distortion is usually not difficult to observe empirically. For example, if you think I am wrong either in my interpretation of or my defense of the need for a hermeneutics of suspicion, you need only interrupt me with a good argument. If I am reasonable I will study your argument and address it reasonably. As a result, I will either change my original position or try to show you, by further argument or analytical clarification, how you have misunderstood my position. Even if we can only agree to disagree, the conversation and dialogue can proceed normally. If, however, in the course of conversation and arguments (as in Plato's model dialogues) you begin to suspect that I am not so much rationally confused or in error but unconsciously and systemically distorted (psychotic) you would be right to stop the conversation. If anyone is paranoid he/she is not good dialogue material. Nor is anyone who is unconsciously filled with ressentiment from unadmitted or even noticed racism, sexism, homophobia, elitism, classism, colonialism, imperialism, or Eurocentricism. These cases are hardly exceptional since we are all damaged goods.

Some persons are so damaged that they are incapable of genuine dialogue. They cannot allow any other to be really other. For example, every inter-cultural or inter-religious dialogue may need the Western participant to hesitate before entering to analyze whether some unconscious Western colonialist, imperialist attitude to the other is present despite my good will. My belief that the 'isms' I list are more likely to be unconscious distortions rather than conscious errors is, of course, at the moment, only my 'suspicion.' Such matters rarely yield strict proof. However, there are good reasons to suspect that all the infamous 'isms' listed above are more likely to function in us, and our cultures and our religions as unconscious and repressed distortions than as conscious errors. Sexism, racism, classism, cultural imperialism are unlikely to be adequately understood much less treated if they are considered merely conscious errors which better arguments and more accurate theories will eventually remove. For example, using the word 'pagan' suggests that some problem--perhaps unconscious--is still functioning among some monotheistic thinkers and prospective dialogue partners with the many non-monotheistic religions, especially indigenous religions.

In my judgment, inter-religious dialogue even more than other dialogues have one great advantage for a successful dialogue. Most religions possess a basic vision of what is ultimately Real as well as some 'way of life.' Most religions also sense that there is both great goodness and a dark underside to the human situation. Religious persons seek liberation either by means of either self- (not ego-) power (Zen) or through Other Power (Pure Land). Two examples of religious hermeneutics of suspicion: the notions of sin and avidya. In Christian understanding sin is not properly understood as conscious moral errors or mistakes. For the Christian, sin is rightly understood as sin (note the hermeneutic as) as an egotistic disorientation of the self. Sin, like secular ideology in the strict sense, is an unconscious

but systemically functioning basic disorientation of the self. 'Sin' describes the self as trapped in its own ego. There the self, desperate but unable on its own to escape, finds itself trying to get out of its ego but relentlessly driven back into it. The self becomes an all devouring and self-destructive ego. The Christian self, in sin, is unable by its own power to free itself but needs the Other Power of God's grace. Even more starkly, as in Luther, the Christian self is understood as always/already curvatus in se. No exit. To understand sin in Christian terms (as both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky insisted) means that sin is understood as sin only in the light of grace--i.e., that emancipatory Other power from God called grace which comes as pure gift to emancipate the self from itself. Theologies at their best or their equivalents in every tradition are complex hermeneutical ways to retrieve the original vision of the tradition for an ever-changing situation. In effect, good theologies also use theological-critical theories (e.g., the theory of sin-grace, the dialectic of primal ignorance/enlightenment) to transform and be transformed by their practices. Critical theories may also need still other critical theories to understand their own possible unconscious distortions. For example, feminists have exposed the unconscious, distorted understandings of 'woman' in other 'critical theories': for example, Lacanian psychoanalysis (Kristeva), mainstream Western philosophies (Irigaray) or Western religions (Catherine Keller rethinking chaos in Genesis).

A second example of a religious hermeneutics of suspicion: when many forms of Hinduism and Buddhism speak of our 'primal ignorance' (avidya) they describe not conscious errors but a trap within which the ego cannot let go of its own clinging ego in its primal ignorance on what is real. Avidya is not premised on the thought that better, clearer thinking will suffice to cure our dilemma anymore than 'sin' can be cured by one's own moral struggle (Augustine contra Pelagius). A religious/philosophical premise of avidya and the suffering (dukkha) it causes is central to most forms of Buddhism. So is the parallel belief that enlightenment (nirvana) can happen resulting as well in a compassion for all sentient beings. For some Buddhists this compassion can be so great that she postpones her own nirvana in order to help all the other still ignorant and suffering beings. In that case, a Buddhist strives to become a new Bodhisatva, not yet a Buddha.

Avidya or primal ignorance cannot be cured by reason and argument alone. Logical arguments are highly developed in Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu philosophies. But argument cannot cure primal ignorance just as, in the Western case, critical reason, asceticism, and free will cannot on their own cure either the inherited or the personal sin that afflicts all.

Ideal inter-religious dialogue is always difficult since it must involve self-exposure and risk to the point of a possibility of radical and initially unwelcome change. Nevertheless inter-religious dialogue (which sometimes also demands intercultural dialogue) has resources that most intercultural (or for that matter, intra-cultural) dialogues lack: a built in dynamism toward the other through religious principles of justice, compassion, love. Candidates for the other expand in the religions: the friend, the family, the neighbor, the stranger, the forgotten and oppressed, even, at the limit, the enemy. This drive to the other in most religions make all the more deeply troubling how often the 'preference for the other' especially the outcast and the marginal others has been betrayed by the religions. Justice or love or compassion can unjustly and unlovingly become limited to one's own (even in First John!). 'Others' can be excluded even violently (e.g., Inquisitions, heresy-hunting, 'religious' wars, Crusades, forced conversions, or religious triumphalism). The history of religions is, as everyone knows, an often horrifying tale--a tale of unthinkable violence towards those deemed 'other'--pagans, heretics, infidels. Inter-religious dialogues may also need moments of repentance for past actions towards the 'other' before a new inter-religious dialogue can come into clear focus. In these histories of violence the religions, alas, are not alone. Indeed, the greatest horrors of the last century were enacted by explicitly anti-religious systems (Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot). These vicious systems functioned as unbelievably violent to all 'others,' often especially religious and ethnic others. As even Hegel, with his strange philosophical optimism on the rational teleology that somehow drives



and directs 'history' to reason insisted 'History is a slaughterbench.' As Joyce also noted 'History is the nightmare from which we are attempting to awaken.'

Nevertheless, blanket dismissals of either religion or secularity are entirely shortsighted. Both have not merely negative but fully ambiguous histories. Both religious and secular traditions before and since the Enlightenment have proved great benefactors to humankind. For example, the Jewish, the Christian, and Muslim traditions have functioned at their frequent best, not only for themselves but for the various cultures of which they are part, as carriers of better ways to live individually and communally. At their frequent best they showed a more just, a more responsible, a more compassionate way to live towards others, especially those forgotten or marginalized by the wider society. George Orwell sharply observed that Western secular thinkers like himself have unconsciously lived now for two centuries on the interest of the ethics of justice and love of the Jewish and Christian traditions. Now, Orwell surmised, we are starting to spend the capital itself. What to do?

To recall a thought of Adorno's lest its full force be quietly assented to before one moves one with 'more of the same' (Foucault): there is no innocent tradition, there is no innocent text; there is no innocent reading. All our religious traditions are pluralistic, fragmentary and ambiguous in their histories. What religious tradition (except, possibly the ancient religions in matrilineal societies) and cultures before modern secular feminist movements had faced the tradition's own unconscious, systemically functioning patriarchy and deep-grained sexism? Without a doubt secular critical theories available since the Enlightenment and now often in postmodern form will always be needed in contemporary inter-religious dialogue.

Most religions with their attendant philosophies and theologies can, in effect, serve not only as a hermeneutics retrieving a trusted central religious vision of what is construed as the ultimately Real. They can also serve as hermeneutics of suspicion on our self-delusions and intractable egotism, including our communal egotisms. However, there is also another, more positive and even more important matter to discuss for dialogue on matters of art, ethics and religion: hermeneutics at the Limit.

### III. Hermeneutics at the Limit

For my part, I can see no good philosophical reason to reject Gadamer's basic model of hermeneutics as conversation driven by the to and fro movement of the logic of questioning itself to the point where the interlocutors find themselves being played as they experience an event of new understanding. However, as we have just argued, there are times for the dialogue to stop for a time to face some possible systemic distortion. In the use of any critical theory, one hopes to return to the dialogue just as the analysand interrupts her ordinary conversation to face repressed feelings and unconscious distortions in order to return to conversation. This healing through some theoretical and, in effect, therapeutic critical theory necessarily interrupts all dialogue for however long necessary.

Even in a hermeneutics of trust or retrieval every hermeneutical-dialogical event of understanding is a blow to the ego's desire for control, that desire endemic to the always self-aggrandizing ego. For example, if most texts of Shakespeare do not signal all the characteristics of a great classic of European literature, then there are no classics at all. Yet interpreters should not ignore the blatant sexism of the Taming of the Shrew or even the more subtle patriarchy in other Shakespearean plays? Too often in Shakespeare the adage is true: tragedy is for men; comedy for women. Alternatively, is it really possible to consider the Shylock of The Merchant of Venice as anything other than a typical Renaissance Christian, anti-Semitic caricature? These two plays are obvious even blatant examples of systemic distortions even in Shakespeare. Everywhere in Shakespeare as in every classic, there lies great beauty, goodness and truth side by side with unnerving unconscious ugliness, evil and falsehood. The suspicions even on Shakespeare keep

coming--even with our favorite Shakespearean texts. For example, since Edward Said's Orientalism is it possible not to notice the Orientalism in the portrait of Caliban in The Tempest as well as the troubling British colonialist understructure of this deeply moving, 'farewell' play? The tide rises: Said, almost with sadness also suggests, that one finds an even stronger understructure of British colonialism in Jane Austen! If Jane Austen is not free from unconscious distortions, who is? The answer is troubling but true: no one, no classic, no tradition, and no reading (including Said's or mine) is innocent. Only a self-blinded ideologue would stop reading the now clearly damaged but still superbly great Shakespeare after such unconscious distortions are spotted both in his lesser plays (The Merchant of Venice, Taming of the Shrew, Titus Andronicus) and even in some of his greatest plays (The Tempest, Othello, Richard II, Hamlet, King Lear). In all interpretations, a hermeneutics of suspicion may be needed. The strongest classics will emerge damaged but in some ways stronger because rendered more accurately and honestly by these new both retrieving and suspicious readings. The lesser texts (no period pieces) should fall into an unmourned oblivion.

The list of failed dialogues is a long one. Successful dialogues are, in fact, very rare.<sup>xiii</sup> Instead of full dialogue, religious authorities often prefer that interlocutors 'exchange viewpoints' (a practice suspiciously like political negotiations between states); more positively, the interlocutors in official inter-religious dialogues should clarify differences and sustain legitimate boundaries of each tradition. They may very well through dialogue find some similarities in ethical and even religious purposes (e.g., social justice) that allow for common ethical and political action. These official inter-religious dialogues possess clearly admirable even noble aims. However, official inter-religious dialogues rarely aim for what we earlier analyzed as a full-fledged dialogue, inter-religious or otherwise. At the same time it seems to me unjust to demand that official inter-religious dialogues become full dialogues in the above sense or cease to be regarded as dialogues at all. In our present charged global atmosphere where conflicts among the religions is part of the wider problem of violence, one can only be thankful for all inter-religious and intra-religious dialogues that promote mutual understanding.

Sometimes the failure of a dialogue is occasioned by the unequal power relationships involved (for example, teacher and student in seminars). Sometimes the failure is caused by a refusal to expose oneself to the other or to risk one's present self-understanding. Sometimes the failure is caused by the irruption of an unwelcome but unmistakable sign of a systemic distortion.

There is a final moment, however, where dialogue properly ends not because of some external power, nor some refusal to risk exposing oneself to the other or to the resultant logic of questioning, nor to the irruption of a possible systemic distortion but for a very different, a fully positive reason: the experience that dialogue has reached its natural limit and thereby provides an opportunity for a new experience of the Real beyond ordinary reality--the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Impossible. The experience of that excess opened at the limit of dialogue and discursive reason is simultaneously an invitation for thinkers to search for a new post-dialogical way of thinking within the new experience of the Incomprehensible. New ways of thinking in this new 'Impossible' will not be non-dialogical in any simple sense. We will, after all, always struggle to understand the other--even a radical, excessive Other-power experienced at the very limit of serious dialogue. Limit is initially disclosive of our limits, our finitude, our historicity.<sup>xiv</sup> Limit may also uncover--suddenly--a new experience of what Heidegger wisely named 'The Impassable.'<sup>xv</sup> Dialogue after all is constituted by reason in its discursive functions and thus by temporality. Dialogues literally 'take time.' The interlocutors in good dialogue as we have seen can be so taken up by the logic of questioning on what has become a common question to both partners that they find themselves 'in the zone.' They are being played more than they are playing. When dialogue (like discursive reason, like ordinary time) reaches its natural limit, one experiences and understands one's limit as one's finitude and historicity while also possibly (one must wait) experiencing a reality that impinges on one from somewhere beyond one's limits. The positive experience of a new reality (the Impassable) at the limit to hermeneutics is, if

experienced, more than real. It is Real. An openness to transcendence, an unexpected sense of some mystery attracting one like a magnet (Iris Murdoch)<sup>xvi</sup> can be named, if naming proves desirable, with many names--The Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Ineffable, the Impassable (Heidegger) and the interesting recent name, the Impossible<sup>xvii</sup> (Angelus Silesius, Kierkegaard, Blanchot, Derrida, Marion, Caputo and many others).

For Heidegger, in the move that defines his 'turn' (Kehre) from the analysis of Da-sein to a more meditative approach to the question of Sein, the dual experience of limit and openness constitutes a turn away from his earlier emphasis on hermeneutics to a search for some new way of thinking appropriate to a new Unexpected experience of radical openness before Sein (for example, in Rilke's experience of 'the Open,' as Heidegger reads his poetry). For Heidegger, the thinker needs, at the limit, to move beyond dialogue to a more meditative, non calculative thinking, to 'poetic thinking,'<sup>xviii</sup> to a thinking beyond discursive thinking, to a more apophatic perhaps even mystical sense--a sense of both of naming and not naming the experience. Perhaps, Heidegger muses, we should simply say 'es gibt' (it gives). Reflection on hermeneutics at the limit seems especially appropriate for inter-religious dialogue since religions, in one of their functions, can provide some experience of excess, a sensed reality beyond or at the limit of discursive reason beyond ordinary experience, some experience of a time outside of time.

How does this happen? In dialogue one must always be attentive to the unexpected, especially in inter-religious dialogue, for a possible sudden moment of insight. One must attentively await in and through dialogue at its limit for a new, unexpected, often sudden experience. Of course, this happening may not happen. At any rate, the moment cannot be forced. As Plotinus insisted in his quiet, meditative yet rigorous way, a thinker gradually rises in a journey to return home by rigorous moral and intellectual purifications. One moves ever upward to a final achieved moment in the realm of the Intelligible. On one's own, however, one can go no further. One waits. In Plotinus' fine image one waits as if on a shore, waiting for the tide to come in. The tide may not rise during one's time there. But if the tide does rise, it lifts one to the utterly transcendent incomprehensible, seemingly impossible experience of one's true home and origin: the ultimate reality--the One and the Good.

The experience of the Impassable, the Impossible, the Incomprehensible, the Ineffable, the Infinite may happen as an epiphany 'suddenly' as does the experience of the Beautiful glimpsed at the top of the ladder of eros in Plato's Symposium.<sup>xix</sup> It may happen less suddenly and more quietly as in the experience of the Good beyond Being which, Plato asserts, is prepared for but not achieved by the whole intellectual-moral journey of The Republic especially its deliberate intellectual labor ('the divided line') from opinion and belief to mathematics, elenchic argument and dialectical reason to the point where the Good beyond Being may or may not be glimpsed.<sup>xx</sup> The experience of the Good beyond Being for Plato is an experience beyond the range of discursive reason even at its dialogical and dialectical best. We can achieve dialogue and dialectic by performance. An experience of the Good beyond Being, however, is impossible as a personal achievement. It must happen. 'Es gibt.'

The Unexpected, to which any inter-religious dialogue should be open, can be named by many names. In a good deal of modern Western thought since Angelus Silesius and especially Kierkegaard, it has been provocatively named The Impossible. Kierkegaard responded to Kant's critical assessment of the power and limits of reason and, therefore, of rational possibility, by reaching beyond Kantian rational possibility to a category he named the Impossible.

Interlocutors in dialogue may not acknowledge the Impossible as such.<sup>xxi</sup> And yet, especially in inter-religious dialogue, one should be particularly attentive to the unexpected Impossible. Above all, as Simone Weil insisted,<sup>xxii</sup> we too-busy, garrulous, over-stressed moderns must slow down, be attentive, wait for the Unexpected--not in our usual tensed-muscle mode of attention but, at the recognized end of dialogue, await another, more serene way of being played at the limit. The tide may rise. The Impossible may happen. Or it may not.

One example of a religious Impossible: the prophetic religious traditions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, preach resistance to injustice especially injustice to the outcasts of society. We can call for this reality, with Derrida, the Impossible as Justice to come.<sup>xxiii</sup> The meditative and mystical traditions also await The Impossible; they are more likely to name the Impossible Love or Wisdom or Bliss.

It is not the case that the only experience of the Impossible is a religious one. However, a primal experience of religion is, for many, a powerful and pervasive experience, both personal as well as communal: in ritual, liturgy, common meditations, common actions for justice. Official religions, of course, can become tired, listless, worn out: then only the religious virtuosi (M. Weber) still experience the Transcendent Impossible. At other times, usually in small communities of the like-minded within or sometimes separated from but still spiritually dependent upon some larger spiritual community, all members can and do experience the Religious excessive. The word 'religion,' as all know, may indeed be too Western a name for this important phenomenon present in all recorded cultures.<sup>xxiv</sup> A better word than 'religion' would be welcome. In the meantime, however, 'religion' will have to suffice to describe the experience of the reality of the excessive Real called by many names. Clearly some names are more apposite than others to name the Real, but that is a further question beyond the present study. Religion is also usually communal not merely individualist as many philosophers (e.g., W. James) are wont to ignore.<sup>xxv</sup> Religion may be an experience of excess. It may also be an experience of belonging to a particular religious community (religio as from the verb religare, to bind together). Religion in traditions with sacred texts may be a sense of the constant, lifelong need to interpret the sacred texts anew (religio from relegere). Both 'religare' and 'relegere' are familiar aspects of much of what is historically labeled 'religion,' especially 'civic' religions like Roman official religion or Classical Confucianism. Unlike the Chinese, the Romans never could unite their civic, political religion with their attraction to various 'cults' of religious excess (as in the religions of Isis, Cybele, Mithras). Perhaps Christianity (which promises both excess, the Unexpected Impossible as the God who is Love and, therefore, Trinity) as well as community and a sacred text (religare and relegere) may have resolved, for a while, the Roman problem. The most successful union of all three aspects of 'religion' in the history of religions is probably neo-Confucianism, that amazing union of the three 'ways' of Chinese culture: the more civic and interpretive of the classics (religare and relegere) way of classical Confucianism united to the Chinese religions of excess, Taoism and Buddhism. The most obvious and influential cultural reality in human history is religion in claiming 'excessive' experience of the otherwise Impossible: the gift, the Open, the Void, the Good, Justice, Love, Infinity, the Incomprehensible, the Transcendent, the Real as well as many other religious and philosophical names. Religion is feared by some secular thinkers for its claim to the Impossible: an interruption of ordinary human possibilities as enunciated by modern rationality as well as by much classical reason; an experience beyond rational and dialogical limits. Even Aristotle, hardly given to excess, observed that whatever happened to those who went through the Eleusinian mysteries could not be considered knowledge (for Aristotle knowledge is constituted by the actual and the possible). But Aristotle asserts, something happened to them: whatever happened in the mysteries was not knowledge but experience.

In the modern age religion does, for many, still serve that function of some experience if not always of the 'Impossible,' of at least of 'something more' (W. James)<sup>xxvi</sup> than is usually considered possible. For many secular persons, however, religion's day is over and art has come to serve the role of an experience of the Impossible. Art can, as Iris Murdoch wrote, at times free us to consider the possibility of

'a pure transcendent value, a steady visible enduring higher good, and perhaps provides for many people, in an unreligious age without prayer or sacraments, their clearest *experience* of something grasped as separate and precious and beneficial and held quietly and unpossessively in the attention. Good art which we love can seem

holy, and attending to it can be like praying. Our relation to such art though 'probably never' entirely pure is markedly unselfish.' (The Fire and The Sun, pp. 76-77)

Gadamer also found the shock (his word) of art disruptive of discursive reason and therefore also of dialogical reason. He did not agree, however, with his mentor Heidegger in his post Being and Time work that the work of art can so interrupt discursive and dialogical reason that a new mode of thinking other than conceptual dialectics or purely analytical reason or Scholastic philosophy may be needed in philosophy. The early Heidegger had attempted to 'deconstruct,' i.e., dismantle not destroy, any reified dialectical and analytical concepts and return them to ordinary language as Aristotle had done in developing his technical terms from ordinary spoken Greek. This Heideggerian 'destruction' served for both Gadamer and Heidegger as a hermeneutics of suspicion on traditional metaphysics. In his middle and later work, however, Heidegger, in his search for listening to Being affirmed what I am here calling 'hermeneutics at the limit.'

At one point, Heidegger attempted to 'overcome' metaphysics in the hope of freeing himself from what he now realized was still alive in Being and Time.<sup>xxvii</sup> a transcendental method attempting to justify Dasein rationally and a phenomenology of immanence alone (viz., the description of Da-Sein), not the desired transcendence of Sein disclosing and hiding itself in Dasein.

In his later work, therefore, Heidegger tried over and over again with ever new texts to try to find new ways of thinking that allowed Being to speak. The 'late' Heidegger, therefore, conducted new philosophical interpretations of certain poets (especially Hölderlin, Rilke, and Georg), certain works of art (especially the Greek temple, the Greek urn, van Gogh and some other modern painters). He developed a new way of thinking through new modes of poetic, meditative, non-calculative, non-discursive and even non-dialogical thinking.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In the future when Western philosophers know more about Eastern philosophies and religions than most of us presently do, it will be discovered, I believe, that Heidegger was not only dismantling Western philosophy by means of his readings of the pre-Socratics and the ancient tragedies as well as certain modern philosophical poets (especially Hölderlin). Heidegger was also developing a new mode of Western thinking that has far more in common with Taoist thinking and Zen Buddhism<sup>xxix</sup> than has been acknowledged by most of his Western interpreters. In fact, Heidegger was not only a thinker captivated by what he called the 'singularity' of the Greeks. He was also one of the very few modern philosophers or theologians (Raimon Panikkar is another)<sup>xxx</sup> who had been--since 1935 in fact--in serious dialogue with Taoist texts especially the Tao-de-Ching as well as with certain Zen texts. These interpretations were for Heidegger interpretations for the sake of finding in these non-Western texts new possibilities for thinking. It is a telling comment on the cultural provinciality of mainline Western philosophy and theology that most Western philosophers and theologians still do not notice that Martin Heidegger, often considered the most original and influential philosopher of the twentieth century, was in his later works trying to understand Taoist and Zen ways of thinking as clues to finding a way of 'poetic meditative thinking.'

Great art can shock us out of our ordinary thought into an epiphanic experience of the Impossible. Art can provide so powerful a transformative experience that, as Rilke said upon seeing the Apollo Belvedere, 'I must change my life.' The classic modernists (Woolf, Proust, Joyce, Pessoa, Kafka, et al) would all have agreed with Virginia Woolf's declaration on the need for a new form for the novel--a form that would shatter both naturalism and realism in order to let the Real disclose itself in new modernist forms.

All the great literary modernists, as heirs and critics of the Romantics, articulated strong senses of the shock of beauty: Joyce's epiphanies, Woolf's 'luminous halo,' Proust's 'involuntary memories,' Kafka's uncanny Void interpenetrating life in all its richness. Kafka, for example, seemed to write about only impossible extremes. In his amazing, far too short life and his uncanny writings, Kafka experienced and articulated a new tragic-comic form for the

Impossible as the Void far more than he experienced the possible or ordinary reality of his naturalist and realist predecessors. A hermeneutical aesthetics of the work of art and a hermeneutic of the religious event-text-ritual-symbol-person became, from the modernists through the post-moderns, new evocations of the Impossible.

In the modern period, ethics too--at least ethics as understood by the most important ethical philosopher of the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas<sup>xxxix</sup>--worked out an articulation of the ethics of the other which opens to Infinity. Levinas' ethical radicality is clear: Infinity shatters all totality in its ethical opening to the radically other person. Levinas argued that the radical other, indeed ethics itself, are strangely and dangerously absent in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein. In an article on dialogue--a form Levinas found both familiar and sympathetic (especially in its Ricoeurian form), Levinas argues that the unexpected, does not come primarily through art or religion but through ethics: one's exposure to the other as other. Ethics, not ontology, for Levinas is first philosophy. Levinas does not hesitate to state that the superlative moment in dialogue is the dialogical experience of the proximity of the other person.<sup>xxxix</sup> The experience of the other is the experience which opens to Infinity. Ethics, therefore, must become a radical ethics of the other person wherein the Other (God for the Jewish Levinas) may 'come to mind.'<sup>xxxix</sup>

It is important to realize that Gadamer and Derrida, in their different ways, are heirs of Heidegger. Indeed, they are conflicting heirs of Heidegger as their unhappy exchange in Paris, in 1981,<sup>xxxix</sup> on deconstruction and hermeneutics demonstrated: later this happening was described by Gadamer, with sad resignation, as a 'non-dialogue' and by Derrida as a 'non-event.' Another failed dialogue--now on dialogue itself!

The failure of 1981, however, need not keep one from realizing that Derrida, too, stands in the Heideggerian and, in that sense, also the hermeneutical-phenomenological tradition. To clarify: by the completion of the groundbreaking and incomplete Being and Time Heidegger realized that, crucial as this phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis of Dasein was for his thought, he had reached an impasse. Being and Time's phenomenology of Da-sein had, to be sure, described in properly phenomenological-hermeneutical terms a persuasive and deeply influential ontological-existential account of human being (Da-sein). Heidegger's interest in Da-sein was always an ontological, not a psychological one. In Being and Time Heidegger was primarily interested in human being (Da-Sein) as the being who asks the question of Sein. Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein which may have seemed existentialist-ethical (as it did to Sartre) disclosed care constituting Dasein and the temporality of Sein itself as constituting both Dasein and Sein itself. Being and Time therefore was a revolutionary text which radically changed both phenomenology (from its earlier Husserlian emphasis on intentionality) as well as hermeneutics (from its earlier 'empathy' and 'divination' psychological character in Schleiermacher and Dilthey). Those who accepted this Heideggerian revolution in Being and Time seem divided, however, over Heidegger's later non-Dasein and non-hermeneutical search for a new, more meditative-poetic way of thinking. Levinas, for example, strongly affirmed Being and Time over Husserl and just as strongly resisted the late Heidegger's search for a new meditative-poetic thinking. Heidegger's Impassable must yield, for Levinas, to ethics as first philosophy following one's exposure to (not Buberian encounter with) the other. The ethics of other disclosed the Impossible. Moreover, the reality both uncovered and covered over (for example, in insomnia where all reality begins to seem formless) did not manifest, in Levinas' phenomenology, generosity as in Heidegger's 'es gibt'--it gives. Ungenerously, indeed frighteningly, reality in its formless state uncovered itself simply as 'il y a.' Only the other could break through and begin philosophy anew--now as an ethical 'first philosophy' of the other.

Levinas conceded that Being and Time is one of the rare and great philosophical texts that will still be read in five hundred years. And yet, Levinas also put forth devastating and persuasive critiques of Being and Time's fundamental failure to provide an ethics of the other. For Levinas, Heidegger's insistence on Mit-Dasein (or being-with)<sup>xxxix</sup> did not constitute any exposure to the other. Heidegger's Dasein remains radically individualist: Da-sein's authenticity after all

consists in facing my own death as “my own.’ In my judgment, the basic tonality of Being and Time’s portrait of Dasein is sometimes recognizably a Christian Augustinian anthropology (for example, on our experience of thrownness) but fundamentally discloses, like so much German expressionism of the period, a haunting sense of tragic Stoicism. An important effect for many readers of Being and Time, not only Sartre, de Beauvoir and Camus, is the undertow of melancholy courage in the description of Dasein. Heidegger justly rejected all existentialist and ethical readings of Being and Time. He insisted that Being and Time was solely an ontological exploration whose focus on Dasein was only for the sake of uncovering again the forgotten question of Being. Heidegger’s search for philosophically asking anew the question of Being is clearly and consistently the question of this now classic text. At the same time, the existential description of Dasein on its own, as it were, is too powerful and, for many, too persuasive to disown its existentialist and ethical effects upon many, perhaps most readers. Dasein displays Stoic individuality and a Stoic tense, tragic authenticity in the face of death. To be sure, Heidegger’s Dasein completely lacks classical Stoicism’s insistence on the authentic self as dutifully engaging ethically in public life. On this issue Hannah Arendt rightly criticized her mentor Heidegger in The Human Condition<sup>xxxvi</sup> for his unjustified dismissal of the ‘public realm’ as so much inauthentic Gerede [chatter].

The only real philosophical publicness in Being and Time is Heidegger’s reflections on Dasein’s relationships to the destiny of a ‘folk’: a terrible clue to how the so-called ‘non-ethical’ and ‘non-political’ analyses of demands of Being and Time could in principle and did in fact lead to the ethical shipwreck of Heidegger’s Nazi allegiances and actions in 1933 as well as Heidegger’s even more ethically troubling refusal to repent publicly after the war when all was known of the radical evil that constituted the heart of Nazism.

Philosophically, Heidegger’s great achievements in Being and Time included an account of hermeneutical understanding as central to understanding itself.<sup>xxxvii</sup> We understand ourselves not primarily through solitary critical self-reflectiveness (Descartes, Kant, Husserl). On the contrary, the self constitutes itself through hermeneutical-interpretive understanding of itself as a self-interpretive temporal and historical being-in-the-world.

This Heideggerian breakthrough disclosed through phenomenological analysis shows how all human understanding is hermeneutical and linguistic even if language is not as central to Being and Time as it will become for the later Heidegger. Heidegger’s analysis of hermeneutical self-understanding along with his critique of claims to any full self-presence was a central element in Being and Time’s portrait of Da-sein. In the later Heidegger, language becomes not merely a necessary component of understanding as hermeneutical. Instead, language in its poetic forms now becomes the needed reality for thinking. Language speaks through us. By a new, meditative thinking, the thinker finds a new mode of receptive waiting in the presence of such linguistic realities as poetry and pre-Socratic thinking, as well as Taoist and Zen meditative thinking. In these meditative and poetic languages the thinker may hear Being speak. Heidegger believed that he had found a new and more direct way to let Being disclose itself. In its uncovering (aletheia) Being also hides itself in the non-propositional, the non-dialectical even the non-dialogical languages of certain poetry, certain meditative and mystical religions and certain pre-metaphysical philosophers. Heidegger found a new way of thinking where one learns, Buddhist-like, to ‘let go’ of all calculative and discursive thought in order to ‘let beings be’ and thereby let Sein speak in and through the epochs of its self-uncovering. Our own age of technology, Heidegger insisted, is an age where Being is forgotten and its very memory repressed.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Heidegger, not his one-time student Gadamer (as Gadamer always modestly insisted), first made ontological not psychological (Schleiermacher-Dilthey) hermeneutics philosophically central. After the remarkable breakthrough of Being and Time, however, Heidegger strongly felt the need for a wholly new path to thinking Sein, one where the now meditative thinker could experience ‘Denken ist Danken.’ The new path needed to acknowledge that the phenomenological analysis of Being and Time was still only a phenomenology of immanence. Authentic listening to and thinking Sein, however,

demanding a thinking of transcendence. Therefore, for the post-Being and Time Heidegger, his earlier phenomenological-hermeneutical analyses had shattered any illusory grounding of self and world in modern, i.e., Cartesian self-reflection. Still Being and Time was too beholden to modern transcendental philosophy (especially Kantian and Fichtean) to allow Sein to disclose-conceal itself as itself, not only as a reality constituted by human consciousness. For all these reasons, Heidegger withdrew from his interest in philosophical hermeneutics. He also feared that Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics remained too humanist and too anthropological. For Heidegger, hermeneutics had reached its limit.

Heidegger thought that in reaching the limit, hermeneutic philosophy should not turn back to more and more hermeneutics and discursive, temporal dialogue but move forward into the Impassable opened by the limit. There one might find a new more meditative less discursive-dialogical way of thinking beyond dialectic and dialogue alike. Heidegger--having abandoned the main, straight road of Western metaphysics--started searching for new paths in the woods (Holzwege). He desired to be able to hear the possible voice and call of Sein in the great pre-Socratics before the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle and the whole Western tradition. He was enlivened in his thought not only by interpreting the pre-Socratics but also by meditating with those texts, especially the texts of Heraclitus and Anaximander and finally even Parmenides. Moreover, in harmony with the German philosophical tradition from Hegel and Schelling to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Heidegger considered the classical Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles (not the more sophisticated Euripides) new matters for thinking. Heidegger found in Greek tragedy as did so many of his German predecessors, not only a challenge to philosophy but a major resource for his new way of thinking. For Heidegger, the classical tragedies (especially Sophocles) were not merely to be interpreted anew but to become a source for a new philosophical way of poetic thinking. Even if the pre-Socratics may have already been infected by a Western metaphysics of presence (as Heidegger sometimes suspected) and even if the tragedians may have been infected by a Western metaphysics of form ('may' not 'were'), then newer pathways (Holzwege) of thinking must be found. Perhaps one could find these new ways in the clearings for Being opened by great works of art especially poetry, most especially for Heidegger the extraordinary philosophical poetry of Hölderlin, perhaps also in the kind of meditative, non-calculative thinking in the Void-Open of philosophical Taoism and Japanese Zen Buddhism. Martin Heidegger was one of the very few Western philosophers who came to East Asian thought not to interpret their 'exotic' otherness but to learn new ways of thinking which he strongly believed Western philosophy desperately needed in our bleak technological culture.

Heidegger was frustrated for he knew that he could not learn as much as he would have desired with translations of Taoist and Zen thought. He lacked the original languages. He was completely dependent on German and some English translations. Translations, as Heidegger well knew, are already interpretations--as the seemingly endless and often conflicting Western translations of the Tao de Ching demonstrate. Heidegger sensed the profound philosophical-meditative-poetic power and attractiveness of Taoist and Zen thought as thinking. However, Heidegger, because of his own linguistic deficiencies, could never be sure that Taoist and Zen meditative, non-calculative thinking was a kind of thinking he could participate in.

Heidegger named the limit he discovered at the limits of his former phenomenological and hermeneutical thought both a limit expressive of our finitude, temporality and historicity as in Being and Time but also as a limit that opened to an entirely new realm--the Impassable. This happened, Heidegger sensed, in and through the 'sudden' experience of the Transcendent-Open and new ways (mostly meditative and poetic and perhaps even mystical) of thinking in the Open (Rilke) and the Impassable (Hölderlin). In retrospect, Heidegger's philosophical problem post Being and Time is clear: is there a new mode of philosophical, non-metaphysical and especially non-ontotheological thinking in the Impassable? The work of art as a work working in and of itself (not through the artist) and the thinking of Tao and Zen and, at times, the tragedians' thinking of the Greek gods became for the 'later' Heidegger a hope beyond hermeneutics and dialogue for a



necessary new way of reading and thinking. This new Heidegger way was not (as it remained for Gadamer) the philosophical-philological way of classical hermeneutics. Rather, late Heideggerian interpretations were meditative-poetic readings (somewhat analogous, I suggest, to the medieval tradition of lectio divina). In one sense, Heidegger kept re-interpreting his chosen texts. In another sense, a new mode of reading-interpreting became much more flexible than before--less straightforwardly phenomenological-hermeneutical, much more meditative in practice and poetic in expression.

Gadamer acknowledged the truth of the Heideggerian Impassable. However, Gadamer chose not to join the later Heidegger in a quest for a new philosophical way of meditative thinking beyond hermeneutics. Gadamer always maintained with Heidegger that the 'shock' of the work of art or religion was an unnerving shock to ordinary discursive reason, including to discursive-dialogical hermeneutics. Art did, at times, transport us to some 'time outside of time.' For Gadamer, the shock and newness of the experience of art (and perhaps also religion) was real. Still, in continuing with classical humanism's satisfaction at admitting the shock of mystery at the limit of our knowledge, Gadamer's admittance of radical mystery at the limit of dialogue did not demand some new post-humanist way of thinking. Dialogue would continue to serve thinking well.

Gadamer also at times admitted that sometimes a hermeneutics of suspicion ruptured dialogue. Still Gadamer had his own suspicion about critical theory: how could 'critical theorists' (especially Habermas) suspect all positions save their own? How can one practice critical theory (especially on the cultural level) without suspecting oneself as also ideological? For Gadamer, we may also need a hermeneutics of suspicion on hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer maintained that Western philosophical critical thought from Plato and Aristotle forward was ultimately sufficient to handle all conscious errors and probably also able through reason's self-correcting power at least to spot most unconscious distortions. However, Gadamer did puzzle about what to do if a suspicion caused not merely an interruption of dialogue (even argument did that) but perhaps an unmendable rupture of the dialogue. Gadamer, too, was fascinated and troubled by the challenge of psychoanalysis. He doubted, however, that any attempt to provide critical theory on a societal or cultural level was anything other than another expression of the power of self-correcting Western reason in newly developed modern senses. As my earlier analyses suggested, I do not believe that Gadamer ever fully grasped the radical difference between conscious error and unconscious distortions.

Ultimately, for Gadamer classical and modern humanism (e.g., Goethe) grounded in the traditions of Western critical reason must suffice. Except in extreme situations of rupture, hermeneutics and classical and modern reason can handle all interruptions to dialogue. Admirable as Gadamer's retrievals of classical reason and classical humanism are, he seemed not to attend to the outstanding fact of his own century: the twentieth century was largely defined not by humanism but by extreme historical situations of radical evil that should rupture not only progressivist optimism but also humanist complacency.

Gadamer had philosophically developed Heidegger's analysis of hermeneutical understanding far beyond Heidegger into a full model of the event of hermeneutical understanding happening in conversation. Gadamer also had every right to understand his life work as a more radical continuation of Heidegger's earlier dismantling of Western conceptualism. Through his philosophical and philological interpretations of classic texts, Gadamer contributed in a major way in developing the most sophisticated Western model for dialogue available as well as contributing major interpretations of classical texts (especially Plato--here against Heidegger's own Plato interpretations). Most importantly, Gadamer challenged the overemphasis in German (and analytical) philosophy on dialectical-propositional thought by uncovering the dialogues that originally grounded all dialectics. .

For these reasons, Gadamer believed there was no need to follow Heidegger into what for the humanistic Gadamer seemed a labyrinth without exit save through some new unwelcome form of mysticism.<sup>xxxix</sup> Classical philosophy (especially Plato and Aristotle), humanist traditions of scholarship (Gadamer was, unlike Heidegger or Derrida, was a classical philologist), and a new phenomenology (in the Heidegger tradition) of hermeneutical understanding as dialogue grounded in the to and from movement of the logic of questioning were enough. One should, of course, acknowledge the Impassable (as Gadamer did) and then move back to dialogical thinking, the proper form for philosophy.

In significant contrast to Gadamer, Jacques Derrida had no such fear to follow the later, more radical Heidegger into the Impassable. Unlike Gadamer, Derrida both agreed with and critically challenged Heidegger's search for new ways of thinking. Derrida constructed his own paths to a new thinking in what he called not the Impassable but the Impossible. Derrida's new deconstructive ways were deeply critical of Heidegger's meditative way as still trapped in the very metaphysics of presence which Heidegger himself had uncovered at the heart of Western thinking. Moreover, Derrida believed that the 'late' Heidegger was still too devoted to attempt to 'gather' all reality into some new even if poetically expressed totality. Derrida preferred a philosophical gathering that is, at the same time, a disseminating.

This Derridean claim against Heidegger's new meditative and possibly mystical thinking is very similar to Derrida's sympathy for yet distance from apophatic theology. For my part, without being able to provide the necessary arguments here, Derrida presents unpersuasive readings of the late Heidegger's meditative thinking and, even more unpersuasive readings of the complex and subtle traditions of apophatic theologies. Derrida both admired and rejected Heidegger and apophatic theology. Derrida's own deconstructive thought and his later thought on the Impossible bears a strong family resemblance to both

This is not the place to rehearse the reasons for my disagreements with Derrida on his readings of late Heidegger and even more so, his readings of apophatic and mystical theologies.<sup>xl</sup> I cannot share his call for a 'religion without religion,' i.e., an indeterminate 'religion' without a determinate religion<sup>xli</sup> (e.g., messianism without a Messiah). I do not, of course, deny that Derrida's religious option has now become what William James named a 'living option.' This 'religion without religion' therefore, should be considered as a new and unusual candidate for inter-religious dialogue. Derrida's candidate is, to be sure, not merely a unique entry into inter-religious dialogue but a positively interruptive one. The issues Derrida raises on both the limits of dialogue and the nature of religion deserve the attention of all participants in contemporary inter-religious dialogue. He keeps one alert and vigilant about the usual presuppositions of such dialogue. For my part, I share the basic presupposition of almost all inter-religious dialogue that both dialogue-partners, however other their respective traditions initially may be to each other, enter the dialogue embedded in a determinate religious tradition while exposing oneself (and thereby one's tradition) to an other from an other determinate religious tradition. However, any serious 'religious' thinker (as the late Heidegger or the late Derrida clearly were) merit entry into inter-religious dialogues as dialogue partners who, like all others both expose themselves to all others and, in turn, are exposed as other to all participants. Heidegger and Derrida (or Ricoeur and Levinas) can, precisely as philosophers, raise critical questions and possibilities that enrich all inter-religious dialogue.

Despite his own intentions, Derrida can also be interpreted in an explicitly hermeneutical way. In his early work, Derrida developed a 'deconstructive mode of analysis' that can also be interpreted as a hermeneutics of suspicion. In Derrida's early reflections on language and sign in On Grammatology, Sign and Phenomenon and Writing and Difference, he first articulated his crucial non-concept différance. To recall this now familiar move: Derrida coined a new written French word with the grapheme 'a' rather than the traditional 'e.' Différance sounds the same as différence in oral speech. The difference between them occurs only in writing. Différance, for Derrida, means that meaning (including, of course, this one) is constituted not through any illusory clear, single meaning. Meaning occurs only by the absence of

other different signifiers (either phonemes or graphemes). These other signifiers are neither sounded nor written but necessary in order for a word, for example, tree, to mean 'tree' and not free, thee, be, etc. On this reading, meaning is never fully present to itself but depends on other present-absent signifiers. Différance is thus difference and deferral. Hence, the other is always absent-present in what we conceive as the same. In my judgment, Derrida's deconstructive way of analysis provides a welcome new linguistic suspicion on linguistic and non-linguistic signs alike.

Through Derrida's deconstructive approach, any interpreter can learn a new hermeneutics of suspicion. One learns greater critical vigilance to resist the Western temptations to logocentric claims to intellectual self-transparency in either reflection or in oral speech. Writing, with its explicit absence of the author and therefore any claim to logocentric self-transparency, can be said not only to clarify written speech but, paradoxically, oral speech. Writing shows how all language differs and defers. Derrida argues against Saussure that language considered synchronically is indeed a system (langue). However, language is not so much a 'system of differences' (Saussure) as it is a 'system of differences' (Derrida). It follows that all understanding through language (i.e., all intelligible understanding) is always deferring its full meaning (even in repetition) and never reaches full self-presence. We must pay critical, deconstructive attention to signifiers in the linguistic networks and non-linguistic 'traces' in economic, social, cultural, historical networks. The metaphor 'trace' here is not (like a footprint) a trace of some reality once present, but now absent. A 'trace' never was and never will be present and yet is part of a network of traces that are necessary for present meaning to mean at all, like absent signifiers in language.

For Derrida, Western logocentrism can be witnessed in a full-fledged way in Husserl and Hegel. Moreover, the same Western logocentric claim, in more subtle and unconscious ways, can also be found in any thought claiming an achieved unity of meaning. For example, Gadamer's hermeneutical desire for a mutual understanding (a fusion of horizons) where a unity of meaning may be attained falls under Derrida's suspicions of hermeneutics. Moreover, for Derrida, Gadamer's over-estimation of 'tradition' may be dangerously close to affirming present societal (read here bourgeois humanist) norms. This particular Derridean suspicion of Gadamer's bourgeois humanist ideal is similar as a suspicion to Jacques Lacan's insistence that ego psychology so pervasive in the United States actually represses Freud's most true notion of the Unconscious as the radically other within our psyches. For Lacan,<sup>xiii</sup> even Freud at times (viz., in his later less radical model of superego-ego-id) may have repressed the frightening reality of the Unconscious! For Lacan, therefore, ego psychology in effect if not in intention 'cures' clients falsely by preparing them to strengthen their egos to accept superego bourgeois societal norms and repress the energizing frightening and liberating reality of the Unconscious. Psychoanalytic liberation for Lacan occurs if it occurs at all, by releasing the Unconscious against the radically anti-ego, anti-'normal' societal norms. The conflict of interpretations on how to read Freud within psychoanalysis itself is one of the signal examples of the difficulties of interpretation of a classic set of texts even by expert readers.

The early Derrida is also implicitly engaged in an ethical, not solely intellectual suspicion in his early formulations of deconstruction. Consider, for example, his deconstructive analysis of how Western thought and action seems determined in practice by linguistic and non-linguistic binaries that seem (inevitably?) to become binary. For Derrida, the familiar Western binary opposites (male-female, reason-passion, speech-writing, spirit-letter, up-down, etc.) are all related to the most basic binary opposite 'inside-outside.' For the binary opposites--starting with inside-outside--not only render binary differences into binary oppositions; they also create an entire cultural hierarchy enforcing exclusion of the 'lower' member of the hierarchy. Hence, 'oral speech' is not only different from but hierarchically elevated above 'writing.' Oral speech, it is mistakenly believed, renders meanings present and self-transparent. The speaker can always correct misunderstandings of what he said in a conversation with any other. Therefore thinkers begin to believe that writing, where the speaker is absent and cannot correct the reader's mistakes, is far less valuable than oral speech or thought (for

this Western prejudice in action, see Plato's Seventh Letter even more than his dialogue Phaedrus). 'Male' (usually linked in the Western to such 'higher' realities as reason) is held to be higher in the hierarchical scale of values than 'female' (usually linked to passion and emotion). Male 'reason,' therefore, can exclude 'female' desire and affectivity for important discussions (for example, as Kant and many other philosophers in fact do). Derrida's intriguing analysis of the binaries embedded in our thought and speech as binary opposites is an excellent example of a fine suspicion of our cultures. The early analysis of binary opposites can be understood as deconstructing exclusionary and hierarchical tendencies and actualities certainly present in Western cultures. Derrida's analysis, even more than his deconstructive analysis of Western logocentrism and the possible illusions of full self-presence and self-transparency, is clearly both an intellectual and, like all hermeneutics of suspicion, an ethical, even an ethical political task.

Nevertheless, a caveat in Derrida's analyses of binary opposites is in order. For even if one finds this Derridean analysis illuminating of an entire set of problems in our culture (binary differences do often become opposites; binary opposites do often become exclusionary and hierarchical) one may also hesitate before a full philosophical endorsement. The question is this: does Derrida claim that binary opposites are linguistically necessary or culturally inevitable? If Derrida is making that claim (it is not entirely clear that he is), one must demur.

There is no linguistic or ontological necessity for the binaries internal to Western thought to become binary opposites and thereby hierarchical and exclusionary. The binaries of our thought are not necessarily opposites. The binaries of our thought sometimes are not conflictual opposites at all but polarities. This is clear in a great deal of non-Western thought: Taoist thought, for example, believes the polarities of our thought need not become opposites (they may, of course and often do in our reified inflexible habits of thinking). The polarities for the Taoist (male-female, reason-emotion, inside-outside, yin-yang, etc.) are fashioned to function as correlative polarities not dialectical opposites. Moreover, in Western thought itself there are many examples of philosophical thinking where the polarities function as flexible polarities and become binary opposites only when reification sets in. For example, Western process thought deals in polarities as contraries in process not contradictory dialectical opposites. A second example: Goethe's morphological (not dialectical) thinking expressed in polarities. Goethean morphology is a study of polar forms, not dialectical opposites. This Goethean morphology of polar forms has been continued in the morphology of religious forms developed by Eliade and in the Goethean form-centered theology of von Balthasar. Derrida's analysis of the binary opposites also ignores the possibility (as in Nicolas of Cusa) that opposites need not be exclusionary and hierarchical but may prove to be a 'coincidence of opposites' (coincidentia oppositorum). Even more importantly, the prominent use of analogy in Western thought from Aristotle forward does not fit Derrida's model. Analogies are constituted by differences and some sense of sameness. But analogies are neither opposites (equivocal language) nor the same (univocal language). They are similarities.

In sum, Derrida's analysis of the binaries in Western thought and culture is very helpful for understanding how linguistic, philosophical and religious binaries have functioned as binary opposites, both exclusionary and hierarchical. In my judgment, however, this valuable part of Derrida's deconstructive analysis is better read as a historical, i.e., contingent insight than as a necessary linguistic one. Différance may, as Derrida argued, be a linguistic necessity. But Derrida's analysis of binary opposites is historically contingent not philosophically necessary. As culturally contingent, the binary opposites with their hierarchal and exclusionary tactics can also be better resisted and changed--as feminist thought has persuasively challenged all traditional male-female hierarchies as well as other gender hierarchies and exclusionary tactics. Consider, for example, Judith Butler's creative combination of feminist theory, Queer theory and performance theory to dismantle many binary opposites defining and hierarchizing gender relations in our culture. Another example: Derrida's sometimes intellectual ally, Gilles Deleuze,<sup>xliii</sup> always argued that differences need not become dialectical

opposites but can remain pluralistic, multiple, endless differences. In many inter-religious dialogues, pluralism has been advanced as a plausible response to religious plurality. Clearly any form of religious pluralism insofar as it exists, or perhaps more accurately, polycentrism, is more related to an emphasis on differences as either pure difference or polarities, not as opposites. In my judgment, Derrida's ethical point on our culture of opposites even in this early work on binaries is more persuasive than his larger intellectual claim that all polarities must become opposites.

Every hermeneutics of suspicion begins with some ethical sense that something unjust is at play (racism, sexism, classism, etc.). Derrida's deconstructive analysis of différance and binary opposites was already ethical as well as intellectual. Derrida's thought became more and more explicitly ethical, political and religious as his always surprising intellectual journey continued.

Even more importantly for our present purposes, in his later work Derrida was driven ethically, politically, and religiously to what he came to call the Impossible. Derrida's choice of the word Impossible was influenced by his readings of Angelus Silesius and Kierkegaard. The Impossible does not function in Derrida (as it usually does in philosophy) as a purely a logical category. Rather, the Impossible functions as what human beings naturally desire beyond the actual and the possible. Derrida's the Impossible<sup>xiv</sup> is the same kind of reality as the Impassable of Heidegger, the Incomprehensible of the mystics, the Infinite of mathematicians, and the Infinite of some philosophers (e.g., Plotinus) and some theologians (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa). The later Derrida held that several phenomena, if they exist (as he usually added), are impossible yet naturally desired: the gift, forgiveness, hospitality to the stranger, the messianic, the promise, etc. Derrida's description of Justice to come as the Impossible seems to me his most important candidate for naming the Impossible. Our normal human desire for Justice is the Impossible and, as such, is for Derrida the condition of the possibility of our spotting injustices at all. Justice to come as the Impossible, Derrida insists cannot be deconstructed. Any law can be deconstructed but not 'Justice to come.' The futural note 'to come,' moreover, shows that 'Justice to come,' in Derrida has Jewish biblical not Greek tonalities. Greek justice is in the realm of the possible. Derrida's sense of the Impossible as 'Justice to come' is very close, as he acknowledged, to determinate prophetic Jewish religious tradition of his childhood. The prophets resist injustice by the power of God's promise of Justice to come.

Derrida's later turn to the Impossible as the prophet-like Justice to Come (as well as, of course, his notions of the Impossible as 'Promise' and 'the messianic') is fully continuous with his earlier work of deconstruction. And yet the new explicitly ethical, political and religious turns of Derrida's later thought is still surprising. The explicitly religious (indeed Jewish) character of Derrida's turn to Justice to come as the Impossible was still (to me at least) both unexpected and welcome since Derrida stated on more than one occasion that he was reluctant to relate his indeterminate 'religion without religion' driven by a normal human desire for Justice to the fact of his determinate Jewish religious origins. Surely Derrida's reluctance and increasing puzzlement about articulating his own relationship to Judaism even to himself was partly occasioned, as he also said, by the fact that he was 'rightly called an atheist.'

It is difficult, however, to divorce Derrida's indeterminate religion of Justice to come as the Impossible from the influence of prophetic Judaism. Analogously, Derrida's politics--also described as the Impossible, i.e., the Democracy to Come--is clearly related to Western ideals of democracy. Indeed, Derrida's 'Democracy to Come' can function not only as an ideal but also as a hermeneutics of suspicion. In fact, Derrida is not alone in believing that none of the existing political realities that call themselves democracies (e.g., France or the United States) are, in fact, democracies. They are clearly not actual democracies possessing both full equality for all and full personal liberty for each. Our 'democracies' are more accurately described as oligarchies with democratic ideals and pretensions functioning now well, now poorly, by means of the ideals of full equality and personal liberty and guided by the Impossible, viz., Democracy to come--i.e., Justice to

Come. It is impressive, I believe, that Derrida's later ethical turn (here like Paul Ricoeur's)<sup>xlv</sup> was both ethical-political and religious.

## Conclusion

In summary, Gadamer's final vision for hermeneutics is a rich and dense contemporary retrieval of classical Western humanism. That is its great strength and its weakness. Heidegger's later meditative way of thinking, religiously construed, was close to a Westernized form of philosophical Taoism. Derrida's later vision of Justice to Come as the Impossible was, religiously construed, a paradoxically indeterminate form of Judaism.

Some phenomenologists (e.g., Edith Stein, Jean-Luc Marion, Jean-Louis Chrétien, and others) and some theologians (Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan and Franz Rosenzweig) have also named Love as in effect the Impossible. Moreover, so have some of the major modernist writers including Marcel Proust, James Joyce and Toni Morrison.

All thinkers attempting new ways of thinking on naming the Impossible must eventually return to their responsibilities in the world. As an old Christian adage goes, 'We are freed from the world for the world.' Thereby do thinkers of the Impossible return to the actual and possible: to discursive reason, to dialogue, to communal action. I can only hope that dialogical participants in the ever more necessary inter-religious dialogues in our increasingly globalized world; at once so dangerous and so promising may find helpful the heuristic guides discussed above. Most importantly, dialogue fully occurs only when one risks encountering the other in the logic of questioning in preparation for some new transformative understanding (Section One). Dialogical thinkers must, at times, be willing to interrupt dialogue for however long necessary whenever someone suspects that a repressed unconscious distortion is disrupting attempts at genuine dialogue (Section Two). Finally, dialogue, at its best, eventually reaches and acknowledges its own limit. At that impasse, dialogical thinkers may find themselves shocked by some experience of the Impossible, the Impassable, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible. At that point--and at that point only--dialogue partners find themselves 'beyond dialogue.'

Very rarely, dialogue partners may experience the Impossible together--as perhaps did Monica and Augustine at Ostia. But everyone must eventually return to the cave where discursive reason, dialogue and responsible actions thrive. In ordinary life after all, we all--finitely, historically, thankfully--interact with each other in efforts to try to live lives worthy of a human being.

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Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989), 362-79.
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid, 173-97.
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid, 171-264.
- <sup>iv</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- <sup>v</sup> Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 1-15.
- <sup>vi</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer. Dialogue and dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
- <sup>vii</sup> Gadamer, Truth and Method, 306-07, 374-75.
- <sup>viii</sup> Lucy Pick, Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Thirteenth-Century Spain (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
- <sup>ix</sup> Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Exchange of Gadamer and Derrida in 1981,” in Dialogue and Deconstruction: the Gadamer-Derrida Encounter, ed Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 52-71.
- <sup>x</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Explanation and Understanding,” in Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1976), 71-97.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, trans. Denis Savage (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1970), 20-37.
- <sup>xii</sup> For example, Jürgen Habermas, Theory and Practice, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Simon Goldhill, ed. The End of Dialogue in Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- <sup>xiv</sup> See chapter 5 in Blessed Rage for Order: the New Pluralism in Theology (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) for my distinction between “limit to” and “limit of.”

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<sup>xv</sup> Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in Basic Writings: Ten Key Essays, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 112-138.

<sup>xvi</sup> Iris Murdoch, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (London: Penguin, 1992), 391-431, 481-492.

<sup>xvii</sup> John D. Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael J. Scanlon, Questioning God (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4-5, 29-30, 52-53.

<sup>xviii</sup> Heidegger, Basic Writings, op.cit., 139-266, 427-450.

<sup>xix</sup> Plato, Symposium, in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), 563.

<sup>xx</sup> See Plato, Republic, in The Collected Dialogues of Plato, op. cit., VI-VII on the sun, the cave and the divided line.

<sup>xxi</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 493-515.

<sup>xxii</sup> Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, trans. Emma Crawford and Marion von der Ruhr (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987), 105-112.

<sup>xxiii</sup> For his recent representative works on religion, see Jacques Derrida, Acts of Religion, ed. and intro. Gil Anidjar (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Talal Asad, Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>xxv</sup> William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 30-50.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.* 51-71.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York, 1996).

<sup>xxviii</sup> For an analysis of the later Heidegger, see The Later Heidegger, ed. George Pattison (London: Routledge, 2000). For a good example of late Heidegger himself, see Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, trans. and intro. Keith Hoeller (Amherst NY: Humanity Books, 2000).



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<sup>xxxix</sup> Heidegger, On the Way to Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). See also Reinhard May, Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on his Work, trans. Graham Parkes (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>xxx</sup> Raimon Panikkar, The Experience of God: Icons of the Mystery, trans. Joseph Cunneen (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006).

<sup>xxxii</sup> See Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, Of God Who Comes to Mind, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>xxxiiii</sup> Ibid., 137-51.

<sup>xxxv</sup> See Derrida and Gadamer, "Exchange of Gadamer and Derrida in 1981," op cit.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Heidegger, Being and Time, op. cit., 10-18.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Heidegger, Being and Time, op.cit., 134-44.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. and ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

<sup>xl</sup> Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Religion and Ethics, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>xli</sup> Jacques Derrida and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, Alterités (Paris: Éditions Osiris, 1986).

<sup>xlii</sup> John D. Caputo, The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>xliii</sup> Jacques Lacan, Écrits: A Selection, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 107-138.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Between Deleuze and Derrida, eds. Paul Patton and John Protevi (New York: Continuum Press, 2003).

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<sup>xliiv</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, In excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).

<sup>xlv</sup> Paul Ricoeur, The Just, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).