

The Universality of Hermeneutics and Rhetoric in the Thought of Gadamer

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Gary Madison has aided us all in taking heed of the universality of hermeneutics and rhetoric.¹ It is around this question that Gadamer's work has aroused the most controversy. Thinkers as different as Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida have opposed Gadamer's thought on this point by questioning the assertion that everything is truly "understandable" or can be given a linguistic formulation. A more rigorous universality can be found for the former in the critique of ideologies while for the latter in deconstruction. However, both options have in common a suspicion toward the intelligibility of the given in the name of a reflection that takes into account the more or less "repressed" (both Habermas and Derrida have been inspired by psychoanalysis) conditions of understanding. Thus, we can ask whether the universality of hermeneutics was refuted by this critique. What legitimates its claim to universality? Had this claim received a clear formulation in *Truth and Method*?

We know, in any case, that Gadamer, *after* having completed *Truth and Method*, had often associated the universality of hermeneutics with that of rhetoric.² This connection, however, is not to be found as such in *Wahrheit und Methode*. In what follows, I would like to explain the meaning of this association of hermeneutics and rhetoric which Gadamer's *magnum opus* certainly proposes, but without asserting it explicitly. This has to do with the fact that the guiding intention of this book is to rediscover the theme of language as such and save it from the "forgetfulness of language" that Gadamer alleges was pervasive in Western thought. Inspired by the reflections of St. Augustine, *Truth and Method* thus makes possible a rediscovery of rhetoric whose universality will clarify, if not also support, that of hermeneutics. In order to highlight this movement which is essential to the work of Gadamer, I will explore in this essay the consequences for hermeneutics of the transition from Plato to Augustine. The Plato whom Gadamer will oppose to Augustine will appear, in fact, as the great forefather of the forgetfulness of language which marks the entire tradition of Western thought. In the chapter devoted to the notions of "*Logos* and *Verbum*" in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer, in a grand exaggeration, claims to know of only a single exception to this forgetfulness of language, that of the Christian conception of the Incarnation which is notably defended by St. Augustine: "There is, however, an idea that is not Greek which does more justice to the being of language, and so prevented the forgetfulness of language in Western thought from being complete. This is the Christian idea of *incarnation*."³ Despite the extraordinary status accorded to this thesis in

the dramatic economy of the text, the sense of this idea is anything but evident. What is the nature of this "forgetfulness of language" which plays a role in Gadamer's thought akin to Heidegger's forgetfulness of Being, a forgetfulness which, according to Heidegger, begins as well with Plato?

Essentially, the forgetfulness of language is the systematic neglect throughout the philosophical tradition of the intimate bond between thought and the antecedent element of language (a theme which, most certainly, was also that of Derrida's *Grammatologie*). The question of the relationship between thought and language was supplanted, Gadamer argued, in the Western tradition by that of the relation between thought and the world. Language finds itself reduced to being a mere instrument for the expression of thought. Nominalism, which tends to reduce words to designations of individual beings and signs which stand at the disposal of an essentially logical or noetic thought, is only the most frank instance of this forgetfulness. Through its latent nominalism, all Western thought, according to Gadamer, would have succumbed to a forgetfulness of language—with the lone exception of Augustine. The Augustinian exception is all the more surprising since Augustine is generally thought to espouse an instrumental conception of language, as Wittgenstein argued at the beginning of his *Philosophical Investigations*.

Thus, Plato is depicted as the prime mover of the cover-up of language in Western thought. Anyone acquainted with Gadamer's work cannot but be surprised by the stridency of his critique of the Platonic conception of language in *Truth and Method* since the dialogical conception of language which Gadamer intends to develop owes much, if not everything, to Plato and his analysis of speech. The Plato to whom Gadamer is fundamentally closest is that of the *Seventh Letter*, the Plato who is aware of the limits of every statement since it can always be turned from its original intention and from its original dialogical context. Through his own dialogical conception of language, Gadamer also wants to underline the insufficiency of uttered discourse and of the logic that fixes itself exclusively to the objectified order of statements. On this point, Plato should be the natural ally of Gadamer (and in other contexts he is). Yet in *Truth and Method* it is the Platonic relativization of language that preoccupies Gadamer. He is less interested in the *Phaedrus* or the *Seventh Letter* than in the *Cratylus*, where one finds two contradictory theses on the nature of language which attempt to answer the question of whether the meaning of words is conventional (*thesei*) or arises through a natural resemblance with things (*phusei*). What strikes Gadamer is the common presupposition of these two theses. In both cases the word is thought of as a simple name or a common sign, as if things could be known in themselves *before* being expressed in language. For Gadamer, the very clear intention of Plato is to show that it is not through words that we can attain the truth of things. By demonstrating this,

Plato wants to distance himself from the Sophists who teach that through a mastery of words one can be assured of dominion over things. For Plato, true knowledge must, on the contrary, seek to free itself from the tutelage of language so that it can direct itself toward the things themselves, that it to say, toward the ideas. In saying this, Plato does not necessarily want to deny that the thought of the true philosopher will continue to manifest itself in language; his essential point is that it is not the word itself or mastery over language that gives the philosopher access to the truth.⁴

According to Plato, the pure knowledge of the ideas owes nothing essential to language. Language is viewed by Plato as a merely exterior, and dangerously equivocal, aspect of thought. According to Gadamer, Plato does not reflect on the fact that the operation of thought as a dialogue (!) of the soul with itself already implies its essential link with language. This theme appears without question in the *Seventh Letter*, yet in 1960 Gadamer seems not to pay any attention to the dialogical conception of language that Plato defends there. Furthermore, Gadamer does not speak in this context of Plato's art of the dialogue as he would in almost all of his later writings. When he makes use of the *Seventh Letter* in *Truth and Method*, it is only to recall that language remains subordinated to the cognition of the One, such that language remains for Plato banished from the noetic clarity of pure ideas. This brings Gadamer to a conclusion of singular severity: "Plato's discovery of the ideas conceals the true nature of language even more than the theories of the Sophists" (*TM*, 408). The stridency of this assertion is remarkable: Plato is to be seen as a greater dissimulator than the Sophists!

It is not difficult to sense the shadow of Heidegger lingering throughout this chapter of *Truth and Method*. Plato becomes, due to his logocentric or "eidocentric" conception of language, the forefather of the *caracteristica universalis* and of a metaphysics of domination. By reducing language to an instrumental function for the expression of pure thought, he would have laid the ground, according to Gadamer, for an understanding of "Being as absolutely available objectivity," *das Sein als die absolut verfügbare Gegenständlichkeit* (*TM*, 414). Gadamer brings down such a severe judgment on Plato because he believes that Plato's conception of language as a simple exterior sign of thought has left its mark on the entirety of Western thought on language, and that *a fortiori* this conception has prevented the West from taking hold of the true nature of language and its essential anteriority to all thought. The title of the chapter of *Truth and Method* dedicated to the Western forgetfulness of language speaks of a *Prägung*, a trace of a concept of language that has been maintained throughout the entire history of the West.⁵ For Gadamer, the reduction of language to a set of instrumental signs which refer to ideas, a reduction that has enabled the reduction of knowledge "to the intelligible sphere,"

was "an epoch-making decision about thought concerning language" (*TM*, 413–4). In the wake of Platonism, language would serve only for the ventilation of thoughts which can be formed independently of words:

This is to say that thought is so independent of the being of words—which thought takes as mere signs through which what is referred to, the idea, the thing, is brought into view—that the word is reduced to a wholly secondary relation to the thing. It is a mere instrument of communication, the bringing forth (*ekpherein*) and uttering (*logos prophorikos*) of what is meant in the medium of the voice (*TM*, 414).

The forgetfulness of language is bound up with the secondary, and often dismissive, status it is accorded in the realm of thought. The *logos* of knowledge allegedly makes no use of the anterior textuality of language, but rather of a "logic" which renders the concatenation of the ideas such as it is given in clear intelligibility and pure hearing. In the best of cases, language contents itself with the docile reproduction of the logical train of thought. In the worst, it obscures thought (a conception that inspires analytic philosophy to this day, which calls for a logical criticism of language). But does this conception of language do justice to its essential anteriority and to the experience of thought itself?

We know that for Gadamer the West has only known one exception to this forgetfulness: Augustine. Gadamer thus devotes a difficult, yet central, chapter to him. The difficulty arises from our standard association of Augustine with an instrumental conception of language, an association that is undoubtedly justified. His *De magistro*, for instance, is a dialogue on the *inconveniences* language poses for thought, a theme that greatly recalls Plato. Moreover, Gadamer is interested less in the writings of Augustine on language itself than in his reflections on the mystery of the Trinity, in which one will not readily expect a natural or particularly obvious point of departure for a philosophy of language. Furthermore, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer almost never cites the texts of Augustine which form the basis for his reflections, instead contenting himself with a brief and vague allusion to chapters 10–15 of Book XV of *De trinitate*.⁶ In fact the author most frequently cited and used by Gadamer in this chapter is Thomas Aquinas!

What, then, is it in the work of Augustine that has so greatly enthused Gadamer? It is primarily the Christian (and not solely Augustinian) conception of the Incarnation. Gadamer believes that this is an idea that arises from outside the Greek tradition since it does not mean an incorporation in the Greek or Platonic sense of the word, wherein a spiritual being, a soul, comes to be incorporated in a body which is of a fundamentally different order of being. In fact, this "gnostic" idea of incorporation renders

quite adequately the Platonic instrumentalist conception of language where the material sign refers back to a thought which is strictly intellectual and by its essence independent of the accidental materiality of the sign. This is why the materiality of language and the linguistic exteriorization of thought cannot be seriously considered according to such a conception of incorporation.⁷ The mystery of the Incarnation obliges one to think differently of the relation between spirit and matter. This is because the Incarnation of the Son does not represent a *diminution* of God. Rather, it is the essential and saving manifestation of the divine. In this context, Gadamer is certainly not interested in the immediate theological consequences of this doctrine. He is captivated, rather, by the rehabilitation of incarnation as such and the *materiality* of sense as the basis for a philosophical conception of language. While it bases itself upon a terminology that is still Greek, the Christian conception of the Incarnation would thus open a dimension that was closed to Greek thought and which permits for the first time a conception of language that takes into account its materiality and historicity. In this way, Christian thought has succeeded, Gadamer believes, in disengaging the event of language from the spiritual ideality of thought, and has thus led philosophy to discover language as an autonomous theme (see *TM*, 419).

Augustine himself made use of the model of language in order to approach the mystery of the Incarnation. Gadamer does in fact the opposite: he makes use of the model of the Christian idea of Incarnation in order to rethink the event of language. Augustine took his point of departure from the Stoics's distinction between the exterior *logos* and the interior *logos* (*logos prophorikos* and *endiathetos*). For the Stoics, the interior *logos* designates the reflective capacity which *precedes* the linguistic exteriorization of thought, and which characterizes the human being as such. In their reflections on language, the Stoics put the emphasis on the interior *logos*; the uttered *logos* was always thought of as a secondary process which only exteriorized the mental language. The Augustinian conception of language and the Incarnation highlights, on the contrary, the singularity of the exterior *logos*. The idea of a manifestation of the *logos* which would be here secondary or inessential is, of course, incompatible with Christian thought. The materiality of incarnated sense consequently becomes significant in itself. This is what attracts Gadamer, although he is only interested in the linguistic consequences of this seemingly new (because it is non-Platonic) idea of incarnation. The first consequence has to do with the essential *identity* of the interior word and the exterior word in the process of incarnation. For Gadamer, this identity signifies that the pure act of thought cannot be distinguished from its exteriorization and its linguistic manifestation. The materiality of language ceases to be thought of as the imperfect manifestation of thought and becomes instead its only possible means of actualization. It is in this sense

that Augustine (or, more generally, the Christian conception of the Incarnation) represents for Gadamer a singular exception to the forgetfulness of language. For us, as for the divine Incarnation, the exteriorization of speech is not a posterior or secondary act of thought, but is instead intimately linked with thought itself (*TM*, 424). The identity which interests Gadamer here is that which holds between thought and interior speech, and which cannot but always unfold itself in language: "This is more than a mere metaphor, for the human relationship between thought and speech corresponds, despite its imperfections, to the divine relationship of the Trinity. The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with God the Father" (*TM*, 421).

The second consequence stems from the fact that incarnation is simultaneously *event* and *process*. Incarnation cannot be reduced to a purely spiritual occurrence. In hermeneutic terms, the rendering of the word into flesh is an intrinsic element of meaning, a meaning that can be understood, shared, and communicated. Finite beings like ourselves only participate in the advent of meaning through the multiform materiality of its manifestations, a diversity which does not follow the order of a neat, logical sequence. As such, thought does not exist except in its incarnated flesh. In Gadamer's language: language is not formed through a reflective act of the mind (see *TM*, 426). This reflective act, even if it were possible to distinguish it as such, must bring itself about in language, even in the realm of pure thought. It is this realm of pure thought that the Augustinian conception has problematized in asserting that meaning is always incarnated. For Gadamer, thought cannot be situated before or beyond the boundaries of language. The materiality of language is the space, the element wherein all thought can and must bring itself into being.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this necessary materiality of language does not mean that thought can be *reduced* to the level of the spoken word. As in the Christian conception of the Incarnation, the exterior manifestation of the *logos* continues to refer back to an "interior word," to a "thought" which is never exhausted by natural language, but which will itself never be accessible in a definitive or objective manner. Gadamer thus inquires into the nature of this interior word. All that can be said is that it represents "the thing thought to its limits." This terminal thought is for us but a limit concept. It is nonetheless indispensable if we wish to take hold of the finitude which is always that of thought expressed in words. For words are always an imperfect and perilous manifestation of the thought that seeks to bring itself into language. The terms that we use are always contingent and fractured; they are never sufficient to take hold of all that we would like to say and all that must be said to avoid misunderstandings. The error of Platonism and gnosticism, however, is the belief that this perfection of thought could be found in a purely noetic realm, in a *logos*

endiathetos which would be but pure thought and which would be free from the "malignancy of language." Thus, it is necessary to preserve the difference (if not *différance*) of the interior word while maintaining that it can never be exhausted or fixed in a definite expression. The interior word continues to represent, to "incarnate," that which we seek to understand in a thought which exposes itself in words, but its articulation remains absolutely bound to a linguistic expression, imperfect and stammering. The interior word remains the indispensable guide to the understanding of the exterior word. We cannot understand that which comes into language except by seeking what has *not* been said in such an utterance, that is to say, the question or the constellation of questions whence the uttered word arose. But this unsaid is itself a part of the space of language, of linguisticity. It comes into play wherever we seek to understand, even if it can never be spelled out in its unattainable entirety. Nothing can ever be as it must. Augustine's thought thus helps us see how the universality of the linguistic condition goes in hand with a recognition of the limits of language.

If the analogy between the divine process of incarnation and the necessary linguistic expression of thought allowed us to recover the materiality of language, it is now the *difference* between the divine Word and human speech that can now be illuminating for hermeneutics. This is because the incarnated *Logos* corresponds fully with the divine essence. It comes into flesh as its full and integral self. This unity of essence (*homoousia*) between the exteriorization of the *logos* and the interior word does not correspond, however, to *our* experience of language. Unlike the divine Word, ours can never perfectly express our minds (*TM*, 425). This is not an imperfection of language, as was thought by Platonism, but it arises from the finitude of human existence. The human mind is never purely present to itself; it is not pure *noesis noesos*. Its thought evolves by following the rhythm of the words which give flesh to thought and *thus* bring it about. This debt of thought to the always prior element of language is what is recalled by Augustine's conception of the Incarnation.

In his own Augustinian reflection on language, Gadamer thus underlines two aspects which are less contradictory than complementary: on one hand, he insists on the *identity* between thought and its linguistic expression, since there is no thinkable thought without language. But, on the other hand, he shows that we cannot achieve in uttered language (the *logos prophorikos*) the *complete* expression (the *logos endiathetos*) of what we would have to say in order to be adequately understood. I believe that Gadamer stresses the first point in *Truth and Method* while in his later work the irreducibility of the interior word to uttered discourse seems to take on more importance. If in *Truth and Method* he holds that the linguistic element continues to overcome all the objections that can be levelled against its universality, he later realizes that "the supreme principle of

hermeneutical philosophy ... is that we can never quite say that which we would like to say."⁶ One does not have to speak here of an evolution in Gadamer's thought. Rather, one should speak of a *shift in emphasis* since both aspects are integral to his thought on language. It is Augustine's thought, however, that permits the thinking of this essential unity.

Gadamer thus owes a great deal to Augustine's thought. It enables him to think of human finitude out of its essential relation to language: thought is necessarily brought about in language, even if speech can never exhaust that which wants to be said. This conception of finitude brings Gadamer to question the logicist prejudices that have dominated our conceptions of language since Plato. Hermeneutics thus becomes attentive to the materiality and to what we could call the invariably rhetorical incarnation of meaning. Consequently, Gadamer turns toward a *rhetorical* conception of language. It is necessary, however, that we free ourselves from the pejorative conception of rhetoric which arises from an overly logicist conception of language and rationality. The only rationality accessible to us is that which can articulate itself in language. This rhetorical rationality is that which grounds itself in already constituted and practised meanings, and which addresses itself to individuals who are not beings of pure reason. This is not to say that all rationality can be reduced to simple effects of meaning. Only a logicist prejudice permits one to maintain such a restricted view of rhetoric. It is this logicist reduction of meaning that Gadamer combats in the name of the rationality that is always our own. Rhetorical meaning must always be debated and must always be defended with arguments and reasons. The notion of *argumentation*—an ideal frequently hailed by philosophers hostile to hermeneutics and rhetoric—presupposes that meaning must be eloquently and persuasively defended in order to be accepted. We only argue over that which is not self-evident or what cannot be proven mathematically. The meaning which must in every case be defended cannot be thought without rhetoric, which is to say without language, a language which is in every case incarnated and which seeks to bring about understanding.

Gadamer approaches this rhetorical conception of language and rationality in his chapter on conceptualization (*Begriffsbildung*) in *Truth and Method*, a chapter in which he combats the illusion of a total autarky of thought in the formation of concepts. The true place of thought is never that of pure conceptual explanation. This logicist model of thought is replaced for Gadamer by the notion that the true process of thought lies in explication in words (*Explikation im Wort*) (see *TM*, 428). As before, the Augustinian conception of language can serve as a guide in this respect. Thought succumbs to a logicist illusion when it believes that its activity consists of a strictly conceptual procedure. Above all, thought is a searching for words to say that which wants to be said and heard. It is such a work

of concept formation (*Bildung*) that the act of thinking carries out when it moves from one word to another in deploying its thought about something. From this point of view, the true aim of a speech that thinks or a thought that speaks relies less upon an act of *subsumption* than upon an act that takes hold of resemblances. This searching for language corresponds to what Gadamer calls the essential metaphoricity of language and thought: "The genius of verbal consciousness consists in being able to express [such] similarities. This is its fundamental metaphorical nature, and it is important to see that to regard the metaphorical use of a word as not its real sense is the prejudice of a theory of logic that is alien to language" (*TM*, 429). Each word is itself an incarnation of meaning in a formula that can be understood, shared, and always deepened. Logico-scientific thought is itself founded upon this prior metaphoricity of language: "Thus at the beginning of generic logic stands the prior work of language itself" (*TM*, 431).

It is this work, which we can call the rhetoric of language, that Gadamer wishes to reassert in place of the ideal of logical demonstration which became universally accepted in the wake of Aristotelian logic. (Gadamer rightly observed, after many others, that despite this, Aristotle himself followed his own logic less than he did the genius of language in the course of his own scientific investigations.)

The consequence of accepting the ideal of logical proof as a yardstick, however, is that the Aristotelian critique has robbed language of its scientific legitimacy. That achievement is recognized only from the point of view of rhetoric and is understood there as the mere artistic device of metaphor.... What originally constituted the basis of the life of language and its logical productivity, the spontaneous and inventive seeking out of similarities by means of which it is possible to order things, is now marginalized and instrumentalized into a rhetorical figure called metaphor (*TM*, 432).

For a thought which wants to be purely logical, or which forgets its rhetorical foundations, metaphor and rhetoric cannot but appear as *deficient* modes of understanding: the metaphor is a stylistic device of a thought which does not yet have the clarity of a concept, and rhetoric is a device to which one turns in the absence of a rigorous proof.

Gadamer recognizes the same Platonic prejudice in both these criticisms, the forgetfulness of language as the basis of all proof, all clarity, and all rationality. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer contents himself with protesting against the reduction of the metaphor to the level of rhetoric and against an overly instrumental conception of rhetoric. But after 1960, Gadamer develops a far more ambitious conception of rhetoric. This he realized through associating the universality of hermeneutics with that of rhetoric,⁹

notably in essays such as "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics" (1968), "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," "Hermeneutics and Rhetoric" (1976), and numerous later works. Gadamer has defended rhetoric because it was also a tradition of thought that had to defend the legitimacy of a human rationality taking root in living language, rather than following the exclusive model of demonstrative logic.

Where, indeed, but to rhetoric should the theoretical examination of interpretation turn? Rhetoric from the oldest tradition has been the only advocate of a claim to truth that defends the probable, the *eikós* (*verisimile*), that which is convincing to the ordinary reason, against the claim of science to accept as true only that which can be demonstrated and tested! Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove—these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion. And the whole wide realm of convincing 'persuasions' and generally reigning views has not been gradually narrowed by the progress of science, however great it has been; rather, this realm extends to take in every new product of scientific endeavor, claiming it for itself and bringing it within its scope. The ubiquity of rhetoric, indeed, is unlimited.¹⁰

This rhetorical standpoint greatly irritated Habermas's critique of ideology. Rhetoric has indeed played an important role in the debate that opposes Habermas to hermeneutics. One only has to note the title of Gadamer's response to Habermas, "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Critique of Ideology," which, by the way, also alluded to the pompous rhetoric of social emancipation that Habermas employed. Habermas argued that the rhetorical conviction produced by comprehension or dialogue could rest on a "pseudo-communication,"¹¹ or to put it otherwise, on false arguments whose rationality is strictly strategic. Habermas wished to oppose to pure rhetorical conviction an understanding that is linked "to the principle of rational discourse, according to which truth would only be guaranteed by *that* kind of consensus which was achieved under the idealized conditions of unlimited communication free from domination and could be maintained over time" (HCU, 205). True understanding would thus be rhetoric-free, but it could only be attained in an ideal situation: "Truth is that characteristic compulsion toward unforced universal recognition; the latter is itself tied to an ideal speech situation, i.e. a form of life, which makes possible unforced universal agreement" (HCU, 206). But this is another manner of saying that this non-rhetorical truth will *never* be reached, which is of little help to us at all.

Habermas cannot devalue rhetoric except in the name of an ideal

rationality, thus one that can never be of this world. Must we await the Day of Judgment in order to know the truth? In the meantime, it is perhaps the Habermasian devaluation of rhetoric that must be re-examined and replaced by a more reasonable conception of rationality. This was the meaning of Gadamer's response:

If rhetoric appeals to the feelings, as has long been clear, that in no way means it falls outside the realm of the reasonable [*Vernünftigen*]. Vico rightly assigns it a special value: *copia*, the abundance of viewpoints. I find it frighteningly unreal when people like Habermas ascribe to rhetoric a compulsory quality that one must reject in favor of unconstrained, rational dialogue. This is to underestimate not only the danger of the glib manipulation and incapacitation of reason but also the possibility of coming to an understanding through persuasion, on which social life depends.... Only a narrow view of rhetoric sees it as mere technique or even a mere instrument for social manipulation. It is in truth an essential aspect of all reasonable behavior (*TM*, 568).

It is only a certain logicism that leads us to associate rhetoric with a sordid manipulation of emotions in order to blunt rational arguments. This is sophistry, not rhetoric. Without rhetoric, even the idea of a rational *argument*, that is, an argument that seeks to be convincing, is absurd. An argument that *claims* it is rational must also *convince* us of its rationality, that is to say, that there are reasons that work in its favor. If Habermas's criticism possesses an element of truth, it is the demand that we should not forget that there is an important heuristic distinction to be made between a fallacious conviction, possibly obtained through coercion, and those that rest on "good" arguments. But this distinction already belongs to rhetoric when it is properly understood: what is a "good argument" if not one that can convince a vigilant mind which has been adequately instructed by rhetoric to be suspicious of any argument that does not speak to the thing itself. It thus falls to a *more sustained* or *better buttressed* argument to defend the pertinence of controversial assertions. But to speak of *pertinence* and *fullness* is to recognize the universality of rhetoric, without which human rationality is but a dream.

The universality of rhetoric leads to a hermeneutics of vigilance. We cannot content ourselves to whistle along with the ambient postmodern current which claims that if everything is rhetoric then it is reason itself that is nothing but a dream. It is because certain arguments are more credible, more consistent, and more solid than others that the idea of a communicative reason must be preserved and practised. I am intentionally speaking of a "communicative" rationality here. In recent [French] translations,

notably those of Habermas, a preference has arisen for speaking of a "communicational" rationality.¹² Not only is this term awkward, but it is not even French. We forget that the term *kommunikativ*, which we are seeking to translate, is a foreign word in German which has been borrowed from the Latin languages: it is the exact German transposition of the term "communicative."¹³ Why render it incomprehensible when translating it back into its language of origin?

Hermeneutical rationality is communicative in the precise sense that it lives in communication and in the convictions that are shared by those who understand and who understand themselves. Credible arguments follow from these convictions. This rationality is not that of the Final Judgment, but it can convince us *hic et nunc* and does so when we debate the reasons which speak (!) in favor of our beliefs. Another rationality is not divulged to us. Recognizing with the Delphic Oracle that we are not gods is to recognize the inescapable character of the always rhetorical incarnation of rationality and meaning. To be sure, nothing prevents critical reason from falling victim to the seductive arguments of sophistry. But the danger of sophistry infiltrating thought is one that can never be avoided once and for all for a radical hermeneutics of facticity. Hence its singular and unsurpassable vigilance.

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Notes

1. See especially G. B. Madison, "Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur" in *The Routledge History of Philosophy*, vol. VIII (New York: Routledge, 1994).

2. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke* vol. 2, 111, 289, 291, 305, *et passim*. Hereafter cited as *GW*, followed by the volume and page numbers.

3. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition (New York: Continuum, 1989), 418. Hereafter cited as *TM*.

4. See *TM*, 407. For a penetrating discussion of Gadamer's readings of Plato, see F. Renaud, "Gadamer, lecteur de Platon", in *Études phénoménologiques* 26 (1997).

5. *Prägung des Begriffs 'Sprache' durch die Denkgeschichte des Abendlandes*.

6. In *L'Universalité de l'herméneutique* (Paris: PUF, 1993) and elsewhere, I have returned to these texts of Augustine in the hope of clarifying and deepening, to a certain degree, the thought of Gadamer. As such, I have insisted on elements of Augustine's thought which may not have been those which Gadamer had in view. I have greatly benefited in this regard from the critical remarks of D. Kaegi, "Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man philosophische Hermeneutik?" in *Philosophische Rundschau* 41, 1994.

7. The contempt for the corporeal also explains the hostility of pagan philosophy, particularly in Neo-Platonism, toward the mystery of the Incarnation which was thought to be blasphemous for the divine. See Pierre Hadot's fine book, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris: Folio, 1997), 26.

8. *GW* 10, "Europa und die Oikoumene" (1993), 274.

9. See *GW* 2, 111; *GW* 2, 305, translated as "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task" in *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); *GW* 2, 289, 291. On the intimate relationship which permits the thought of a common universality of hermeneutics and rhetoric, see the well known essays of G. B. Madison on this question, and my own article "Hermeneutik" in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Band 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996). See also *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Times*, eds. Michael J. Hyde and Walter Jost (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

10. Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" in David B. Linge, ed., *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 24 (*GW* 2, 236–7). Gadamer here thinks in particular of the conception of rhetoric defended by G. B. Vico (*De nostri temporis studiorum ratione*, Godesberg, 1947; reissued: Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963). On the universality of rhetoric, see the dialogue of the *Gadamer-Lesebuch*, 284, 291, and the Afterword to the third edition of *Wahrheit und Methode* (*GW* 2, 467; *TM*, 568). In seeking to reverse the unfavorable prejudice toward rhetoric, Gadamer tacitly follows in the steps of the young Nietzsche, who recognized that all language is, in essence, rhetoric (see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vorsungsaufzeichnungen [WS 1871/72–WS 1874/75]*, bearbeitet von Fritz Bornmann und Mario Capitella, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995, S. 426: "Es giebt gar keine unrhetorische 'Natürlichkeit' der Sprache, an die man appelliren könnte: die Sprache selbst ist das Resultat von lauter rhetorischen Künsten, die Kraft, welche Arist. Rhetorik nennt, an jedem Dinge das heraus zu finden u. geltend zu machen was wirkt u. Eindruck macht, ist zugl. das Wesen der Sprache.... Die Sprache ist Rhetorik."). Nietzsche cites (*op. cit.*, 416) the

verdict of John Locke on rhetoric (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III, 10, 34): "[W]e must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement; and so indeed are perfect cheats." We can only regret that Gadamer was not aware of the proximity of his thought to that of Nietzsche on the rhetorical nature of language.

11. See Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality" in Josef Bleicher, ed. *Contemporary Hermeneutics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 204. Hereafter HCU.

12. Translator's note: The French text reads: "Dans les traductions récentes, de Habermas notamment, on a préféré parler d'une rationalité 'communicationnelle.'"

13. Translator's note: "communicatif" in the text.

Translated by Barry Campbell