I. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

The subject of these lectures derives from the epistemological problem currently raised by the modern Geisteswissenschaften.

The appearance of historical self-consciousness is very likely the most important revolution among those we have undergone since the beginning of the modern epoch. Its spiritual magnitude probably surpasses what we recognize in the applications of natural science, applications which have so visibly transformed the surface of our planet. The historical consciousness which characterizes contemporary man is a privilege, perhaps even a burden, the likes of which has never been imposed on any previous generation.

Our present-day consciousness of history is fundamentally different from the manner in which the past appeared to any foregoing people or epoch. We understand historical consciousness to be the privilege of modern man to have a full awareness of the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions. Inescapably, we must acknowledge the effect of historical self-consciousness on the spiritual activity of our contemporaries: we have only to think of the immense spiritual upheavals of our times. For example, the invasion of philosophical and political thought by ideas designated in German by the words "Weltanschauung" and "Kampf der Weltanschauungen" is undoubtedly at once a consequence and a symptom of historical consciousness. It is manifest again in the way various Weltanschauungen currently express their differences. As a matter of fact if, as has happened more than once, disputing parties come to a reciprocal agreement that their opposing positions form a comprehensible and coherent whole (a concession which clearly presupposes that both sides no longer refuse to reflect on the relativity of their own positions) then each party must have been fully conscious of the particular character of its own perspective. Today no one can shield himself from this reflexivity characteristic of the modern spirit. Henceforth it would be absurd to confine oneself to the naiveté and reassuring limits of a jealous tradition while modern consciousness is ready to understand the possibility of a multiplicity of relative viewpoints. Thus we are accustomed to respond to opposing arguments by a reflection which deliberately places us in the perspective of the other.

The modern historical sciences of "Geisteswissenschaften"—let us translate the term by "human sciences," realizing that it is only a convention—are distinguished by this mode of reflection and make methodic use of it. Is not this mode of reflection what we commonly mean by "having an historical sense"? We can define "historical sense" by the historian's openness to and talent for understanding the past, sometimes even the "exotic" past, from within its own genetic context. Having an historical sense is to conquer in a consistent manner the natural naiveté which makes us judge the past by the so-called obvious scales of our current life, in the perspective of our institu-
tions, and from our acquired values and truths. Having a historical sense signifies thinking explicitly about the historical horizon which is co-extensive with the life we live and have lived.

In its spiritual motifs, the method of the human sciences dates back to Herder and German romanticism, but it has diffused nearly everywhere and exerted its influence on the scientific progress of other countries. In obedience to this method modern life begins refusing to naively follow a tradition or complex of traditionally assumed truths. Modern consciousness—precisely as "historical consciousness"—takes a reflexive position concerning all that is handed down by tradition. Historical consciousness no longer listens sanc­
dimoniously to the voice that reaches out from the past but, in reflecting on it, replaces it within the context where it took root in order to see the sig­nificance and relative value proper to it. This reflexive posture towards tradi­tion is called interpretation. And if something is able to characterize the truly universal dimension of this event it is surely the role that the word interpre­
tation has begun to play in the modern human sciences. This word has achieved a recognition as only happens to words which betoken the attitude of an entire epoch.

We speak of interpretation when the mean/10/ing of a text is not understood at first sight; then an interpretation is necessary. In other words, an explicit reflection is required on the conditions which enable the text to have one or another meaning. The first presupposition which implies the concept of inter­pretation is the "foreign" character of what is yet to be understood. Indeed, whatever is immediately evident, whatever persuades us by its simple pres­ence, does not call for any interpretation. If we consider for a moment the art of our predecessors in textual interpretation, as applied in philology and theology, we immediately notice that it was always an occasional feature, used only when the transmitted text involved obscurities. Today, by contrast, the notion of interpretation has become a universal concept determined to encompass tradition as a whole.

Interpretation, as we understand it today, is applied not only to texts and verbal tradition, but to everything bequeathed to us by history; thus, for ex­
ample, we will speak not only of the interpretation of an historical incident, but also the interpretation of spiritual and mimed expressions, the interpre­
tation of behavior, etc. We always intend by this that the meaning of what is given over for our interpretation is not revealed without mediation, and that we must look beyond the immediate sense in order to discover the "true" hidden meaning. This generalized notion of interpretation dates back to a Nietzschean conception. According to Nietzsche all statements dependent upon reason are open to interpretation, since their true or real meaning only reaches us as masked and deformed by ideologies. /11/
As a matter of fact, the modern methodology of our philological and histori­cal sciences corresponds exactly to this Nietzschian conception. Indeed, it presupposes that the material upon which these sciences work (i.e., sources, vestiges of a bygone era) is such that it requires a critical interpretation.

This assumption plays a decisive and fundamental role for the modern sciences of historical and, in general, social life. The dialogue we enter into with the past confronts us with a fundamentally different situation from our own—we will say a “foreign” situation—and consequently it demands an interpretative approach. The human sciences, too, use an interpretative method, thus placing them within our circle of interest. We ask ourselves: what is the meaning and import of historical consciousness in the scheme of scientific knowledge? Here again we are going to raise the same problem by examining the idea of a theory of the human sciences. Note, however, that the theory of the human sciences is not simply the methodology of a certain well-defined group of sciences, but is, as we will see, philosophy properly so called in a much more radical sense than, for instance, is the case with the methodology of the natural sciences.

If we make a decided relation between the human sciences and philosophy it is not just for a purely epistemological elucidation. The human sciences are not only a problem for philosophy, on the contrary, they represent a problem of philosophy. Indeed, anything we could say about their logical or epistemological independence vis-a-vis the natural sciences, is a very poor measure of the essence of the human sciences and their truly philosophical significance. The philosophical role played by the human sciences follows the law of all or nothing. They would no longer have any role at all if we took them to be imperfect realizations of the idea of a “rigorous science.” For it would immediately follow that so-called “scientific” philosophy would necessarily take the idea of mathematicized natural science for the scientific norm; as we know this would mean that philosophy would no longer be a sort of “organon” of the sciences. On the other hand, if we recognize an autonomous mode of knowing in the human sciences, if we accord to them the impossibility of being reduced to the natural scientific idea of knowledge (implying that one backs off from the absurdity of facing them with the ideal of a perfected facsimile of the methods and degree of certainty available in the natural sciences) then philosophy itself is called into question with all of its ambitions. And so, given these parameters, it is useless to restrict the elucidation of the nature of the human sciences to a purely methodological question; it is not simply a question of defining a specific method, but rather, of recognizing an entirely different notion of knowledge and truth. Consequently, the philosophy which bears these conditions in mind will have many other ambitions than those motivated by the natural scientific concept of truth. By an intrinsic necessity of things, to guarantee a genuine foundation for the human sciences, as Wilhelm Dilthey proposed not so long ago, is to guarantee a foundation in philosophy, that is to say, to consider the ground of nature and history, and the truth possible in each.
Let us immediately notice that, confirmed or not by the philosophic inclinations of Dilthey, the frames elaborated by the idealism of a Hegel are most readily suited to this philosophic enterprise. A logic of the Geisteswissenschaften, we would say, is already and always a philosophy of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, what we have just suggested in alluding to Hegel seems to contradict the intimate connections which the human sciences do have with the natural sciences, precisely those connections which distinguish the human sciences from an idealistic philosophy: the human sciences, too, would be verifiable empirical sciences, free from any metaphysical intrusion, and reject all philosophical constructions of universal history. However, is it not more true to say that the filiation of the human sciences with the natural sciences, and the anti-idealistic and anti-speculative controversy which they inherit at the same time, have up to now hindered the human sciences from moving towards a radical self-understanding? Although the constant desire of the human sciences may be to bolster themselves with contemporary philosophy, it remains no less true that in order to achieve a scientific good conscience, they continue to be attracted to the models of the natural sciences in developing their historical-critical methods. But we must raise the question whether it is meaningful, or valid, to look, by analogy with the mathematicized natural sciences, for an autonomous and specific method for the human sciences which remains constant throughout the domains of its application? Why is not the Cartesian notion of method proclaimed inadequate in the domain of the human sciences; why would it not be instead the ancient Greek concept of method which is privileged in this domain?

Let us explain. According to Aristotle, for example, the idea of a single method, a method which could be determined before even having penetrated the thing, is a dangerous abstraction; the object itself must determine the method of its own access. Now, curiously, if we take a look at the positive research in the human sciences during the last century, it seems that concerning the effective procedures of the human sciences (I am speaking just of those procedures which acquire evidence and knowledge of new truths, and not of the reflections on those procedures), it is much more valid to characterize them by the Aristotelian concept of method than by the pseudo-Cartesian concept of the historical-critical method. We must ask if a method which justifies detaching itself from the domain in question (and we know how fruitful this method was in the case of the mathematization of the natural sciences) does not, in the human sciences, lead to a misapprehension of the mode of being specific to this domain? This question leads us again into the vicinity of Hegel, for whom, as we know, every method is "a method linked to the object itself." Can we learn something from the Hegelian dialectic about a "logic" of the human sciences?
I dare say, this second allusion to Hegel can appear absurd in the light of the methodological conclusions drawn by the human sciences in the period of their real efflorescence during the nineteenth century; obviously, only the natural sciences served as a model for these conclusions. This is even betrayed by the history of the word *Geisteswissenschaften*; although admitting that the intellectual survival of idealism spurred the German translator of Mill's inductive logic to render "moral sciences" by "*Geisteswissenschaften,*" we must, however, deny Mill the intention of having wished to attribute to the "moral sciences" a logic of their own. On the contrary, Mill's aim was to show that the inductive method found at the base of all empirical science is also the only valid method for the domain of the moral sciences. In this his doctrine is but the confirmation of an English secular tradition whose most powerful formulation we find in the introduction to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. The moral sciences constitute no exception, Mill says, when we look for uniformities, regularities and laws in the interest of predicting particular facts and events. Besides, the extension and applicability of the laws arrived at in the natural sciences is not always the same, but that does not impede meteorology, for example, from working on precisely the same basic principles as physics; the only difference which separates them is that in meteorology the system of data includes relatively more gaps than in physics. But this only affects the relative certainty of their respective predictions and in no way constitutes any methodological difference. Now, one will say, it is the same in the domain of moral and social phenomena, no less than in the natural sciences: in both cases the inductive method is independent of all metaphysical presuppositions. It is of no concern whatsoever to know, for example, what one thinks of the possibility of a phenomenon like human freedom; the inductive method has nothing to do with the search for any occult causes, it merely observes regularities. Thus it is possible to believe in free will and, at the same time, in the validity of predictions in the domain of social life. Drawing consequences on the basis of regularities does not imply any hypothesis about the metaphysical structure of the relations in question: one is concerned with them solely for the prediction of regularities. The actuality of free decisions is one of the moments of the universal derived by induction. That is the way in which the natural scientific ideal is adopted at the level of social phenomena.

Undoubtedly, certain researches conducted in this style, as for example in mass psychology, have been crowned with incontestable success. However, with the elementary acknowledgement that the discovery of regularities realizes actual progress in the human sciences, in the end we only conceal the genuine problem that these sciences raise. The adoption of this Humean model does not allow us to circumscribe the experience of a social-historical world; quite the contrary, we totally misunderstood the essence of this experience so long as we approach it merely by means of inductive procedures. For what-
ever is /17/ meant by science, neither by procuring regularities nor by their application to actual historical phenomenon will one ever grasp the peculiar component of historical knowledge.

Surely we can admit that all historical knowledge involves the application of general empirical regularities to the concrete problems it faces; yet, the true intention of historical knowledge is not to explain a concrete phenomenon as a particular case of a general rule, even if this had to be subordinated to the purely practical aim of an eventual prediction. In actuality, its true goal—even in utilizing general knowledge—is to understand an historical phenomenon in its singularity, in its uniqueness. Historical consciousness is interested in knowing, not how men, people, or states develop in general, but, quite on the contrary, how this man, this people, or this state became what it is; how each of these particulars could come to pass and end up specifically there.

But what sort of knowledge do we speak of now, and what is meant by "science" in this case? We have just presented a type of science manifesting a character and goal radically different from the natural sciences. But doesn't this characterization come back to a purely privative definition? Must we then speak of an "inexact science"? From the perspective of this question it is desirable to examine the reflections of Hermann Helmholtz who, in /18/ 1862, was already looking for a solution to the problems engaging us here. Although he insisted on the importance and human significance of the Geisteswissenschaften, he was still inspired by the methodological ideal of the natural sciences when he attempted to define their logical character. Helmholtz distinguished between two species of induction: on the one side, logical induction, and on the other, instinctive induction, artistic induction, as it were. Note well that this is a psychological and not a logical distinction. For Helmholtz both sciences make use of inductive reasoning; in the human sciences, however, inductive reasoning is practiced implicitly, unconsciously, and happens as a tributary consequent of what we call in German Taktgefühl, a sort of tact or sym-pathetic sensibility. In turn, this sensitivity is supported by other mental faculties, as for example the richness of memory, respect for authority, etc. In contrast, the explicit reasoning of the naturalist rests entirely on the use of a single function: understanding [l'entendement].

Although we readily admit that the great scholar has, perhaps, resisted the temptation to take his own scientific activity as the measure, nevertheless, in characterizing the procedures of the human sciences, in the end he resorted to the single logical category which he took from Mill: i.e., induction. For him as well, the model that mechanics gave to the whole of eighteenth century science remained valid. But, that this mechanics might itself
be an historical phenomenon, /19/ that consequently it might be subject to historical investigation (as Pierre Duhem did so profitably much later4), was totally foreign to him.

Yet, in the same period, the problem appeared to many with a certain acuity; we have only to think of the prodigious research of the "historical school."

Would it not have been necessary to raise these investigations to the level of logical self-consciousness? As early as 1843, J. G. Droysen, the author who first drew attention to the history of Hellenism, wrote: "There is certainly no scientific discipline which is—theoretically speaking—so little justified, so little circumscribed and articulated as is history." And he appealed to a new Kant in order to disclose the living source of history in a categorical imperative, "from where springs," to use his words, "the historical life of humanity." That Droysen called upon Kant tells us that he did not conceive of the epistemology of history to be a logical "organon," but a truly philosophical task. He expected that "a deepened conception of history could make possible new progress in the human sciences and become the center of gravity stabilizing their oscillations."5

That it is still the natural scientific model that matters here finds no better proof than the plural used in saying "Geisteswissenschaften" or "human sciences." However, this "model" does not necessarily signify an epistemological unity: /20/ on the contrary, the natural sciences constitute a model for the human sciences only insofar as the latter submit to the ideal of an autonomous and grounded scientific value. Droysen's logic of history—which he called an *Historik*—was the first sketch of an epistemology of this species.
II. THE IMPORTANCE AND LIMITS OF WILHELM DILTHEY'S WORK

Dilthey's philosophical work is dedicated to this same task of constructing, parallel to the critique of pure reason, a "critique of historical reason." But the difference between Droysen and Dilthey is notable. Whereas Droysen remains a successor—albeit a critical one—to Hegel's philosophy (we need only recall that in his logic of history the fundamental concept of history is defined as a generic concept of man), we find in Dilthey, however, that the romantic and idealistic heritage is tangled with the influence which Mill's logic had exerted since the middle of the century. It is true that Dilthey thought himself quite superior to English empiricism on account of his vivid intuition of the superiority of the "historical school" compared to all naturalistic or dogmatic thought. Indeed, he said: "Only in Germany could the practice of an authentic experience be substituted for an empiricism which was dogmatic and burgeoning with prejudices; Mill is dogmatic for lack of historical erudition." These lines are found noted in Dilthey's copy of Mill's Logic. As a matter of fact, the difficult work accomplished by Dilthey over several /22/ decades to ground the human sciences and distinguish them from the natural sciences is a continual debate with the naturalistic methodological ideal that Mill assigned to the human sciences in his famous last chapter. To a so called "explanatory" psychology—in the naturalistic sense of the word—Dilthey opposed the idea of a "geisteswissenschaftliche" psychology. It is to geisteswissenschaftliche psychology, disencumbered from all dogmatism and every hypothetical construction, that belongs the knowledge and description of the laws of spiritual life which are to serve as the common ground for the various human sciences. Indeed, all propositions in the human sciences concern, in the end, the facts of "internal experience": a domain of being which is not put into relief by the category of "explanation," but by that of understanding.

Dilthey's effort to philosophically ground the human sciences depends upon the epistemological consequences which he drew from everything the "historical school" (Ranke and Droysen) had already tried to emphasize in opposition to German Idealism. According to Dilthey, the greatest weakness in the reflections of the disciples of the "historical school" is their inconsistency: "instead of, on the one hand, exposing the epistemological presuppositions of the historical school and, on the other, examining those of idealism which made their way from Kant to Hegel, in order to discover their incompatibilities, they have uncritically confused the two, /23/ one with the other." Dilthey's own intent is clear: discover on the boundary between historical experience and the idealistic heritage of the historical school a new and epistemologically solid foundation; it is this which explains his idea of completing Kant's critique of pure reason by a "critique of historical reason."
Even by posing the problem in this way Dilthey already abandons speculative idealism; the analogy which conjoins the problem of historical reason with the problem of pure reason must be taken literally. Historical reason is in search of justification no less than was pure reason not so long before. The critique of pure reason aimed at not only the destruction of metaphysics as a purely rational science of the world, of the soul and of God, but also the simultaneous unveiling of a new domain within which rational science had a justifiable application. In this connection we witness, then, a double philosophical consequence: On the one side, if the critique of pure reason denounced "the dreams of visionaries," it did not, however, fail to furnish a response to the question: How is a pure science of nature possible? On the other side, by introducing the historical world into the autonomous development of reason, speculative idealism integrated historical consciousness into the domain of purely rational knowledge. History became a chapter in the Encyclopedia of the Spirit.

In this way philosophy came in effect to the following problem: how to produce for the world of historical consciousness something similar to what Kant succeeded in producing for the scientific knowledge of nature? Is there a way to justify empirical knowledge in history while totally renouncing all dogmatic constructions?

At this point Dilthey asks himself how to fit historical consciousness to the place previously held by Hegel’s Absolute Knowledge of Spirit. But that raises more problems than it solves. Dilthey stressed that we can only know from within an historical perspective since, as it happens, we are ourselves historical beings. But doesn’t the very historical mode of being of our consciousness constitute an impermeable boundary? Now Hegel solves the problem by the Aufhebung of history into Absolute Knowledge; but for Dilthey, who admits the possibility of unceasing variation in the interpretation of historical relations, isn’t the attainment of objective knowledge excluded in advance? Dilthey pondered over these problems untringly; his reflections had precisely the goal of legitimating the scientific knowledge of the historically-conditioned as objective science. A great aid was provided him by the idea of a structure which was constituted as a unity emanating from its own center. It was a very flexible schema: the knowledge of infinitely complex historical relations became conceivable, even extending so far as to include universal historical knowledge. The notion that a structural relation could become intelligible through its own center corresponded to the old hermeneutic principle and, at the same time, met the exegencies of historical thought. According to these conditions every historical moment must be understood in itself and cannot be submitted to the measures of a present which may be extrinsic to it. But the application of this schema presupposes that the historian can disen-
gage himself from his own historical situation. And, indeed, isn't having an "historical sense" in fact claiming to be disencumbered from the hold exercised by the prejudices of the epoch in which one lives? Dilthey was convinced he had achieved a truly historical view of the world; but at bottom, what his historical reflections were able to justify was nothing other than the grandiose and epical self-effacement practiced by Ranke.

This explains in what specific sense the perspective of finitude and historicity did not cause, in Dilthey's opinion, any detriment in principle to the validity of knowledge in the human sciences. For Dilthey the task of historical consciousness is a victory gained over its own relativity, thus justifying objective knowledge in this domain. But how can one legitimate this claim to objectivity on the part of historical consciousness in spite of its conditioned and bounded mode of being—and even in opposition to all other cognitive forms known through history, forms always relative to a determinate perspective?

According to Dilthey, this legitimation can no longer be lodged in Hegel's Absolute Knowledge. This Hegelian Absolute Knowledge is an actual self-consciousness which re-totalizes the phases of the progress of Spirit. What is this if not the pretension of philosophical consciousness to contain in itself the total truth of the history of Spirit—exactly the thesis rejected by an historical vision of the world? We need, then, an historical experience since human consciousness is not an infinite intelligence to which everything can be simultaneously present. On principle, for a finite and historical consciousness, the absolute identity of consciousness and object is unattainable: it is always immersed in historical influences. But in what, then, consists its privileged capacity to transcend itself and be entitled to an objective historical knowledge?

Here is Dilthey's reply: as impenetrable as the ground of historical life may be, this life is able to historically understand its possibility of having an historical attitude. Ever since the rise and victory of historical consciousness we confront a new situation. Hereafter, this consciousness is no longer simply an unreflective expression of real life. It ceases to judge everything transmitted to it by the measures of the understanding it has of its own life and, in this way, to establish the continuity of tradition. This historical consciousness now knows how to situate itself in a reflexive relation with itself and with tradition; it understands itself by and through its own history. Historical consciousness is a mode of self-consciousness.

Dilthey proposes, then, that we understand the appearance and genesis of a scientific consciousness through an analysis of the essence of self-knowledge. But immediately his philosophical impasse, regarding the problem he chose for himself, becomes apparent.
Dilthey’s point of departure is that life carries in itself reflection. /27/ We must credit Georg Misch with exposing Dilthey’s orientation towards a Lebensphilosophie. Now this orientation has as its foundation the idea that all life as such carries within it knowledge. Even the intimate familiarity which characterizes “lived experience” contains a sort of reflective consideration of life on itself. “Knowledge is there; it is, without reflection, bound up with life,” says Dilthey. It is this same immanent reflexivity in life which, according to Dilthey, is at the base of our lived experience of meaning. The experience of meaning in the cohesiveness of life is possible only if one is disengaged from the “pursuit of ones (vital) objectives”; this reflection is possible only if we take a certain retreat by placing ourselves above the connections which secure our different activities. Likewise Dilthey emphasized—and undoubtedly he had reason—that what we call the “meaning of life” takes shape, well before any scientific objectivation, in the natural view of life on itself. This natural view of life on itself is found objectified in the wisdom of proverbs and myths, but especially in the great works of art. Art, in fact, constitutes the privileged medium through which life is understood, because, situated “in the confines between knowledge and action it allows life to be disclosed at a depth no longer accessible to observation, reflection and theory.”

Yet, we must not limit the reflective meaning of life to the pure expression we find in works of art. We must say that every expression of life implies a knowledge which shapes it from within. /28/ Is not expression this plastic milieu of the spirit—Hegel’s Objective Spirit—whose realm encompasses every form of human life? In his language, in his moral values and juridical forms, the individual—the isolated being—is even then and always beyond his particularity. The ethical milieu, where he lives and in which he partakes, constitutes something “solid” that allows him to orient himself despite the somewhat vague contingencies of his subjective impulses. Dedication to communal purposes, to action for the community, this is what frees man, says Dilthey, from his particularity and from his ephemeral existence.

This would still have been acceptable to Droysen, but with Dilthey it takes on a quite unique profile. “Searching for solid forms”:/29/ there, according to Dilthey, is the vital tendency of our life, a tendency present in contemplation and science no less than in the reflection which practical experience always involves. Thus, we understand that for Dilthey the objectivity of scientific knowledge, no less than the inquiring reflection of philosophy, is like an unfolding of the natural tendencies of life. What guides Dilthey’s reflections is not at all a pure, simple and superficial adaptation of the method of the human sciences to the procedures of the natural sciences, rather it is the discovery of something genuinely common to both methods. It is indeed essential to the experimental method to go beyond the contingencies of subjective observation, and in this way it succeeds in discovering the laws of nature. Likewise, the underlying aspiration of the human sciences is to go beyond the contingencies of a purely subjective perspective by methodical critique and thus
achieve an historical and objective knowledge. Finally, we recognize in philosophical reflection an analogous intention and sense as well, even when it gives up the pretension of pure knowledge through the analysis of mere concepts: it “objectifies itself as a human and historical fact.”

Dilthey’s position, centered entirely on the relation between life and knowledge, thoroughly withstands the idealistic objection which accuses it of “historical relativism.” To root philosophy in the primordial fact of life amounts to abandoning the search for a simple, non-contradictory system of statements and concepts. The role occupied throughout life by Besinnung—self-consciousness, reflection—must also be valid, according to Dilthey, for philosophical reflection. This is a Selbstbesinnung which brings the reflexivity of life to its highest point; consequently, philosophy must be considered as an objectification of life itself. Thus philosophy becomes a “philosophy of philosophy,” but assuredly not in the sense nor with the claims that idealism earlier attributed to itself. The program of this reflection does not start from a self-sufficient speculative principle and aim at the construction of the one and only possible philosophy, instead it intends to follow solely the path of the historical Selbstbesinnung. And in this sense Dilthey’s philosophy is quite unscathed by the accusation of relativism.

It is true that Dilthey was not untroubled by the problem of relativism. He pondered a great deal on the question of how to assure objectivity in the midst of all these relativities, how to conceive of the relationship of the finite to the absolute. “Our task consists,” he said, “in explaining how the relative values of an age can have widened out into something in some manner absolute.” Nevertheless, we ask Dilthey in vain for an effective answer to this problem of relativism. And this state of affairs is less because he did not find an authentic answer, than because, in the last analysis, this problem did not touch the true center of his thought at all. In fact, throughout the unfolding of the historical Selbstbesinnung which carried Dilthey from relativity to relativity, he always felt sure to be on the road to the absolute. In this sense Ernst Trötsch summarizes very well Dilthey’s work by the formula: “from relativity to totality.” This expression corresponds perfectly to Dilthey’s own formula: “To be consciously a conditioned being.” Obviously, this formula epigrammatizes an explicit critique of idealism for which the truth or the achievement of consciousness is real only as infinite and unconditioned consciousness, that is to say, Absolute Spirit.

But considering his assiduous and unremitting meditations on the objection of relativism one quickly realizes that Dilthey himself did not clearly counteract the full anti-idealistical implications of his philosophy inspired by the problem of “life.” Indeed, how else are we to explain the fact that Dilthey did not notice and refute the intellectualist motive in the objection of relativism, intellectualism incompatible not only with the ultimate import of his philosophy of life, but even with his chosen point of departure: the immanence of knowledge in the very heart of life.
The underlying reason for this inconsistency at the heart of Dilthey’s thought undoubtedly lies in his latent Cartesianism. His historico-philosophical reflections towards grounding the human sciences cannot really be reconciled with the starting point of his Lebensphilosophie. He demands that his philosophy be extended to all the domains where “consciousness, by a reflexive and dubitative attitude, will be liberated from the hold of authoritarian dogmas and aspire to genuine knowledge.”\(^{15}\) It seems clear to us that this statement adequately reflects the spirit of modern science and philosophy in general. Also, we cannot ignore the Cartesian resonances which it conveys. And yet, curiously, Dilthey applied it in a very different sense: “Always and everywhere, life leads to reflection on that which confronts it, reflection leads to doubt, and life can only resist doubt in the pursuit of valid knowledge.”\(^{16}\) This citation clearly shows that in reality Dilthey, unlike the epistemologies of the Cartesian persuasion, is not aiming towards a shattering of philosophical prejudices, but rather he contends that it is real life as a whole—the moral, religious, juridical, and other traditions—which must arouse reflection and call out for a new rational order. Nevertheless, in this passage, then, Dilthey means by “knowledge” and “reflection” something more than the simple immanence of knowledge in life, a universal immanence of which we have spoken above. In fact living traditions, like the moral, religious and juridical traditions, are always derivatives—and without reflection—of life’s spontaneous self-knowledge. We have already noted that in dedicating himself to tradition the individual is raised to the level of Objective Spirit. Thus we will agree with Dilthey in saying that the influence exercised by thought over life “springs from an intrinsic necessity to find, within the inconsistent variations in sense perceptions, desires and affections, something solid which makes possible a stable and harmonious behavior.”\(^{17}\) But this is carried out specifically through the objectifications of the spirit, such as morality, positive law and religion, binding the particular being to the objectivity of society. Here now is something incompatible in the Diltheian Lebensphilosophie: at the same time he demands a “reflexive and dubitative” stance towards all these objectifications of the spirit in order to raise a work to the stature of “science.” Here Dilthey continues to adhere to the scientific ideal of Enlightenment philosophy. Now this Enlightenment philosophy agrees but little with the Besinnung immanent in life; specifically, Dilthey’s Lebensphilosophie is, in principle, most radically opposed to its intellectualism and dogmatism.

Actually, the sort of certitude we acquire through doubt is fundamentally different from that other—immediate—sort which is possessed by the ends and values in life which are themselves presented to consciousness with the pretension of being absolute. There is a decisive difference between this certitude grasped in the heart of life and scientific certitude. The certi-
tude obtained in the sciences always possess a Cartesian resonance; they are the result of a critical method. The latter puts in doubt the accepted opinions in order to achieve, through new examination, their confirmation or rectification. Rightly we speak of methodic doubt. By the artifice of a hyperbolic doubt, through an experiment analogous to those of the laboratory, Descartes proposes to show us in his celebrated meditations the *fundamentum inconcussum*: self-consciousness. Likewise, a methodical science doubts on principle all that can be doubted in order to arrive at the certitude of its knowledge.

Now it is characteristic of Dilthey's thought that he does not distinguish between this methodic doubt and the sort of doubt which assails us, so to say, without reason, without purpose, spontaneously. Dilthey treats scientific certitude as the fulfillment of this certitude which reigns at the heart of life. On the other side, we can not say that Dilthey, with all the weight that concrete historicity burdened him, was insensible to the uncertainty of life. Quite on the contrary, the more he was devoted to the modern sciences, the more he struggled with the tension between the tradition of his origins and the historical forces which modern life had unleashed. His search for something, as he said, "solid" is explained precisely by the sort of defensive instinct that he develops in view of the tumultuous reality of life. But it is remarkable that to conquer the uncertainty of life, he hopes to find this something "solid" in science, and not in the assurances that the experience of life itself can offer.

The personal process of secularization which made Dilthey—a theological student—a philosopher, can /34/ be paralleled to the historical process of the birth of the modern sciences. Just as the natural sciences bring to bear a limited yet sure light on the secrets of nature, now we face a scientifically developed power of "understanding" focused on the mysteries of life. Enlightenment philosophy is carried out in historical consciousness.

Consequently, we will understand how Dilthey is dependent on romantic hermeneutics. In fact, romantic hermeneutics masks the essential difference between historical experience and scientific knowledge, i.e., it allows one to neglect the essential historicity of the mode of knowledge of the human sciences and to coordinate them to the methodology of the natural sciences. Thus Dilthey maintained, for example, an ideal of "objectivity" for the human sciences which could only serve to assure them of a "rank" equal to that of the natural sciences. From there also stems the frequent use Dilthey liked to make of the word "results" and his preference for methodological descriptions, a usage and preference which served the same aim. In this respect romantic hermeneutics is useful to him, for it too misconceives the historical nature of the experience which is at the base of the human sciences. It starts off from the assumption that the proper object of understanding is the text to be deciphered and understood, but that every encounter with a text is an encounter
of the spirit with itself. Every text is foreign enough to pose a problem, and yet familiar enough that, in principle, the possibility of deciphering some sense out of it is assured, even when all that one knows is the fact that it is a text, that is to say, written spirit.

As we can see with Schleiermacher, the model of hermeneutics is the reciprocal understanding attained in the relation between the I and the thou. Understanding a text carries with it the same possibility of perfect adequation as the comprehension of the thou. What the author has in view is immediately evident in his text; text and interpreter are absolutely contemporaneous. Here is the triumph of the philological method: grasp the past spirit as the present, welcome the foreign as the familiar. It is evident, then, that in spite of the diversity of methods, the "differences" with the natural sciences no longer exist—since, in both cases, we address our questions to an object already fully present, to an object which contains every answer.

From this point of view Dilthey fulfilled perfectly the task he had set for himself: he justified epistemologically the human sciences by conceiving the historical world in the manner of a text to be deciphered. This proposition epitomizes the position of the "historical school." Ranke had already assigned the historian the sacred task of deciphering the hieroglyphs of history, but Dilthey goes even further. If historical reality has a sense transparent enough to be deciphered like a text, then all that is wanting is an interpreter who would reduce history to the history of Spirit. Dilthey himself draws this conclusion and recognizes in fact his kinship with Hegel's philosophy of Spirit. And while Schleiermacher's romantic hermeneutics had ambitions of being a universal instrument of the spirit (but confined itself to aiding the expression of the force of salvation in the Christian faith), for Dilthey's Grundlegung of the human sciences, however, hermeneutics is the telos of historical consciousness. For it, there exists but one species of knowledge of the truth: that which understands expression, and in expression, life. In history, nothing is incomprehensible. Everything is understood since everything resembles a text. "Life and history have meaning, as letters have in a word," said Dilthey. Consequently, the study of the historical past is conceived not as an historical experience, but as deciphering. This constitutes an important difference between Dilthey's conceptions and the views of romantic hermeneutics; despite his obvious attachments to these views we cannot be led astray and overlook this very real difference.

Now historical experience is defined by the historical acquirements from which it originates and by the impossibility of detaching it from this origin; never, then, will it be a pure method. There will always be certain means of deducing general rules from this experience, but the methodological meaning of this step forbids that one draw a law, properly so called, from it and for ever afterwards subsume the complex of given concrete cases in an unequivocal manner. The idea of experiential rules always demands—the rules
being what they are only through use—that they be tested in use. This is what remains valid, in a general and universal way, for our knowledge in the human sciences. They never attain an "objectivity" other than that which all experience carries with it.

/Dilthey's effort to understand the human sciences through life, beginning from lived experience, is never really reconciled with the Cartesian concept of science which he did not know how to throw off. Emphasize as he might the contemplative tendencies of life itself, the attractions of something "solid" that life involves, his concept of "objectivity," as he reduced it to the objectivity of "results," remains attached to an origin very different from lived experience. This is why he was unable to resolve the problem he had chosen: to justify the human sciences with the express purpose of making them equal to the natural sciences.
In the meantime, however, phenomenological research, as inaugurated by Edmund Husserl, decisively broke the bonds of neo-Kantian methodologism. Husserl gave back an absolutely universal theme of research to the dimension of living experience and thus overcame the point of view limited to the purely methodological problematic of the human sciences. His analyses of the "life-world" (Lebenswelt) and of this anonymous constitution of all meaning and significance which forms the ground and texture of experience, showed definitively that the concept of objectivity represented by the sciences exemplifies but a special case. The opposition between nature and spirit is re-examined; the human sciences and the natural sciences must be understood in terms of life's universal intentionality. This understanding alone satisfies the requirements of a philosophical Selbstbesinnung.

To these discoveries of Husserl, and in the light the question of being which he revived, Heidegger ascribed an even more radical meaning. He follows Husserl in that for him as well, it is unnecessary to separate, as Dilthey had done, historical being from the being of nature in order to legitimate on the level of the theory of knowledge /40/ the methodological uniqueness of the historical sciences. On the contrary, the natural scientific mode of knowledge is a sub-species of understanding which, as Heidegger says in Being and Time, "has strayed into the legitimate task of grasping the present-at-hand (the Vorhandene, 'substantial' being) in its essential unintelligibility." For Heidegger understanding [le comprendre], comprehension [la comprehension], is no longer the ideal of knowledge to which Spirit, now grown old, must be resigned—as it was for Dilthey—but neither is it simply the methodological ideal of philosophy—as with Husserl. Contrary to both, understanding is the primordial accomplishment of human Dasein as being-in-the-world. And prior to any differentiation of understanding into the two directions of pragmatic interest and theoretical interest, understanding is Dasein's mode of being which constitutes it as "potentiality-for-Being" [Seinkönnen] and "possibility."

On the basis of Heidegger's existential analysis of Dasein, with the many new perspectives that it implies for metaphysics, the function of hermeneutics in the human sciences also appears in a totally new light. While Heidegger resurrects the problem of Being in a form which goes far beyond all traditional metaphysics—he secures at the same time a radically new possibility in the face of the classical a prioris of historicism: his concept of understanding carries an ontological weight. Moreover, understanding is no longer an operation antithetic and subsequent to the operations of the constitutive life, but a primordial mode of being /41/ of human life itself. Although Misch, in departing from Dilthey, discovers in the liberating distanciation from oneself [la distance libre à soi] one of the fundamental possibilities of life, the possibility upon which the phenomenon of understanding must be grounded,
Heidegger—also taking his departure from Dilthey—goes further to initiate a radical ontological reflection about understanding as existential and disclose all understanding as pro-ject (Entwurf). Understanding is the very movement of "transcendence."

For traditional hermeneutics, of course, the Heideggerian theses sound a truly provocative note. Certainly the German verb verstehen (to understand) has two meanings. First of all, it has the same meaning as when we say, for example: "I understand the meaning of something"; then it also signifies: "to know about or be an expert in something." Let us give an example of this last case: "er versteht nicht auf das Lesen"—translated into English: "he is incompetent when it comes to reading," i.e., "he doesn't know how to read." In other words, the verb verstehen signifies, beyond its theoretical sense, a "knowing how," an "ability," a "capacity" to carry out a task at the practical level. But according to this last sense, it is essentially distinguished or so it seems—from the understanding obtained by scientific knowledge. And yet, on closer examination, even there we find something in common. In both cases there is an act of knowing, a "knowing about something," a "knowing how to go about something." Those who "understand" a text—to say nothing of a law—not only project themselves in an effort of understanding towards a significance, but acquire through understanding a new liberty of the mind. This involves numerous and new possibilities, like interpreting a text, seeing the hidden relations that it conceals, drawing conclusions, and so on—precisely those things which define what we mean when we speak of the understanding or knowledge of a text. Similarly, those with mechanical "know-how," or even those with a practical mastery in whatever craft, as for example the savant with hermeneutical "know-how," really know "how to go about it." In sum, even if it seems perfectly evident that a simply practical understanding of a rational goal has other norms than, for instance, the understanding of a text or other expression of life, nevertheless, it is still true that in the end all understandings are reducible to a common level of an "I know how to go about it," i.e., a self-understanding in relation to something other.

In the same way, understanding a gesture or a pantomimed expression is more than grasping directly its immediate meaning; it is to discover what is hidden in the soul and apprehend how we ought "to go about it." In this case one rightly says that accomplishing an understanding is to form a project from one's own possibilities.

The lexicological history of the German word verstehen confirms this result. In fact, the primitive meaning of the word seems to be what it had in the ancient juridic language which used the expression "eine causa verstehen" ("understanding" a cause) in the sense of "defending the cause of a party before a tribunal." That the use of the word developed later into its current and familiar sense, may be clearly explained by the fact that the defense of
a "cause" necessarily means that one has assumed it completely—that one has understood it—to the point of not losing any ground in the face of any possible arguments advanced by one's adversaries.

In taking account of this it is easy to see that traditional hermeneutics greatly over restricted the horizon of problems attached to the idea of understanding. In this respect the initiative taken by Heidegger on a great deal more vast plane than that of Dilthey, was particularly fruitful concerning our hermeneutical problem. Certainly Dilthey also rejected entirely the naturalistic methods in the human sciences and Husserl, as we know, even deemed "absurd" the application of the naturalistic concept of objectivity to the human sciences, in showing the fundamental relativity that every type of world, every type of historical knowledge, implies. But with Heidegger we witness an ontological evaluation of the problem of the structure of historical understanding, grounded on human existence which is essentially oriented towards the future.

Although having recognized the tribute that historical knowledge pays to the projective structure of Dasein, no one, however, will dream of putting in doubt the inmanent criteria of what we call scientific knowledge. Historical knowledge is neither a species of project, in the sense of a forecast or program, nor is it the extrapolation of deliberate ends, nor again the disposition of things according to good will, vulgar prejudices, or suggestions of a tyrant, but is a mensuratio ad rem. Except that the res is not meant in the sense of a factum brutum: it is no simply "substantial entity" (bloss vorhanden, in the Heideggerian sense), neither is it anything instrumentally determinable or measurable. To be "historical" is, on the contrary, itself a mode of being for human Dasein. But now we need to fully understand the importance of this often repeated statement. Neither does it signify that the understandable and the understood may be simply homogenous modes of being, and that the "method" of the human sciences is founded on this homogeneity. That would make the "historical" into a psychology. The common relationship which the understandable and the understood share, this sort of "affinity" which ties them together, is not founded on the equivalence of their modes of being, but on what that mode of being is. This means that neither the knowable nor the known are "ontic" and simply "subsistant," but that they are "historical"; that is to say, their mode of being is historicality. As Count Yorck said, "everything depends upon the generic difference between the ontic and the historical." When Yorck shows us the opposition which separates the homogeneity of being from the "affinity"—which distinguishes the Gleichartigkeit from the Zugehörigkeit—then appears the problem that Heidegger will develop in all of its radicality. For Heidegger, the fact that we can only speak of history insofar as we are ourselves historical, signifies that it is the historicity of human
Dasein, in its incessant movement of anticipation and forgetfulness, which is the pre-condition for our ability to revive the past. What before appeared as prejudicial to the concept of science and method, as only a "subjective" approach to historical knowledge, today is placed in the foreground of fundamental inquiry. "Affinity" (Zugehörigkeit) "conditions" historical interest not only in the sense of the non-scientific and subjective factors which motivate the choices of a theme or question. In accepting such a hypothesis we would interpret the concept of "affinity" as a particular case of emotional servitude: sympathy. On the contrary, "affinity" with a tradition is no less primordially and essentially constitutive of the historical finitude of Dasein than is the fact that Dasein always projects itself towards its future possibilities. On this point Heidegger rightly emphasized the two moments of "thrownness" (Geworfenheit) and "pro-ject" (Entwurf) must always be thought of together. Thus there is no understanding or interpretation whatsoever which does not bring into play the entirety of this existential structure—even if the intention does not exceed a purely "literal" reading of a text of stating some specific event.

These remarks still do not constitute a sufficient response to the problem raised by hermeneutics. Nevertheless, the Heideggerian interpretation of understanding as "existential" represents neither more nor less than its most fundamental element. If "understanding" is a transcendental determination of all existence, then hermeneutic "understanding," too, receives a new dimension and universal importance. The phenomenon and problematic of "affinity" which the "historical school" knew not how to justify, will henceforth have a concrete significance, and the task of hermeneutics properly so-called will be precisely to grasp this significance which is its own.

The existential structure of "thrownness," fundamental to understanding as the meaningful operation of Dasein, is a structure also found at the basis of daily life understanding as performed in the human sciences. The concrete links which represent an ethics or tradition, more generally the concrete historical conditions, as well as the future possibilities which they imply, there links define what is active at the heart of the understanding proper to the human sciences. The importance of an existential doctrine such as "thrownness"—Geworfenheit—is precisely to show that the Dasein which is projected towards its future "potentiality-for-Being" is a being which here and now has been, so that all of its unrestrained posturing comes up against and is halted in the face of the facticity of its own being. Here, then, in opposition to the quest for a transcendental constitution in Husserlian phenomenology, is the crucial point of Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity." It is
fully aware of the insurmountable precedence of what gives it the possibility of even having a pro-ject, a pro-ject, in fact, which by the same token can only be a finite pro-ject.

The understanding of an historical tradition will also, and necessarily, carry with it the imprint of this existential structure of Dasein. The problem, then, is how to recognize this imprint in the hermeneutics of the human sciences. For in the human sciences there can be no question of being “opposed” to the process of tradition which is itself historical and to which these sciences owe their access to history. Detachment or being “liberated” from tradition can not be our first worry in our attitude towards the past in which we—who are ourselves historical beings—incessantly participate. Quite the contrary, the authentic attitude is that of looking at an inherited “culture”—in the literal sense of both inherited and culture, i.e., as a development—and a continuation of what we recognize as being the concrete link among us all. Obviously, what is handed down by our forebearers is not appreciated when it is looked at in the objectivist spirit, that is, as the object of a scientific method, as if it were something fundamentally alien or completely foreign. What we prepare to welcome is never without some resonance in ourselves; it is the mirror in which each of us recognizes himself. In fact, the reality of tradition scarcely constitutes a problem of knowledge, but a phenomenon of spontaneous and productive appropriation of the transmitted content.

This said, it is time to ask if the appearance of historical consciousness has really rent an unbridgeable abyss between our scientific attitude and our natural and spontaneous approach to history. In other words, doesn’t so-called historical consciousness deceive itself in designating the totality of its historicity as a simple prejudice which must be overcome? The “presuppositionless science”—the vorurteilslose Wissenschaft—does it not itself partake, and more than it realizes, in the naive receptive and reflective attitude, through which the past is presented to us as living tradition? Without other attitudes—scientific or quotidian—that it lives only through the solicitations which arrive to it from a tradition? Must we not admit that the meaning of the objects of investigation which it borrows from tradition is formed exclusively by a tradition? Even if a given historical object doesn’t answer at all a current historical interest—even in this truly extreme case of historical investigation—it is still the case that there is no historical object which does not always motivate us to question it primordially as an historical phenomenon, that is to say, to grasp it as something meaningful which has nothing immutable about it except that it can never be defined once and for all.

Consequently, in order to proceed to an historical hermeneutics it is necessary to begin by clearing away the abstract opposition which lies between tradition and historical research, between history and historical knowledge. Everything that the living tradition, on the one hand, and historical research,
end form an effective unity which can only be analyzed as a network of reciprocal actions. Thus it would be more correct to take historical consciousness, not as a radically new phenomenon, but as a relative transformation, although a revolutionary one, within which man has always constituted his attitude towards his own past. In other words, it is a matter of being familiar with the role that tradition plays within the historical attitude, and of investigating its hermeneutic productivity.
IV. THE HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEM AND ARISTOTLE'S *ETHICS*

At this point in our exposition, it would appear that the problem with which we have been occupied manifests an intimate connection to a problematic that Aristotle developed in his ethical investigations. In fact, the problem which hermeneutics poses can be defined by the question: What can we make of the fact that one and the same message transmitted by tradition will, however, be grasped differently on every occasion, that it is only understood relative to the concrete historical situation of its recipient? On the logical level, this problem of understanding is presented as the application of something general (the self-same message) to a concrete and particular situation. Now certainly Aristotelian ethics is not interested in the hermeneutical problem, much less its historical dimensions; instead its concern is precisely what role reason plays in all ethical behavior. It is the role of reason and knowledge in Aristotle's *Ethics* which manifests such striking analogies to the role of historical knowledge.

By criticizing the Socratic-Platonic intellectualism involved in the question of the Good, Aristotle became the founder of ethics as a discipline independent from metaphysics. He demonstrated that the Platonic idea of the Good is a vacuous generality and contrasts to it a *human good*, that is to say, good in relation to human activity. The target of the Aristotelian critique is the identity of virtue and knowledge, of *arete* and *logos*, as it was promulgated in Socratic-Platonic ethics. In defining the fundamental element of human ethical knowledge as *orexis*, as *desire*, and by the organization of this desire into an habitual disposition—into a *hexis*—, Aristotle reduces the doctrine of his teachers to its proper scale. Remember that according to Aristotle's theory, practice and habit are at the basis of *arete*. We see this significance in the very name "ethics."

Ethical being, as a specifically human undertaking, is distinguished from natural being because it is not simply a collection of capacities or innervating forces. Man, on the contrary, is a being who only becomes what he is and acquires his "bearing" by what he does, by the "how" of his actions. It is in this sense that Aristotle differentiates between the domain of *ethos* and that of *physics*. Although it is not devoid of all natural regularities, the ethical domain is, however, distinguished by the inconstancy of human precepts and thus stands in contrast to the natural domain where stable laws prevail.

The question raised by Aristotle at this point concerns the possibility of a philosophical knowledge of man *qua* ethical being; in this regard he must ask what function knowledge should fulfill in the constitution of ethical behavior. If, in fact, man does acquire the good—his own particular good—with an altogether concrete and practical situation, the task which befalls ethical knowledge can only be to ferret out just exactly what demands this situation places on him. We would say the same thing by affirming that the proper task
of ethical consciousness is to gauge a concrete situation by the light of the most general ethical requirements. The other side of the coin is that general knowledge, by virtue of its very generality, is unmindful of concrete situations and their exigencies; in itself, general knowledge knows not how to be applied to a concrete situation and even threatens to obscure the meaning of the concrete exigencies which a factual situation could pose to it. We mean here not only that the methodological aspect of philosophical ethics is far from a simple matter, but above all that in a sense every philosophical method necessarily involves a certain ethical problem. In opposition to the Platonic doctrine of the idea of the Good, Aristotle vigorously emphasizes that in the domain of ethics there is no question of aspiring to the rarefied exactitude of mathematics; in the concrete human situations in which we find ourselves such misguided aspirations would obscure our real goal [which is always ethical being]. Such a calculus could only organize the elements of an ethical problem according to their major vectors and then, through plotting their contours, furnish a sort of templet [d'appui] to ethical consciousness. On closer examination, this immediately implies a moral problem. In fact, it is essential to the phenomenon of ethics not only that the agent knows in general how to decide and what to prefer, but also, he must know and understand how he ought to act in the given occasion, a responsibility that he can never evade. Thus it is essential that ethical sciences—while they may contribute to the clarification of the problems of ethical consciousness—never occupy the place properly belonging to concrete ethical consciousness. Indeed, for those who listen to one of Aristotle’s lessons, for this audience who would find therein a templet for their ethical consciousness, all of this presupposes a whole series of things. To begin with, a listener must be sufficiently mature so that he does not demand of the instruction he receives more than it can give him. In more positive terms we might say: it is indispensable that through practice and education the listener may have already formed a habitudo which he takes into the concrete situations of his life, a habitudo which will be confirmed and solidified by each new action.

As we see, conforming to his general principle, the method which Aristotle follows is defined in terms of the particular object. According to the exposition presented in Aristotle’s Ethics, this object is determined by the relation between ethical being and ethical know-how and we must elucidate this special relation. Aristotle remains within the Socratic-Platonic mold in the sense that for him knowledge is still an essential moment in ethical behavior. It is the balance that he strikes between the Socratic-Platonic heritage and his own conception of ethos which will constitute the subject of our following analysis.

It is obvious from our foregoing examination that hermeneutical knowledge, too, must reject an objectivist style of knowing. Moreover, in speaking of the “affinity” which characterizes the relation between the interpreter and the tradition he interprets, we saw that understanding is itself a constitutive mo-
ment in the progress of history. Now neither does Aristotle's description of ethical knowledge put it in the "objectivist" camp. Nor is the ethical subject or knower found simply confronting an entity which it must verify. From the first, the subject of ethical knowledge finds itself concerned with and invested by its "object," i.e., what it will have to do.

The distinction drawn by Aristotle between ethical know-how (phronesis) and theoretical or "scientific" knowledge (episteme) is particularly evident when we remember that in the eyes of the Greeks, mathematics represented the ideal of "science." Science, i.e., knowledge of the immutable, is grounded on demonstration, and consequently everyone is in a position to "learn." It is easy to contrast ethical knowledge to this theoretical knowledge. Obviously, in terms of this distinction, what we call the human sciences are to be considered as "moral sciences." Their object is man and what he has to know about himself. This human self-apprehension concerns him from the very first as an acting being; it does not in any way aim at verifying what is always the case. Quite the opposite, it relates to what is not necessarily what it is and what could be otherwise at some particular moment. Only in things of this sort [i.e., in that which is not immutable] can human action intervene.

Because it is a matter of knowledge guiding activity, we could call to mind what the Greeks called techne, the know-how or skill of an artisan who knows how to produce something. Is ethical knowledge similar to that of techne, as in the statement: "I know perfectly well how I ought to go about it"? Is there a similarity between the man who makes himself what he ought to be and the artisan who acts of his own choice in terms of a preconceived intention and plan? Is there a similarity between the man who, as we said above, is a project of his own possibilities—let us now say of his eidos—and the artisan who prepares a deliberate plan, an eidos, for himself and knows how to execute it in some medium? Undeniably Socrates and Plato uncovered something very true in applying the concept of techne on the level of ethical activity. In fact, it is obvious that ethical know-how and technical know-how have this in common: neither of them are an abstract kind of knowledge; instead, in the definition and direction of activity, both of them imply a practical knowledge fashioned to the measure of the concrete tasks before them.

This last characterization leads us to a distinction that is very important in our perspective. It concerns the nuance which delineates the acquisitions due to a "teachable" technique from those acquisitions made by virtue of a thoroughly concrete experience in everyday practice. The knowledge transmitted by instruction—in a handicraft, for example—is not necessarily of a real practical value nor necessarily superior to the knowledge acquired through practice. In no way do we mean that knowledge which guides its practice (the "art") is in its turn purely theoretical; as a matter of fact, precise-
ly in making use of this “book knowledge” in practice do we acquire the indispensable experience that is techne. Thus, Aristotle rightly cites the adage that “techne loves tyche and tyche loves techne,” that is to say, the “chance” for success is offered first to those who “know” their craft.

What we have said is just as applicable to ethical knowledge. It is obvious that experience by itself, /55/ rich though it may be, is an insufficient foundation for ethical know-how or a morally consistent decision; the guidance of moral consciousness by prior knowledge is always indispensable. Thus there is an obvious correspondence between ethical know-how and technical know-how. This allows us to raise the difficult and urgent problem of their difference.

No one can ignore the fact that there are radical differences between ethical know-how and technical know-how. It is evident that man does not deal with himself in the same way that an artisan deals with his material. The question, then, is to learn to distinguish the knowledge one has of oneself qua ethical being from the knowledge required to produce something. For Aristotle, this ethical know-how is distinguished just as much from technical knowledge as it is from theoretical knowledge. In fact, he says in a bold and original formula that ethical knowledge is a “knowledge-for-the-sake-of-one-self.” In this way ethical knowledge is clearly distinguished from the theoretical attitude of episteme. But how are we to distinguish knowledge-for-the-sake-of-one-self from technical know-how?

He who knows how to make something has learned thereby a good, and he understands this good—he knows it “its own sake”—in such a way that he can effectively proceed from the possibility of a task to its execution. He chooses the right materials and the appropriate means. He knows how to apply what he has learned in general to a concrete situation. The man who makes an ethical decision has learned something, too. Through the education and training he has received, he possesses a general knowledge /56/ of what we call right and just behavior. The function, then, of an ethical decision is to find what is just within the bounds of a concrete situation. In other words, the ethical decision for the just is there in order to “see” all that the concrete situation demands and to put the matter in some order. In this sense, then, just like the artisan who is ready to initiate his work, the putting into effect of an ethical decision deals with a “material”—the situation—and a choice of means. But this said, does not the anticipated distinction between the two types of knowledge vanish before our eyes?

We find a whole series of answering elements in Aristotle’s analysis of phronesis. As Hegel once remarked, what guarantees the genius of Aristotle is the comprehensiveness of the perspectives taken into consideration in his descriptions. Let us call attention to just three:
1. A technique is learned and can be forgotten; we can "lose" a skill. But ethical "reason" can neither be learned nor forgotten. Nor is it like the professional knowledge that one can choose; one cannot put it down, like a profession, in order to take up another one. By contrast, the subject of ethical reason, of *phronesis*, man always finds himself in an "acting situation" and he is always obliged to use ethical knowledge and apply it according to the exigencies of his concrete situation.

But for this very reason, it is problematic to speak of "application," since we can only apply what we already possess. Now ethical knowledge is not our property in the same way that we have something at our disposal and choose to utilize it or not. Thus if it is true that the image that man forms of himself, i.e., what he wishes and ought to be, is constituted by governing ideas such as right and injustice, courage, fellowship, etc., then we readily acknowledge a difference between these ideas and those that the artisan conceives of when he prepares plans for his work. To confirm this distinction it is sufficient to think of the way we are aware of what is "just." "Justice" is totally relative to the ethical situation in which we find ourselves. We cannot say in a general and abstract way which actions are just and which are not; there are no just actions "in themselves," independent of what the situation requires.

One might perhaps object that, nevertheless, a perfect analogy between *technē* and *phronesis* is actually confirmed by what is indexed by the phenomenon of right. Because, one might say, my "rights" are defined by laws, very often, moreover, by uncodified rules of behavior which are nonetheless valid for everyone. What I regard as my right, what is "just," is it not simply the result of the correct application of a law to a concrete case?

However, upon reflection we will see that the idea of application used by this objection is not unequivocal. For as soon as we consider application in its negative aspect, in the form of a non-application, it becomes evident that it means something quite different on the level of an artisan's knowledge than what it does on the level of ethical knowledge. It is quite possible, in fact, that under certain conditions the artisan may be obliged to forego the exact execution of his work plans; he is subject to external conditions, he lacks a tool or material, etc. But the fact that he gives up and is content with an imperfect work does not imply that his knowledge of things is augmented or has become more perfect through the experience of failure. On the other hand, when we "apply" a law the situation is entirely different. It can happen that, owing to the characteristics of a concrete situation, we may be obliged to mitigate the severity of the law—but "mitigation" is not exclusive of "application." Mitigation does not ignore the right expressed in the law, no more than it condones an unjustifiable carelessness in its application. When we mitigate the law we do not abandon it; on the contrary, without this mitigation there would really be no justice.
Aristotle speaks very explicitly of *epieikeia*, [or "equity,"] as a "rectification" or an "accommodation" of the law. He grounds his conception on the fact that every law admits of a certain internal tension with respect to the concrete possibilities of action: a law is always general and can never address itself to all the concrete complexities of a particular case. (Let us note in passing that this is the original problem of juridical hermeneutics.) A law is always insufficient, not by reason of any intrinsic fault, but because the practical world as the field of our actions is always imperfect in comparison to the ideal order envisioned by laws.

For the same reason Aristotle adopts a subtle position on the question of natural right: for him codified law does not, in itself, fulfill the conditions for finding justice. Consequently, Aristotle sees in the deliberations about the function of equity an important juridic task, viz., perfecting codified law. In marked opposition to the strict conventionalism of a juridic positivism, he distinguishes between positive law and natural law. But it would be erroneous to apply this distinction by recourse to the single criterion of the eternity and immutability of nature—by denying these characteristics to positive law while granting them to natural law. For according to Aristotle, the idea of an immutable natural law applies only to the divine world, and he declares that with /59/ us humans, natural law is in the last analysis just as inconstant as positive law. This theory is confirmed by the examples we read in Aristotle. He reminds us—borrowing the idea from Plato—that though the right hand is by nature stronger than the left, anyone can train it to become as strong as the other. Another example: measures of wine are everywhere identical; by all appearances, however, they are smaller where purchased than where sold. Aristotle, of course, does not mean that the seller always cheats the buyer, but that each concrete application of the law carries with it the implication that it is not unjust to tolerate a certain elasticity in legal exactitude.

It follows, then, according to Aristotle that the idea of natural law serves only a critical function. Nothing in the idea authorizes us to use it dogmatically by attributing the inviolability of natural law to particular and concrete juridical contents. It is legitimately useful only when the strict application of a law appears incompatible with justice. Thus, the task of a natural law is to lead us to an equitable solution more consonant with justice.

What we have just demonstrated regarding the concept of right is, in principle, valid for all the concepts man has at his disposal in order to determine what he ought to be. These concepts are not fixed in the firmament like the stars; they are what they are only in the concrete situations in which we find ourselves. Therefore, in order to define these concepts we must refer to the use and application which ethical consciousness makes of them.

2. What we have just said also entails a /60/ different conceptual relation between the end and the means in ethical knowledge on the one hand, and in technical knowledge on the other.
To begin with, let us note that contrary to what happens on the level of technique the end of ethical knowledge is not a "particular thing," but that it determines the complete ethical rectitude of a lifetime. Moreover, and even more importantly, technical activity does not demand that the means which allow it to arrive at an end be weighed anew on each occasion and personally by the subject who is their practitioner: "He is already an expert; he already knows how to go about it." And since a similar possibility is excluded in advance from ethical knowledge, it follows that we must characterize the ethical domain as one where technical know-how gives way to deliberation and reflection. But it is better to show its positive side: in all situations ethical consciousness—without prior avail to the knowledge of all the facts—is personally responsible for its own decisions. Ethical consciousness does not keep counsel with anyone but itself. Thus the whole problem is summarized in the fact that in moral actions there is no "prior" knowledge of the right means which realize the end, and this is so because, above all else, the ends themselves are at stake and not perfectly fixed beforehand. This also explains why in his discussion of phronesis Aristotle constantly oscillates between defining it as the knowledge of the ends and the knowledge of means.

Just as there can be no dogmatic use made of natural right, still less can we make dogmatic use of ethics. When Aristotle describes the concrete forms of a balanced attitude as to the choice of valid means, he above all relies upon the ethical consciousness which is molded within the exigencies of a concrete situation. Ethical know-how oriented by these ideas is the same knowledge which must respond to the momentary contingencies of a factual situation. Thus, when it is a question of ethical ends we can never speak only of the "opportunity" of means; the ethical rectitude of the means is an essential component of the ethical validity of ends. To reflect on the means in moral decisions is eo ipso an ethical undertaking.

Now, the "knowledge-for-the-sake-of-one'self" of which Aristotle speaks is precisely this "perfect application" which unfolds as personal "knowledge" [savoir] within the intimacy of a given situation. Only in the "knowledge" of the immediately given is ethical knowledge attained: it is, however, a "knowledge" which is not of the same order as sensible perceptions. For even if we must pay attention to the demands of the situation, our perception is not a brute perception of facts without meaning. Only within "ethical perception" does the situation appear to us as a situation-for-our-action and in the light of what is "just." Our awareness of the situation is a consciousness of an act which cuts through the situation.

Thus, "justice" is not the opposite of moral error or illusion, but of blindness. In other words, when overwhelmed by his passions man no longer sees what is just of unjust. He is not in error but loses control of himself and, dominated by the play of his passions, is no longer oriented towards the good at all.
Thus, we call ethical knowledge that which encompasses in an entirely unique way our knowledge of ends and means; and precisely from this perspective it is opposed to a purely technical know-how. Consequently in this field no longer makes any sense to distinguish between knowledge and experience, since ethical knowledge is also in itself a sub-species of experience. On this score it is even an absolutely primordial form of experience, and perhaps all others constitute but secondary, non-primordial forms by comparison.

3. The "knowledge-for-the-sake-of-one'self" of ethical reflection actually implies an absolutely remarkable relation to oneself. This is what the Aristotelian analyses teach us respecting the varieties of phronesis.

Alongside phronesis there is the phenomenon of "understanding" in the sense of synesis. This is an intentional modification of ethical knowledge when it is a moral question, not for the sake of myself, but for the sake of another. This intentional modification carries with it an ethical appreciation in the sense of being placed by it in the situation of another where the other must act. Here again it is not a matter of a generalized knowledge, but of its concretion motivated by the reality of the moment. However, to "live on good terms" with someone is presupposed and only manifests all of its ethical importance in the phenomenon of "understanding." Understanding another as a unique phenomenon is not simply the technical knowledge of the psychologist, nor the equivalent everyday experience possessed by the "wily" [malic] or "resourceful" [debrouillard] man. It supposes that one is committed to a just cause and through this commitment one discovers a link with another. This bond is concretized in the phenomenon of "moral counsel." One gives and receives, as they say, "good counsel" only among friends.

This emphasizes that the relationship established between two people is not that of two entities who have nothing to do with one another; instead, understanding is a question of—employ an idea to which we are by now accustomed—"affinity." According to Aristotle understanding gives rise to the following two correlative phenomena: to a spirit of discernment of another's moral situation and to the resulting tolerance or indulgence. Now what is this discernment if not the virtue of knowing how to equitably judge the situation of another?

Clearly it is not a question here either of a technical know-how. In fact, Aristotle emphasizes the purely virtuous character of ethical know-how. And to put it in even greater relief, he gives a description of the degenerative form of phronesis which characterizes the deinos: the man who, by means of his shrewd intelligence, turns every situation to his own advantage. Its opposition to real phronesis is obvious: the deinos uses and abuses his capabilities without any reference to ethical considerations. It is not by chance that
the term denoting this man, for whom every situation is an opportunity for self-aggrandizment, is faithfully translated by the word "redoubtable." Nothing is more terrifying than a genius so constituted that he takes not account of good or evil.
Let us return to the subject, properly so-called, of the present lectures. If we recall the Aristotelian approach to the problem of ethics and its inherent mode of "knowledge", it is evident that we have an excellent model at our disposal to guide us in the elucidation of the hermeneutical task. In hermeneutics, no less than with Aristotle, "application" is a constitutive moment. It can never signify a subsidiary operation appended as an afterthought to understanding; the object of our "application" determines from the beginning and in its totality the real and concrete content of hermeneutical understanding. "Application" is not a calibration of some generality given in advance to unravel afterwards a particular situation. In attending to a text, for example, the interpreter does not try to apply a general criterion to a particular case; on the contrary, he is interested in the fundamentally original significance of the writing under his consideration.

In order to elucidate the meaning of an authentically historical hermeneutics we started from the failure of historicism we found in Dilthey and then recalled the new ontological dimensions that we owe to the phenomenological analyses of Husserl and Heidegger. Historical knowledge cannot be described according to the model of an objectivist knowledge because it is itself a process which has all the characteristics of an historical event. Understanding must be comprehended in the sense of an existential act, and is therefore a "thrown project." Objectivism is an illusion. Even as historians, i.e., as representatives of a modern and methodic science, we are members of an unbroken chain through which the past addresses us. We have seen that ethical consciousness is at the same time ethical know-how and ethical being. It is this integration of practical knowledge into the substance of morality, the "belongingness" of "education" or "culture" (in the etymological sense) to ethical consciousness and the concrete knowledge of obligations and ends, that will provide us with the model to analyze the ontological implications of historical consciousness. Just like Aristotle, though on a very different level, we will see that historical knowledge is at the same time historical know-how and historical being.

It is now a question of determining more concretely the structure of understanding found at the basis of hermeneutics; it is, we have seen, something like an essential "affinity" with tradition. At this point a traditional hermeneutical rule comes to our aid. It was formulated for the first time by romantic hermeneutics, but its origin dates back to ancient rhetoric. It concerns the circular relation between the whole and its parts: the anticipated meaning of a whole is understood through the parts, but it is in light of the whole that the parts take on their illuminating function.
The study of a text in a foreign language will serve as our example. In a general way, before we understand anything in a sentence, we proceed by a certain preliminary structuration which thus constitutes the groundwork for later understanding. This process is dominated by a global meaning we have in view, and is based on the relations which an earlier context affords us. But, of course, this purely anticipatory global meaning awaits confirmation or amendment pending its ability to form a unified and consistent vision. Let us think of this structure in a dynamic way; the effective unity of the anticipated meaning comes out as the comprehension is enlarged and renovated by concentric circles. The perfect coherence of the global and final meaning is the criterion for the understanding. When coherence is wanting, we say that understanding is deficient.

The hermeneutical circle of the whole and its parts, especially in its objective and subjective aspects, was examined by Schleiermacher. On the one hand, every text belongs to the whole of the author's works and then to the literary genre from which it originates. On the other hand, if we wish to grasp the text in the authenticity of its unique meaning, then we must see it as a manifestation of a creative moment and replace it within the whole spiritual context of the author. Only from the totality formed, not only by objective facts, but in the first place by the subjectivity of the author, can understanding arise, in the extrapolation of Schleiermacher's theory we encounter Dilthey who tells us about an "orientation towards the center" to describe the understanding of the whole. In this way Dilthey applied to the complex of historical research the traditional hermeneutical principle that a text must be understood through itself. It remains to be seen, however, if the idea of the circle of understanding is grounded upon an accurate description.

On the one hand, to relate, as Schleiermacher and romanticism tell us, to the subjective factors of understanding does not seem at all convincing. When we understand a text we do not put ourselves in the place of the other, and it is not a matter of penetrating the spiritual activities of the author; it is simply a question of grasping the meaning, significance and aim of what is transmitted to us. In other words, it is a question of grasping the intrinsic worth of the arguments put forward and doing so as completely as possible. In one move we find ourselves within the dimension of the aim [la visée], already comprehensible in itself, and without so much as a second look at the subjectivity of the partner. The meaning of hermeneutical inquiry is to disclose the miracle of understanding texts or utterances and not the mysterious communication of souls. Understanding is a participation in the common aim.

On the other hand, the objective aspect of the hermeneutical circle will also be described in a different way than what we read in Schleiermacher. For it is really what we have in common with tradition that we relate to and which determines our anticipations and guides our understanding. Consequently, this
“circle” is not at all of a purely formal nature, from neither a subjective nor an objective viewpoint. On the contrary, it comes into play solely within the space established between the text and he who understands. The purpose of the interpreter is to make himself a *mediator* between the text and all that the text implies. Therefore, the aim of hermeneutics is always to restitute the authentic intention and re-establish the concordance, to fill in the lacunas of the argumentation. This is entirely confirmed by the history of hermeneutics when we follow closely its major contours: St. Augustine spoke to us of the Old Testament which must be seen through Christian truths; Protestantism resumed this same task during the Reformation; in the age of the Enlightenment we are persuaded that the “rational” meaning of a text offers the first approach to its understanding, and that only the absence of such a “rational” meaning demands an historical interpretation. But is it not curious: while romanticism and Schleiermacher became the messengers of historical self-consciousness, the same romanticism and the same Schleiermacher never even dreamed of attributing to their own tradition the value of a true foundation.

Yet, among Schleiermacher’s immediate predecessors, there is one, the philologist Friedrich Ast, who had clear views of this hermeneutical task. According to him, hermeneutics plays a mediating role: that of establishing agreement between the true traditions of antiquity and Christianity. In opposition to the *Aufklärung*, this perspective creates a new situation, in the sense that it was no longer a question of reconciling the authority of tradition with natural reason but of effecting a relation between two different traditions. However, Ast resumes the old tradition to build up an intrinsic and concrete agreement of antiquity with Christianity, and thereby preserves the real task of a non-formal hermeneutics, a forgotten task by the time of Schleiermacher and his successors. If the philologist Ast avoided this forgetfulness, it is by virtue of the spiritual influence of idealistic philosophies and, above all, of Schelling, who inspired him.

/70/ Today, it is through Heidegger’s existential analysis that we again discover the deeper meaning of the circular structure of understanding. Here is what we read in Heidegger:

[The hermeneutic circle] is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle or even a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, foresight, and fore-conceptions to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.22
Just as they stand, these lines announce not only the conditions imposed on the practice of understanding; they also describe the manner in which interpretation always proceeds when it intends an understanding tempered to the "thing itself." For the very first time the positive ontological meaning of the circle that understanding implies is explicitly affirmed. Every authentic interpretation must provide itself against the happenstance arbitration of baroque ideas and against the limitations caused by unconscious habits of thought. It is evident that in order to be authentic the inquiring gaze must be focused on the "thing itself," and in such a manner that it may be grasped, as it were, "in person." Likewise it is evident that an understanding faithful to the meaning of the text, for example, is not a matter of a simple, more or less vague wish nor of "good and pious intentions," but rather has the same meaning as the program Heidegger designated as the "first, last and constant task" of interpretative understanding. Now, the circular character of understanding is precisely the outcome of the effort which leads the interpreter to strictly abide by this program, despite any errors he might commit in the course of his investigations.

Let us think once more about textual interpretation. As soon as he discovers some initially understandable elements, the interpreter sketches out the meaning of the whole text. But these first meaningful elements only come to the fore provided that he sets about reading with a more or less definite interest. Understanding the "thing" which arises there, before him, is nothing other than elaborating a preliminary project which will be progressively corrected in the course of the interpretative reading. Let us describe this process, realizing that it is obviously only a kind of "abbreviation," since the process is much more complicated. In the beginning, without the revision of the first project, there is nothing to constitute the basis for a new meaning; but at the same time, discordant projects aspire to constitute themselves as the unified meaning until the "first" interpretation is modified and replaces its initial presupposed concepts by more adequate ones. Heidegger described this perpetual oscillation of interpretative visions, i.e., understanding being the formative process of a new project. One who follows this course always risks falling under the suggestion of his own rough drafts; he runs the risk that the anticipation which he has prepared may not conform to what the thing is. Therefore, the constant task of understanding lies in the elaboration of projects that are authentic and more proportionate to its object. In other words, it is a bold venture that awaits its reward in confirmation by the object. What we can term here as objectivity cannot be anything other than the confirmation of an anticipation which results even in the very course of its elaboration. For how do we judge that an anticipation is arbitrary and inadequate to its task, if not by confronting it with the only thing which can demonstrate its futility? Every textual interpretation must begin then with the interpreter's reflection on the preconceptions which result from the "hermeneutical situation" in which he finds himself. He must legitimate them, that is, look for their origin and adequacy.
Under these circumstances we will understand why the task of hermeneutics as described by Heidegger is not a simple matter of recommending a method. Quite the contrary, he demands nothing less than a radical account of actual understanding as everyone who understands has always accomplished it.

To give an example of the procedure that I just spoke about, let us think of the questions which arise with the analysis of an ancient text or else when we ask for a translation. It is easily seen that the enterprise must begin by our attempt to grasp the author's entirely personal manner of using words and meanings in his text: how arbitrary it would be to want to understand the text as an exclusive function of our own vocabulary and particular conceptual baggage. It is immediately evident that our understanding must be guided by the peculiar linguistic customs of the epoch or/author themselves. However, we must ask how this task can be realized in concreto, especially with respect to semantics: how to distinguish between unconventional language in general and unconventional language specific to the text. Our reply is to bring out the fact that we get our first initiation necessarily from the text itself: the experience of an impasse—maybe the text is totally incomprehensible to us or the response it seems to offer contradicts our anticipations—this discloses the possibility of an unconventional linguistic usage.

What is valuable for the implicit aims of a linguistic usage, the significant tendencies with which the words are laden, is even more valid regarding our anticipations of the content of a text, anticipations which positively determine our preconception of it. Yet, this case is more complex than the one we have just seen.

It is commonly admitted that when we speak everyday language, we use words in their usual sense. While presupposing this we need not presuppose that thoughts (or better, "other people's opinions" [les dires d'autrui]) which have been understood are therefore of themselves and from the mere fact that they have been grasped, organically integrated into my particular system of opinions and expectations. To "grasp" something which is not yet to "approve" of it. It is always implied—to begin with—that I acquaint myself with "other people's opinions" without committing my own.

This distinction must be maintained. Nevertheless, it must be added that it practically never happens that in taking cognizance of "other people's opinions" I do not feel myself ipso facto invited to take a position on their subject matter; and furthermore, it is usually a matter of feeling invited to take a favorable position. We see in what sense we are going to be able to say that the hermeneutical intention always implies that it slips into a question of another order: i.e., what is the "acceptable" meaning of a stated "opinion," the "integratable" meaning of a signification? It is evident that in a concrete situation the two moments are inseparable: the "latter" moment, which is
more than a pure and simple "grasping," even determines in every case the concrete character of "grasping," and it is precisely into this nexus that the hermeneutical problem is inserted.

What in fact are the implications of this description?—But do not make me say what I have not in fact said; and I have not said that when we listen to someone or when we read we ought to forget our own opinions or shield ourselves against forming an anticipatory idea about the content of the communication. In reality, to be open to "other people's opinions," to a text, etc., implies right off that they are situated in my system of opinions, or better, that I situate myself in relation to them. In other words, it is of course true—and everyone admits it—that other people's opinions can have "in themselves" an indefinite manifold of different meanings (in contrast to the relatively perfect concordance that dictionary words present); in concreto, however, when we listen to someone or read a text we discriminate, from our own standpoint, among the different possible meanings—namely, what we consider possible—and we reject the remainder which seem to us "unquestionably absurd." On these grounds, and despite the best presumptions attached to a "literal" reading, we are naturally tempted to sacrifice, in the name of "impossibility," everything that we totally fail to integrate into our system of anticipations.

The authentic intention of understanding, however, is this: in reading a text, in wishing to understand it, what we always expect is that it will inform us of something. A consciousness formed by the authentic hermeneutical attitude will be receptive to the origins and entirely foreign features of that which comes to it from outside its own horizons. Yet this receptivity is not acquired with an objectivist "neutrality": it is neither possible, necessary, nor desirable that we put ourselves within brackets. The hermeneutical attitude supposes only that we self-consciously designate our opinions and prejudices and qualify them as such, and in so doing strip them of their extreme character. In keeping to this attitude we grant the text the opportunity to appear as an authentically different being and to manifest its own truth, over and against our own preconceived notions.

The phenomenological descriptions of Heidegger are perfectly correct when in the heart of alleged "immediate givens" he emphasizes the anticipatory structure constitutive of all understanding. But this is not all. Being and Time is also an example of the application to a concrete case of the universal hermeneutical task which derives from the anticipatory structure characteristic of understanding. In Being and Time this "concrete case" is the ontological problem. Still, the question posed to ontology must be posed concretely, i.e., without making an abstraction of the layered density [l'étaiissement] of the hermeneutical situation which frames the meaning of the question. According to Heidegger, to be able to explain the hermeneutical situation of the "ontological question," i.e., its implicit "fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conceptions," it is indispensable reexamine the general "ontological question" in a
concrete way. For this reason he systematically addresses the question to
the decisive moments in the history of metaphysics. From all evidence,
Heidegger's approach serves this universal task which appears in all its ex-
egencies only to an historical-hermeneutical consciousness.

Consequently there is a strong need to elaborate a consciousness which di-
 rects and controls the anticipations involved in our cognitive approaches. Thus
we are assured of a truly valid understanding since it is intimately linked to
the immediate object of our intentions. This is what Heidegger means when he
claims that we "make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-
structures in terms of the 'things themselves,' " for which they constitute the
horizon.

Certainly no one will accuse us of unbridled exaggeration when we conclude
by these analyses that historical consciousness is no longer an unbounded pro-
jection. It is indispensable that consciousness take account of its secular pre-
judices and prevailing anticipations. Without this "purification," the illumina-
tion we gain by historical consciousness /77/ is but dim and ineffective. With-
out it our knowledge of the historically "other" is but a simple reduction. A
cognitive procedure which involves prejudices or anticipations, but also pre-
conceptions about method or what "must" be an historical fact, such a pro-

cedure flattens experience and inevitably leads to a betrayal of what is specifi-
cally "other."

We will now examine how to develop in the hermeneutical domain what we
have just established regarding an historically "operative" consciousness. On
this point, too, the Heideggerian description marks an important turning point.
The pre-Heideggerian theories confined themselves to the framework of a
purely formal relation between the whole and the parts. From a subjective
point of view, we can express the same thing by characterizing the hermeneuti-
cal circle as a dialectic between the "divination" of the meaning of the whole
and its later explication by the parts. In other words, according to the roman-
tic theories, the circular movement is not a result, but a deficiency—however
necessary—of inquiry. Having wandered through a text in all its directions and
various articulations, the circular movement finally disappears in the light of
a perfect understanding. For Schleiermacher this theory of hermeneutical un-
derstanding reaches its apogee in the idea of a pure, divinatory act, a purely
subjective function. Obviously, such a notion of hermeneutical understanding
is inclined to violate the genuinely foreign and mysterious which lies hidden in
texts. In contrast, Heidegger, in his description of the interpretative circle,
vigorously insists upon the fact that /78/ understanding a text never ceases to
be determined by the anticipatory impulses of pre-understanding.
Let us take this one step further. I have just said that all understanding can be characterized as a system of circular relations between the whole and its parts. However this sort of characterization must be completed by a supplementary determination: I will explain it by speaking of the anticipation of "perfect coherence." To begin with, this perfect coherence can be understood in the sense of an anticipation of a purely formal nature: it is an “idea.” It is, nevertheless, always at work in achieving understanding. It signifies that nothing is really understandable unless it is actually presented in the form of a coherent meaning. Thus, for example, it is implicit from the outset in our intention of reading a text that we consider the text to be “coherent,” unless this presupposition proves untenable, in other words, as long as the message of the text is not denounced as incomprehensible. It is at just this instant that doubt appears and we set to work with our critical instruments. We need not specify here the rules of this critical examination since in every respect their justification is inseparable from the concrete understanding of a text. Thus our understanding is guided by the anticipation of perfect coherence, and this anticipation shows that it possesses a content which is not merely formal. In fact, it is not only the unity of an immanent meaning which is presupposed in the concrete operations of understanding: every textual understanding presupposes that it is guided by transcendent expectations, expectations whose origins must be looked for in the relation between the intentional object of the text and the truth.

When we receive a letter we see what is communicated through the eyes of our correspondent, but rather, the event itself that we believe we ought to know by his letter. In reading a letter, to aim at the personal thoughts of our correspondent and not at the matters about which he reports is to contradict what is meant by a letter. Likewise, the anticipations implied by our understanding of an historical document emanate from our relations to “things” and not the way these “things” are transmitted to us. Just as we give credence to the news in a letter, because we assume that our correspondent personally witnessed the event or has validly learned of it, in the same way we are open to the possibility that the transmitted text may offer a more authentic picture of the “thing itself” than our own speculations. Only the disappointment of having let the text speak for itself and having then arrived at a bad result could prompt us to attempt “understanding” it by recourse to a supplementary psychological or historical point of view.

Thus, the anticipation of perfect coherence presupposes not only that the text is an adequate expression of a thought, but also that it really transmits to us the truth. This confirms that the primordial significance of the idea of understanding is that of “knowing about something” and that only in a derivative sense does it mean understanding the intentions of another as personal opinions. Thus we come back to the original conditions of every hermeneutics:
It must be a shared and comprehensible reference to the "things in themselves." It is this condition which determines the possibility that a unified meaning can be aimed at, and thus also the possibility that the anticipation of perfect coherence may actually be applicable.

We have emphasized the role, within our cognitive approach, played by certain absolutely fundamental anticipations, i.e., anticipations common to us all. We are now in a position to determine more precisely the meaning of the phenomenon of "affinity," that is to say, the factor of tradition in a historical-hermeneutical attitude. Hermeneutics must start from the fact that understanding is related to "the thing itself" as manifest in the tradition, and at the same time to a tradition from where "the thing" can speak to me. On the other hand, he who achieves hermeneutical understanding must realize that our relation to "things" is not "a matter of course" and unproblematic. We found the hermeneutical task precisely on the tension which exists between the "familiar" and the "foreign" character of the message transmitted to us by tradition. But this tension is not as it was for Schleiermacher, that is, a psychological tension. It is, on the contrary, the meaning and structure of hermeneutical historicity. It is not some psychic state, but the very "thing" delivered over by tradition which is the object of hermeneutical inquiry. By a relation to both the "familiar" and the "foreign" character of historical messages, hermeneutics claims a "central situation." The interpreter is torn between his belongingness to a tradition and his distance from the objects which are the theme of his investigation.

This "hermeneutical situation," by which hermeneutics is henceforth placed "in the middle of things," serves to emphasize a phenomenon which has received scant attention thus far. It is the question of temporal distance and its meaning for understanding. Contrary to what we often imagine, time is not a chasm which we would bridge over in order to recover the past; in reality, it is the ground which supports the arrival of the past and where the present takes its roots. "Temporal distance" is not a distance in the sense of a distance to be bridged or overcome. This was the naïve prejudice of historicism. It believed it could reach the solid terrain of historical objectivity by striving to place itself within the vantage point of a past age and think with the concepts and representations particular to that epoch. Actually, it is rather a matter of considering "temporal distance" as a fundament of positive and productive possibilities for understanding. It is not a distance to be overcome, but a living continuity of elements which cumulatively become a tradition, a tradition which is the light wherein all that we carry with us from our past, everything transmitted to us, makes its appearance.
It is not an exaggeration to speak of the productivity of the historical process. We all know how we make more or less arbitrary judgments when our ideas are not clarified by the passage of time. Limiting ourselves to an example, let us think of the uncertainty which characterizes our esthetic standpoint in the face of contemporary art. It is obviously a matter of uncontrollable prejudices which conceal the real content—authentic or not—of these works. Momentary relations must be erased in order to know if it is a question of masterpieces or not and if we can discover the true sense enabling contemporary art to enter an ongoing tradition. Obviously, this does not happen from one moment to another, but is developed in an indefinite process. The "temporal distance" which produces the filter is not of a definite magnitude, but evolves in a continuous movement of universalization. Universality purified by time is a second productive aspect of temporality. Its work develops a new set of "prejudices." It is a matter of "prejudices" which are neither partial nor particular, but which constitute, on the contrary, the legitimate guiding ideas for genuine understanding.

This is yet another specification of the hermeneutical task. Only by virtue of the phenomenon and clarified concept of "temporal distance" can the specifically critical task of hermeneutics be resolved, i.e., of knowing how to distinguish between blind prejudices and those which illuminate, between false prejudices and true prejudices. We must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding and in this way realize the possibility that "other aims" emerge in their own right from tradition—which is nothing other than realizing the possibility that we can understand something in its otherness.

To denounce something as prejudice is to suspend its presumed validity; in fact a prejudice in the strict sense of that term cannot get hold of us unless we are sufficiently unconscious of it. But we cannot successfully take a prejudice into account so long as it is simply at work; it must be somehow provoked. Now this provocation of our prejudices is precisely the fruit of a renewed encounter with a tradition which was itself, perhaps, at their origin. And, in fact, what demands our efforts at understanding is manifest before and in itself in its character of otherness. And this leads us back to a point we made above: we must realize that every understanding begins with the fact that something calls out to us. And since we know the precise meaning of this affirmation, we claim ipso facto the bracketing of prejudices. Thus we arrive at our first conclusion: bracketing our judgements in general and, naturally first of all our own prejudices, will end by imposing upon us the demands of a radical reflection on the idea of questioning as such.
The essence of questioning is to lay bare and keep alert for possibilities. We will shortly see in what sense. When one of our convictions or opinions becomes problematic as a consequence of new hermeneutical information, and though it is disclosed as prejudice, this does not imply that it is automatically replaced by a sort of “definitive truth”; this was the naive thesis of historical objectivism. Such a thesis forgets that the displaced conviction and the “truth” which denounces and replaces it are both members of an uninterrupted chain of events. The “former” prejudice is not simply cast aside. For in reality it has an important role to play later on, although a different one than while it was still only implicit. It must also be said that the denounced prejudice can only play its new role if it is exploited to the maximum. It is a difficult task to replace a conviction, to denounce it as a prejudice; this is precisely because whatever replaces it cannot present its credentials until the position under assault is itself unmasked and denounced as prejudice. Every “new” position which replaces another continues to need the “former” because it cannot itself be explained so long as it knows neither in what nor by what it is opposed.

We see that there are dialectical relations between the “former” and the “new,” between, on the one hand, the prejudice organically a part of my particular system of convictions or opinions, i.e., the implicit prejudice, and, on the other hand, the new element which denounces it, i.e., the foreign element which provokes my system or one of its elements. The same can be said of the relation between “my own” opinion in the process of losing its implicit persuasive force by being exposed as prejudice, and the new element which, for the moment, is still external to my system of opinions, but is in the process of becoming “my own” through being disclosed as truly “other” than “my own” former opinion. This is to say that there are dialectical relations between the inauthentically “mine” and the authentically “mine” (the implicit prejudice in the process of being exposed as prejudice). In other words, the relation is between “my own” in the process of becoming authentic through the new hermeneutical information which provoked it, and the hermeneutical information itself, i.e., the information in the process of entering into my system of opinions and convictions—in the process of becoming “mine”; that is to say that this new hermeneutical information gains entrance into my system by its opposition to the denounced prejudice and by this opposition it is revealed as strangely “other.” The universal mediator of this dialectic is questioning. Questioning always discloses or leaves open the new possibility that denouncing an opinion as prejudice and disclosure of the truly different in hermeneutical information transforms an implicit “mine” into an authentic “mine,” makes an inadmissible “other” into a genuine “other” and thus assimilable in its otherness.

Historical objectivism is naive because it never follows its reflections to their conclusion. In its trusting blindness to the presuppositions of its method, it totally forgets the historicity which is its “own.” An historical con-
sciousness which proposes the task of being truly concrete must already consider itself as an essentially historical phenomenon. However, to define consciousness as historical consciousness or to grant that it is such remains a mere verbalization so long as historical consciousness is not yet actualized: i.e., we must question it and question it radically. There is a notion of the "historical object" which is simply the naive correlative of the thought of historical objectivism. For historical objectivism the historicity of the object is an illusion to be overcome; outside of these illusions the "true" object is no longer historical! Or, in other words, for historical objectivism the "historical object" is a mixture of the "in-itself" and the "for-us"; a mélange of the "true a-historical object" and "our historical illusions." Radical questioning denounces the notion of an "historical object" so characterized as a construction of objectivistic thought, motivated—I say motivated, an implicit motivation—by the primordial historicity of knowledge and the historical object which together have affinities. The notion of "historical illusions" was the result of a subjectivist or phenomenalist interpretation of this primordiality; and the notion of a "true and a-historical object" is the result of an objectivistic or naturalistic interpretation; furthermore, the two interpretations are interdependent: they are the mutual complements of one another.

Not only the concept, but even the expression "historical object" seems useless to me. What we mean to designate by this phrase is not an "object" at all, but a "unity" of "mine" and "other." I repeat again what I have often insisted upon: every hermeneutical understanding begins and ends with the "thing itself." But it is necessary to guard against, on the one hand, a misunderstanding of the role of "temporal distance" which is between the beginning and the end, and, on the other hand, an idealizing objectification of the "thing itself," as historical objectivism has done. The de-spacialization of "temporal distance" and the de-idealization of the "thing itself" allows us to understand how it is possible to know in the "historical object" the genuinely "other" despite "my own" convictions and opinions; that is to say, how it is possible to know them both. Thus it is more true to state that the historical object, in the authentic sense of that term, is not an "object" but the "unity" of one with the other. It is the relationship, i.e., "affinity," through which they both manifest themselves: the historical reality on the one hand and the reality of historical understanding on the other. It is this "unity" which is primordial historicity where knowledge and the historical object manifest themselves in their "affiliation" [d'une maniere 'affine']. An object which comes to us through history is not only an object which one discerns from afar, but is the "center" in which historically operative being and historically operative consciousness appear.
I will say then that the condition for hermeneutics to think about historical reality properly so-called, comes to us from what I call the principle of historical productivity. Properly understood this effectuates a mediation between the once and the now; it develops in itself all the continual series of perspectives through which the past presents and addresses itself to us. In this radical and universal sense, historical self-consciousness is not the abandonment of philosophy's eternal task, but is the path granted to us for reaching the truth, which is always our goal. And I see in the relation of all understanding to language, the way in which consciousness opens out to historical productivity.

NOTES

Chapter I
2. J. S. Mill, System der deductiven und induktiven Logik, tr. Schiel (1863); 6th Book: "Von der Logik der Geisteswissenschaften oder moralischen Wissenschaften."
5. J. G. Droysen, Grundsätze der Historik (Halle: Max Niemeyer, republ. 1925), p. 97. [See Outline of the Principles of History, tr. E. B. Andrews (N. Y.: Howard Fertig, 1967 reprint of 1893 ed.). This translation is from an 1867 edition of the Historik which does not include the final section, "Theologie der Geschichte," cited by Gadamer and which originally appeared in 1843 as an introduction to the second part of Droysen's History of Hellenism. For related comments on scientific and historical methods see pp. 16, 62ff., and 107 of Andrews' translation—Tr.]

Chapter II
12. Ibid., vol. V, pp. 338ff; see vol. VII.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

Chapter III


Chapter IV

21. In the following we will refer to especially the Nichomachean Ethics and in particular Book VI.

Chapter V


23. The systematic implications of an historically operative hermeneutics, such as has just been sketched here, and the centrality of the phenomenon of language, are illuminated in the third part (pp. 361—465) of the author's Wahrheit und Methode, Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960, 1965).